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Building Products

HOW DO YOU FIND GOOD LOCAL CONTACTS?

Jason (London): Network, network and network. I meet local industry people by walking trade shows and attending conferences, and then work these contacts regularly on the telephone. I find that people like to talk about their industry; share their thoughts on its state, and hypothecate on its future. This is my best source of market intelligence and the best method to identify the right contacts for my Canadian clients.

Tom (Detroit): I meet them at trade shows, seminars and other events. I utilize local business associations, chambers of commerce, and printed and electronic databases. When I meet someone, or see their name in a guide book or database, I contact them, and stay in touch. I try to keep them abreast of our activities, such as business partnering events, trade shows and conferences.

WHAT ARE THE EMERGING TRENDS IN YOUR MARKET?

Jason (London): The domestic UK construction industry is going through a period of rapid change, evidenced most in the new-build housing market. The industry is responding to three critical issues: skills shortages, rising construction costs and defects associated with onsite wet trades, new building regulations requiring higher thermal insulation, and a shortage of new housing. This has created a demand for innovative products, which "de-skill" the construction site, a greater acceptance of framing systems, particularly wood frames, and a trend toward offsite production. Canadian manufacturers are in an excellent position to supply this market in the short-term, while the domestic industry is still rethinking its infrastructure. In the long term, successful Canadian companies will have developed supply partnerships with small to medium size homebuilders who do not have their own manufacturing capability.

Tom (Detroit): One of the main concerns in the construction industry is a shortage of skilled labour. Any building product that can mitigate the effects of that shortage will get a fair hearing, for example, modular and panelized home construction, and any other prefabricated products that can be shipped and installed quickly and easily in a new structure. The same applies to commercial and industrial construction, including prefabricated structural steel and other building mechanicals. A lot of Canadian precast concrete products are coming our way too.

WHAT TOOLS ARE MOST VALUABLE TO YOU AND WHY?

Jason (London): Without a doubt, the Trade Team Canada Sector Team for building products is my most valuable tool. This network keeps me up-to-date on industry developments, responds quickly to my sourcing needs and are willing partners in our business development activities. They are also a quick way to disseminate market intelligence to Canadian industry. Without them, I could not do my job effectively.

Tom (Detroit): Electronic databases are very helpful in identifying companies. Dow Jones Interactive, the Canada and US phone directories and CorpTech are on Citrix. We also subscribe to Dunn & Bradstreet Marketplace and referenceUSA. They save a lot of time. However, you still have to make contact with these companies, and that requires (my preferred method) picking up the phone and calling them.