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Market your maintenance program

Knowing how to market a maintenance program is important to client relations

by Ambika Puniani

If only the phrase, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," could be erased from consumers' memories. But that's pretty much the way most homeowners and building owners regard their roof systems, and convincing them to partake in a roof system maintenance program can be difficult. Although maintenance programs traditionally are not sufficient revenue generators, some roofing companies have found that roof system maintenance programs — if marketed properly — can help build upon a loyal customer base.

Why they do it

For small roofing contracting companies, it often is challenging enough to get projects completed — let alone check on roof systems that may have no apparent problems. But companies that have maintenance programs have definite ideas about what the programs can accomplish. And regardless of your company's size, some of their ideas may apply.

"Our primary objective in having a maintenance program is relationship building," says Mark Santacrose, chief executive officer (CEO) and president of Tecta America Corp., Skokie, Ill. "We have found that caring for our customers' roof systems over time builds strong working relationships."

For John Larimer, CEO and president of generalRoofing, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., forming a maintenance program was a matter of taking the outstanding efforts of several companies within generalRoofing's consolidation and applying the efforts companywide.

"Our main goal in creating a maintenance program was to develop a program that incorporated the best maintenance practices of all our operating companies," Larimer explains. "We additionally

wanted to develop programs that were flexible enough to meet our customers' needs regardless of their budgets and ages of their roof systems."

LAW Engineering and Environmental Services Inc., Atlanta, is an engineering and consulting firm that provides roof system inspections and consulting to various building owners. The company tells clients that roof system repair and replacement decisions should be based on condition assessment, life-cycle costing and return on investment analyses.

For example, the company created a roof asset management program for Florida's Brevard County Public Schools (BCPS). The company first took inventory of BCPS's roof assets and assessed the roof systems' conditions. Then, the company used a computer program to analyze the data using life-cycle analysis and engineering algorithms. Once the data were analyzed, the company rated the roof systems from worst to best and suggested BCPS allocate its money toward repairing the worst roof systems.

During the next five years, the company helped BCPS maintain the roof systems that were in the best condition. As a result, BCPS received more than \$1 million in energy rebates from its local utility company, and roof leaks were reduced from more than 850 annually to less than 40.



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What they do

NRCA — and most contracting companies that offer maintenance services — suggest homeowners and building owners have their roof systems checked at least twice per year, preferably in the spring and fall, to identify problems caused or exacerbated by winter weather.

But how a company provides maintenance depends, obviously,

on its size, budget, manpower and philosophy about customer service. Nevertheless, many companies' maintenance programs have similar structures.

Most larger roofing contracting companies, such as Tecta America; generalRoofing; and Centimark Corp., Canonsburg, Pa., have separate maintenance divisions that employ between 100 employees and 200 employees.

Although your company may not have that kind of labor at its disposal, consider how these companies target their customers. Their maintenance teams focus on absentee owners, owners who only inhabit their homes during certain months, owners of multiple facilities and owners of large roof systems. They then try to customize inspections as much as possible.

For example, Centimark provides photographs of a roof system before and after damage or before and after repairs, detailed service descriptions and complimentary reports. Tecta America provides all clients with repair histories, as well as online access to roof system plans, maintenance work, photographs and projected costs.

To customize a maintenance program for a client concerned about costs, ask the client to consider allowing one of your crews to periodically visit his roof system free of charge. If something seems amiss, the client can pay for a full maintenance visit and/or repair work. Another way to customize maintenance service is to charge a flat rate for a certain number of visits, which may not require repair work. If any repair work is needed, it will be conducted as part of the flat rate.

Although maintenance programs do not make up a majority of companies' revenues, some income is realized. Most of the contractors interviewed say their maintenance programs make up about 10 percent to 15 percent of their annual revenues.

Making it known

But a maintenance program won't yield results for your company if it isn't marketed correctly to clients. Whether you service clients with residential or commercial roof systems, both need to be educated about maintenance.

For example, when you install a new roof system, explain to your customer what he should watch for on his roof system. Although you will want to stress that safety — particularly for clients with steep-slope roofs — is extremely important, you can ask them to keep watch for problems, such as peeling shingles or ponded water.

"Our maintenance program is outlined to our customers after new installation to make sure they understand how to keep their manufacturer warranties valid," Larimer explains. "Additionally, after we service a roof system, we let our customers know how they can reduce their roofing costs by preventing leaks through maintenance."

Tecta America crews leave behind brochures specifically focused on maintenance. In addition, the company conducts a marketing campaign about its maintenance services. The campaign includes direct mail, telemarketing, educational seminars, personal visits and access to its online maintenance offering, TectaTracker.™

In addition to brochures, Centimark also provides clients with preprinted Rolodex cards and a Web-site address on which clients can check the status of their roof systems.

LAW Engineering and Environmental Services takes further steps to educate its clients. It provides customers with case studies that demonstrate maintenance programs' successes, as well as copies of pertinent industry articles and studies that apply to specific situations a client may face.

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Making a team

Of course, a maintenance program is only as good as the people who execute it. Therefore, properly training employees is crucial to ensuring customers receive professional maintenance checks.

Maintenance workers need to be specially trained to recognize problems with roof systems, as well as the proper ways to fix them. Although several companies perform in-house training, consider sending workers to training seminars sponsored by your local roofing association, material manufacturers or NRCA. Regardless of the method, make sure the training is broad-based and thorough.

"A good service employee must have expert knowledge of all roof systems and conditions, as well as experience with specialized equipment," Santacrose says. "In addition, service workers must have strong communication skills and personal presence to be able to communicate with owners effectively. Finally, maintenance crews need to be well-versed in Occupational Safety and Health Administration requirements to make sure appropriate safety standards are maintained."

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Putting it together

The quality of service you provide is a reason clients respond with repeat business. Maintenance programs simply lend owners an added sense of security and allow you to continue to show them your company's commitment to quality, professionalism and taking care of their roofing needs.

Ambika Puniani is editor of Professional Roofing magazine and NRCA's director of communications.

 **LAW Engineering and Environmental Services, Inc.**

A MACTEC COMPANY

Corporate Headquarters:
1105 Sanctuary Parkway, Suite 300
Alpharetta, GA 30004
(770) 360-0600
(770) 360-0580-FAX