

Sales Kit to Go

by Kim and Linda Katwijk

When you drive up to your prospective client's home and she peers out the window, what does she see? Do you look like a professional deck expert — or do you look like just another guy in a pickup truck?

A while ago I was meditating along these lines and realized that when I drove up to a prospective client's house, I looked like some guy in a pickup truck! I'm a board member of NADRA (North American Deck and Railing Association), the co-author of numerous articles for *Professional Deck Builder*, the best darn deck builder in my county — yet prospective clients couldn't distinguish me from Joe Fly-by-Night.

During that thought process, I reflected on another troublesome part of the sales call: Many clients can't visualize how their deck or railing will look until I'm actually installing it. My quandary was that I wanted my clients to see beforehand how everything was going to look, so they could make the right choices quickly and easily.

My musings led to two questions: How could I upgrade my image in a cost-effective way? And how could I conveniently and efficiently carry an array of samples?

Easy-Riding Solution

My wife, Linda, suggested using a small trailer. Although I hate driving with a trailer, the idea had merit. I could hook up the trailer when going to sales appointments, but I wouldn't have to drag it around with me all the time. It would hold all the samples and keep them clean and organized.



Figure 1. Sales samples stay clean and organized in this customized tow-behind trailer, helping the author to project a professional image.

I began looking at trailers, but none of them fit my needs: They were too big and too expensive. Finally, while driving one day, I passed a couple of motorcycles, and behind one of them was a tiny trailer. Wow! It looked so cool!

Back to the trailer dealer I went, but this time I asked about what the motorcycling world calls a tow-behind. Sure enough, the dealer had them, and now I have one, too (Figure 1). My little trailer is made of aluminum and has a hatchback lid that locks. It's 4 feet wide, 6 feet long, and 22 inches deep. With some modification to the hinges, I can take the lid off. Inside, I built racks to hold everything that I want to bring to sales appointments.

One-Stop Shopping

My presentation setup includes 10 decking samples — six composites and four woods — each comprising

three 25-inch-long boards mounted to 5/8-inch plywood that has been painted black. I made the plywood larger than the decking to create a handle and to allow room to set a railing sample next to the decking (Figure 2, page 52). I have eight railing samples, 24 inches wide by 19 3/4 inches tall, mounted on deck boards.

I also have a fiberglass pergola sample from Arbors Direct (800/930-7495, www.arborsdirect.com), two samples of sub-framing (standard and upgraded), and a waterproof-membrane sample. A display case of Highpoint Deck Lighting (888/582-5850, www.hpdlighting.com) plugs into the 12-volt system in the trailer.

In addition, I carry literature about the decking products I offer and a photo album of my work. To top it all off, I have a big golf umbrella to keep Washington's regular rain off the clients while they view the samples. I spent \$2,500 and put in 80 hours to get

it all together, and boy, am I glad I did.

The trailer tows, hitches, and unhitches easily, and can be moved around by hand. I use it for only one purpose and I love how it keeps everything clean and organized. My sales presentations are more professional, and the response from clients has been even better than I expected. My samples are big enough to give a good visual representation, and my clients have emphatically expressed their appreciation that they can actually see what each choice would look like.

The return from my investment boils down to increased sales and increased profits. If you feel like you fit the category of “some guy in a pickup truck,” or if you find yourself scrambling to locate your samples amidst tools, cords, and screws in the back of your



Figure 2. With the trailer lid open, the authors show how a potential client can examine her decking and railing selections — and stay dry in the Washington rain.

truck, consider putting together a sales trailer. Improve your image, sell more decks, and sell more accessories.

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Applying the Golden Rule to Your Crew

by Bobby Parks

I began my construction career carrying material and doing grunt work with a crew building high-end houses. In time, the lead carpenter gave me a nail apron and a hammer — but little instruction — and sent me up on a scaffold to nail

was back to carrying material and doing grunt work.

The next time I got to use a hammer was nailing off baseboard inside another house. This I did at a pretty impressive pace, and even left no hammer marks. I did, however, nail a

Like the others on the crew, I really wanted to work for someone else. The pay on that job was competitive, but it didn't seem to matter. There was no loyalty, and the faces on the crew changed frequently. We never seemed to keep a good rhythm and were just productive enough to keep him off our backs. We had more in us, but weren't motivated to give it. I guess I stayed on because I was young and lacked the confidence to quit.

Eventually, this particular lead carpenter was replaced by someone with a completely different manner. He made it clear that there was work to be done — and he pushed us — but he led by example. He complimented hustle and good attitude. He thanked us for a good day's work. He took the

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off fascia. It was so exciting I blew across one entire side of the house. Unfortunately, I left hammer marks and an inconsistent nailing pattern behind me, which led to an embarrassing rant by the lead man — and I

pocket door closed and hit two water pipes. How was I supposed to know? Nobody told me that could happen. Again, the lead carpenter humiliated me in front of everyone; it was his standard way of operating.

time to explain things. When I did something stupid, he took me aside and corrected me privately.

Unlike the other lead carpenter, this man motivated me and made me feel like a contributing member of the crew. I was appreciated, complimented, and respected; in turn, I was more productive and would do anything I could for him.

When I struck out on my own and began to hire help, I decided early on to follow the example of the second lead carpenter. My company does

high-end deck and enclosure work, and it's grown over the years to the point where it keeps five crews busy. Thanks in part to how they're treated, my crew leaders have stayed with my company for many years: Two have been with me for 14 years, another has been with me for 10 years, another for nine years, and the most recently hired, for two years. The work is complicated, and it would be nearly impossible to do if I had to constantly hire and train new carpenters.

I believe it's this simple: Treat employees the way you want to be treated. Pay them as well as you can. Make people feel good about their work. Give them a small bonus at the end of the year. Let them off early on a Friday once in a while. Pay them for a rainy day on occasion.

You may think you can't afford to do this. I would argue you can't afford not to. ♦

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