

Why Attend DeckExpo?

by Bobby Parks

I asked myself that question last year — and for a couple of years before that. I was busy, didn't have time, and questioned spending the money. Besides, my business was doing well, and I felt I was up to date on what was going on in the deck world. What would the benefit be? Well, last year I finally decided to attend DeckExpo in Las Vegas. When it was over, I realized it had been worth the time and expense.

New Products

It's my view that the days of all-pressure-treated-wood decks are just about over. New products have changed customers' demands. Deck contractors who don't stay current with new products will face competitors who do. There's not a lot of room for complacency.

When I walked onto the DeckExpo floor, exhibitors were lined up as far as I could see.

This was composite-decking and alternative-rail city. Every deck product imaginable was here and displayed not only so that I see it, but so that I could walk on it and run my hands over the railings. I could talk to the manufacturers' representatives face to face.

One aspect of talking to these representatives surprised me. They aren't only interested in showing and explaining their products; they also want feedback from deck builders. They're in a very competitive business, and our experiences help them to continue improving their offerings.

Networking

Seeing the new products and taking classes (everything from marketing and selling to production management and specific construction techniques) would have justified the time and money I spent to attend. But as good as these were, the best thing about the event was being able to let my guard down and talk turkey with other deck builders from across the country.

At home, I'm friendly with other deck builders, but they're my direct competitors. It's hard to talk in depth with them without fear of giving up some key piece of information. At



DeckExpo, I developed relationships with deck builders from Connecticut, Utah, Texas, Indiana, Washington, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. I met a deck builder from Australia who amazed me with his knowledge and enthusiasm.

Before this experience, I never realized how much pleasure and value there is in having open dialogue with people who experience the same challenges and problems as I do. Not only was I not worried about giving up trade secrets, the deck builders I spoke with gave me invaluable feedback based on their experience with different products and techniques.

I've been in the deck business for 19 years. It should come as no surprise that I felt the beginnings of burnout. DeckExpo recharged my batteries and I returned home ready to jump into the spring deck-building season — loaded with useful information and extremely pleased with the relationships I had started with other people in this industry.

The proof is in the eating of the pudding, though: I've already reserved my hotel for 2008.

[Editor's note: DeckExpo is owned by Hanley Wood, publisher of Professional Deck Builder.] ♦

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