

DEPARTMENTAL NEWS

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Marketing Issues

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MARKETING YOUR LOCAL UNION

One of the most important factors that a Local Union needs to consider before investing time or resources into a Top-Down marketing strategy or a Bottom-Up campaign is the internal operations of the Local Union. In order to successfully “market” your organization it must present itself as something of value to a potential non-signatory target. The same holds true when organizing from the bottom-up. Non-union roofers will be more interested in joining an organization that can substantiate how the Local Union can improve their lives.

Before Local Unions should even contemplate a Top-Down marketing or potential Bottom-Up campaign they need to answer a few simple questions. Are we an organization that is appealing to a potential non-signatory contractor? What do we have to offer a non-signatory contractor of value to their business? Does our Local have the ability to respond to their needs and the means to increase or expand their market share? There are key elements that a non-union contractor or roofer will consider before making any decision to become a part of your organization.

The key elements of a Local Union that make it “marketable” in my opinion are as follows:

Apprenticeship Training: Does your Local Union have a viable Training Program that includes both hands-on and classroom training? Training is the most important element that we can offer to a non-union contractor interested in becoming signatory.

Policing Work: Does the Local effectively police the work covered under your Agreement in your jurisdiction? This would include assuring that both Federal and State (if applicable) prevailing wages are paid on public works projects along with participating in wage surveys in order to keep your Local’s wages and benefits at the prevailing rate. In addition, we should attend public pre-bid meetings when work covered under our agreements is going out for bid. Protecting our work jurisdiction and expanding our market share is a method of organizing that will leave an impression on the non-union sector.

Recruitment of New Members: Are you actively recruiting new members or experienced non-union roofers to fill your contractor’s labor requests? Availability of a skilled workforce is a key issue that is commonly raised when meeting non-union contractors!

Building and Trades Central Labor Councils: Does your Local Union affiliate with and participate in the area Building and Trades and Labor Councils in your jurisdiction? In any organizing campaign it will be important that the Local have as much support from the Labor Community as possible, especially small Locals that have limited resources and personnel to engage in a campaign.

Labor/Management Committee: Does your Local Union have an active Labor/Management Committee that can identify industry issues or problems that can be addressed in a cooperative approach? Non-Union contractors have this preconceived idea that the Union will control their business. The concept of a Labor/Management Committee will demonstrate how you are willing to be their “business partner.”

Political/Legislative: Are you actively supporting candidates for office that support the views and beliefs of the Local Union? Prevailing Wages, Project Labor Agreements, strong building codes and licensing requirements are a few examples of legislated items that benefit the Union sector of the industry and therefore can influence a potential non-union contractor’s decision.

Community Service: Participating in any type of Community Service endeavors such as Habitat for Humanity, United Way etc. will always reflect on the Local Union in a positive way. Too many times the non-union sector only hears about the negatives regarding Local Unions and as we already know, most of this is uneducated preconceived notions. Turn that around by using “press releases” to promote your Community Service projects and therefore the Local Union.

Marketing: Finally, develop a marketing strategy to get the advantages of using Union roofers, not only to the non-union contractor and roofer but to end users of our skilled services such as school districts, General Contractors, etc. Promote your training and safety programs, “the Code of Conduct”, Foreman Training, Labor/Management initiatives etc. We have a lot to offer. Promote it as much as and wherever possible.

Many of our Locals operate using these strategies every day and are successful in organizing and increasing or retaining market share. There are no guarantees. However, we believe it will increase our chances to capture a larger share of a growing industry. The bottom line is that we must strive to make our Locals as appealing and marketable as possible; and therefore increase our chances of increasing market share and membership growth. The non-union contractor must recognize a significant value and profitable advantages from the Union sector before making any decision to become signatory to your Local. By improving the Local’s marketable image you will greatly improve your chances of successfully achieving growth in signatory contractors and membership numbers. ■