

Face-to-Face: Still the Best Way to Maintain a Strong Supply Chain

We all know that technology is meant to solve problems and make our lives better. Sending email is faster and cheaper than mail. Looking up products on the Internet gives us instant, anonymous information, and helps us make buying decisions quickly – both as consumers and as businesspeople. But when it comes to developing strong business relationships throughout the wallcovering supply chain, there is still no substitute for connecting face-to-face with your partners and customers.

That's why so many people attend events like the National Hardware Show; it is simply the best way to network and find the partners you need to run your business successfully. In contrast to all the hype and chatter you have to plow through everyday in your inbox, magazines, and mail, trade shows give you a chance to meet one-on-one with suppliers and other business partners. In person, you have the ability to ask more questions, learn more, and make better purchasing decisions.

There's nothing wrong with doing your homework online, so that you are informed and aware of what you need and what a current or potential partner has to offer. It's always advantageous to come to a face-to-face meeting with a prior understanding of what you want and what the other person can provide. But actual purchase decisions are best made after connecting directly with a partner. It's the best way to negotiate and collaborate to get exactly what you need.

The good news for you is that many industry events exist to provide you with opportunities to find the right partners up and down the supply chain. From large national trade shows that encompass a wide range of products and services (the National Hardware Show and NeoCon World's Trade Fair come to mind), to regional events and product-specific shows, such as the Wallcovering Association's Annual Meeting, these shows are organized to make your life easier, with buyers and sellers all under one roof, in one temporary marketplace. They're also a great way to see the latest innovations and get the jump on upcoming trends.

In addition to building valuable relationships, many of these events provide extremely valuable education opportunities. You can expect to find workshops on the latest trends and best practices, presented by the people who are doing them right now. It's hard to get more hands-on than that.

Whether you're buying or selling, looking for new partners or strengthening existing relationships, the value you gain from attending trade shows like these will last far beyond the few days you spend. And more importantly, the financial return you gain from the relationships you build will come back to you many times over. If you don't know what events are best for you to attend, ask your current colleagues, or simply do an industry search online. Once you settle on an event, the chances are good that it will be an experience you look forward to, year after year.



For more advice on maximizing the value of your wallcoverings supply chain, visit the Wallcoverings Association Web site, at <http://www.wallcoverings.org>, where you'll find even more resources. For quick ideas on how to sell more wallpaper, check out the WA retailer Web page, at <http://retailercentral.wallcoverings.org/>. We also recommend you subscribe to *On A Roll – Highlights of Wallcoverings' Latest and Greatest Consumer Press*. It's free to subscribe (email info@wallcoverings.org) and allows you to see the latest media trends and stories that your customers are viewing today.

WA's column in the May 2010 Paint & Decorating Retailer Magazine
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