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Rethinking How We Target Consumers to Spark Business Growth

By Brian Ray, member of the *Roof Assembly Ventilation Coalition*.

With the housing market on what appears to be a slow path toward improvement, the growth potential for roofing contractors in the coming year will be largely dependent upon reroofing projects and add-on services. And, while roofing professionals look to marketing to help drive new business and differentiate their services from competitors, tapping into the consumer mindset now will ensure that messaging resonates when the time comes to conduct maintenance or reroof the home.

According to data from the most recent Home Improvement Research Institute (HIRI) Consumer Trends Report, consumers are looking for more opportunities to be in control of their purchasing decisions. As a result, many homeowners are educating themselves to make sure they are informed about their home's needs before tapping into the expertise of a professional.

During this time of year, with the promise of warmer weather, many homeowners have already identified whether or not their shingles need replacement; the harsh winter has passed and any visible storm damage has likely been acknowledged and earmarked for repair. Something most homeowners don't realize, however, is that the roof can be in need of fixing even if damage can't be seen from the outside. Proper roof ventilation is a chief component to a healthy roofing system, but it is an element that is often ignored or forgotten by homeowners.

Keeping consumers informed about the steps they should take each year to perform a complete roof inspection – beyond just shingles – will help build trust with an increasingly demanding consumer audience while also helping to identify new opportunities for business growth and keep the roof top of mind with potential customers.

Informing Consumers to Build Trust

Many homeowners are in the habit of changing their air conditioning or furnace filter, switching out smoke detector batteries and rotating mattresses as part of their spring cleaning routine. Yet,

despite their growing access to information through the rise of new global media and communications technologies, homeowners may not know what to look for when it comes to identifying other areas of the home that may need consideration.

Included on this list should be inspecting roof attic ventilation, as ventilation ensures proper performance in the summertime by helping reduce heat and moisture buildup in the home. Especially in situations where home attics may get extremely hot in the summer, the spring season provides the perfect opportunity to check out the attic while the climate is still comfortable. While working with homeowners, help to indentify some easy tasks they can complete to help prolong the life of their roof and/or determine if they need professional help to repair their roof:

- **Interior Inspection of the Intake and Soffit Vents.** Intake vents introduce air into the roof system. When they are plugged or obstructed with insulation or items stored in the attic, they may not be introducing the proper amount of intake ventilation for a balanced system. This can also lead to heat and moisture buildup, along with the heightened potential for ice dams, mold or mildew growth, which can impact a home's indoor air quality. Homeowners should check each year to ensure the vents are not blocked.

- **Exterior Inspection of the Intake and Soffit Vents.** Along with checking the intake or soffit vents from the inside of the attic, homeowners should also perform a visual inspection from the exterior of the house. Dirt, debris or even insects can limit the free flow of air through the soffit vents. Typically, these vents can be cleaned with an air or water hose, however if they can't safely be reached or if it appears unnecessary debris can't easily be removed, it may be an opportunity for a professional to become involved.

- **Roof Exhaust Vents.** Similarly, roof exhaust vents should also be inspected annually to make sure leaves and debris that may be caught within the louvers or baffles are cleared. Things like pine needles, leaves or seed podlings can fall and accumulate around roof vents, limiting the amount of air that can pass through the vent product and hindering the performance of roof ventilation. Only trained roofing professionals should attempt to clear debris from a roof deck or vent.

Informing consumers about what to look for and including services like these in your business portfolio, is one way to help expand your business' reach and ensure that you remain top of mind when future repairs or services are needed. In addition to these regular inspections, springtime can also provide an opportunity to witness several warning signs that can be indicators of larger problems that may need to be addressed by a roofing professional.

Warning Signs that Require Professional Help

Whether educating current clients about the things they can do within their home to prolong the life of their roof or simply speaking with potential customers about their home, contractors should also make homeowners aware of common warning signs that indeed something may be wrong with the roof. In most cases, these signs indicate that there may be a larger problem within the roof assembly that will need to be indentified and fixed.

- Wet deck boards on the underside of the roof can be a sign of ice damming or a warning sign that a leak is occurring. Additionally, damp or moist insulation can also be a tell-tale sign of a leak somewhere within the roof assembly.
- Water or rust on pipe or any other protrusions through the roof may indicate that rain or snow is entering the attic.
- Nail tips that have frost or rust on them might be a sign of improper roof ventilation. Moisture tends to migrate to cold surfaces where they will form frost. If a homeowner does not have proper attic ventilation, there may be additional moisture present that does not have an exhaust route.

In these cases, homeowners should be aware that the next course of action if any of these signs are noticed is to tap into a local roofing professional for help.

According to HIRI: consumer decisions are more complex than ever before, often requiring for extra consideration, research or consultation of trusted sources to make certain that best and most savvy decision is made. Identifying opportunities to inform consumers and position yourself as an expert when it comes to matters surrounding the entire roof, will help build lasting and long-term relationships with consumers, ensuring that you'll be top of mind when repairs both large and small are needed. (End)