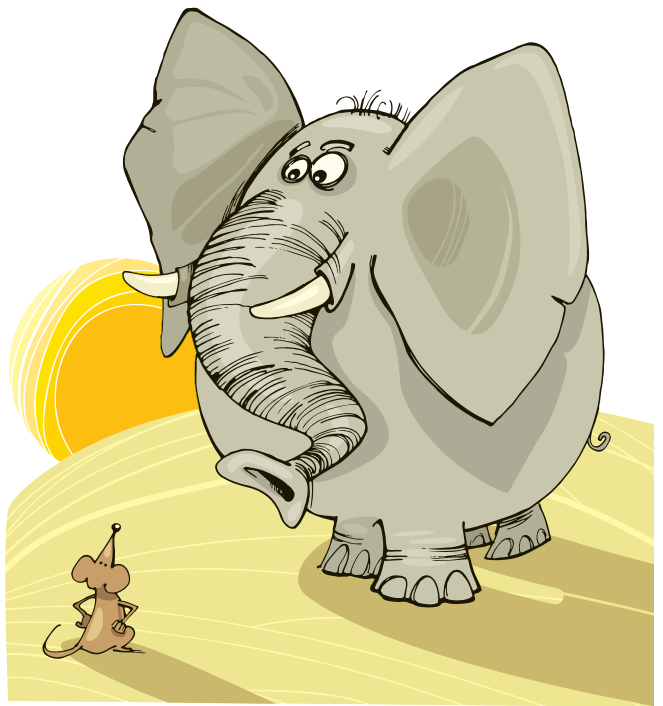


The Key To Success

It is official. It has made the pages of the *Vancouver Sun* (March 20, 2009): “The elephant (the U.S. economy) has sneezed and so the mouse (Canada’s economy) is on its back (wheezing and hacking).” How should our industry respond to the turmoil? **BY MARK EVANS**



Graphic iStockphoto

It is no surprise to those of us with close ties to the industry in the U.S. that Canada’s economy is now feeling the effects of the recession. The question is: How will our industry change as a result of this turmoil?

The Harper government’s stimulus package included a renovation incentive. However, it seems the incentive will only benefit a portion of the industry, as the program, intent and subsequent activity focuses heavily on kitchen and bathroom renovations and flooring updates. For those skilled trades’ people whose livelihood has been dependent on new construction, what opportunities are there for them to explore?

According to Industry Canada (reported July 2008), 48 per cent of Canada’s workers were employed in small businesses (classified as less than 100 employees). Being small allows these companies to quickly embrace what I refer to as the “**ation**” words, which include: diversification, integration, qualification, communication, valuation and reputation. Of these words, diversification is at the heart of the capabilities of the independent contractor.

For companies that built a business and a reputation on serving a single market sector, the reality of shifting to serve a new market is analogous to starting a new division. They can build off an existing business infrastructure and use existing resources, but may lack contacts and access to find work. A solid reputation will offer networking opportunities and ultimately facilitate the shift to servicing a new market sector.

For the plumbing and heating contractor, the role of the specialist consultant is a great way to meet new people, to get a handle on the local maintenance and/or repair market, and even to connect to a source of new construction

work. It may not drive a lot of revenue initially, but it will drive a great deal of conversation and exposure. One strategy could be to promote your plumbing and heating expertise as a specialist consultant assisting with pre-purchase home inspections. Focusing on the pre-purchase market, who are the potential targets? On the residential side they could include: home inspectors, realtors, bankers, mortgage brokers and homebuyers.

Using home inspectors as an entry point is a good start as they already network with all of the other constituents in this group. For many years they have been integral to the resale housing market. They are getting more involved in the sale of new homes as well. British Columbia recently made licensing a requirement for its home inspectors. Effective March 31, 2009, this is a first in Canada.

Ed Witzke is the author of *The Complete Canadian Home Inspection Guide* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson) and owner of WITCO Building Inspection Services in Vancouver, BC. In his own inspection business, his training in architecture gives him a complete understanding of the scope of work central to home inspection and underscores the need to employ specialist consultants.

“When it comes to understanding radiant floor heating, perimeter drainage or other plumbing system questions, I am only as smart as the last person I spoke to,” said Witzke. “I call experts who know these systems and can tell me and the homeowner what we need to know.” Witzke uses local companies that he knows to be reliable from past experience.

Get connected to this constituent group by hosting a seminar on heating and plumbing for the home and invite the target group. This is an opportunity to gain credibility

by sharing tips on things to look for when buying a home, in addition to more general information, such as renovation innovations and information on government incentives for energy upgrades or other rebate programs.

You could also promote this seminar and your specialist skills using social online networks such as: LinkedIn, Digg, StumbleUpon, Facebook and Twitter. These sites have tutorials to show you how to start promoting your business on their site. You can find free advice to assist you with this using a key word search of "market using social media."

The green building boom also holds new opportunity for specialist consulting, particularly in the area of commissioning, as part of a LEED-certified project. Pre-requisite requirements on LEED projects are designed to ensure minimum standards are met with respect to construction activity, systems performance, energy efficiency, materials used and indoor air quality.

Another component of the LEED process is energy modeling. Whether an in-house engineer or a consultant con-

ducts the energy modeling activity, certain tasks must be performed, and in the correct sequence. Energy modeling can be packaged with post commissioning surveys to LEED project teams and energy audits of existing buildings as part of a new business model. There are many free software packages available to contractors interested in pursuing this avenue. A list of these is posted at http://apps1.eere.energy.gov/buildings/tools_directory/alpha_list.cfm.

The past teaches us many lessons. One is that, like the mythical phoenix, the economy and the construction market will rise from the ashes. An investment in knowledge and an exercise in diversification will not only carry us through these trying times, but will further position us for growth when the inevitable upturn happens.

HPAC



Mark Evans has worked on the wholesale and manufacturer sectors in sales and marketing positions. Contact him at writemarkevans@hotmail.com.

TRINITY^{Lx}

HIGH EFFICIENCY GAS BOILER



Luxury Features and Superior Efficiencies

The Trinity Lx has a patented 316L stainless heat exchanger delivering 95.1% AFUE, and features a state-of-the-art 5.7" colour touchscreen display.



The Right Choice



The Trinity Lx can reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by up to 50%, lead to a reduction of 2.5 tons of GHGs, and result in savings of up to 25% on heating bills.

www.nythermal.com