



## **Distributor Perspective**

### **So What Do Retailers Really Want From Their Distributors?**

By Moe Desmarais

At its 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the North American Association of Floor Covering Distributors, NAFCD unveiled its newest research study entitled: “Understanding the Needs of Floor Covering Retailer.”

The study, conducted with the cooperation and assistance of the World Floor Covering Association (WFCA), provided insight into the pressure points of relationships between the distributor and their retail customers. The study focused on what the floor covering retailer is seeking from a professional distributor sales representative and decision-making criteria retailers use when deciding to add new lines or products. The study also explored what makes a new “alliance” attractive to retailers.

The study revealed that:

- The best distributor representatives are those who are consistent in their follow through, have extensive product knowledge, are creative problem solvers, friendly, respectful of the retailer’s time limitations. The rep must act as a dealer “advocate” when questions or complaints arise.
- Conversely, the worst distributor representatives are those who are arrogant, do not answer or return calls, miss appointments, drop in unannounced, avoid claim issues, push products misaligned with the dealer’s market, lack product knowledge and show favoritism.

“Ducking claims appears to be the cardinal sin of distribution sales,” wrote Jason Bader, of the research firm The Distribution Team and author of the study. “In order to foster a strong relationship, the distributor rep needs to stay on top of the claims process. Even if

it is technically in the hands of the factory or someone else in the company, the rep is the first contact with the dealer.”

Another issue that surfaced both in this year's survey and in a 2008 NAFCD study, "Understanding the Needs of the Floor Covering Distributor," is the convolution of the supply chain. Bader found that in last year's study distributors complained about manufacturers selling direct to dealers. This year's study revealed dealers complaining about distributors who sell direct to builders or large installers. Bader observed that this “practice” appears to be a bit of a double standard.

In addition to these elements, the study also provides insight into how a distributor can become more valuable in serving their customers, what types of manufacturers /distributor sponsored sales promotions tend to be most successful, where the manufacturer/distributor should invest their marketing dollars and what long-standing practice(s) in the floor covering supply chain should be eliminated.

It is the association's hope that this study provides both NAFCD members and their customers a starting point for further discussion and the development of a formal marketing plan. To that end, NAFCD is developing a “Competitive Advantage Kit” to help our members create meaningful and successful, on going marketing and promotion programs that meet the objectives of both the distributor and its dealer partners.

To receive a copy of the report, “Understanding the Needs of Floor Covering Retailer,” or the “Competitive Advantage Kit,” send an email to: [info@nafcd.org](mailto:info@nafcd.org).

*Maurice A. Desmarais, CAE, is executive vice president of the North American Association of Floor Covering Distributors (NAFCD), a not-for-profit trade association serving distributors and suppliers of floor covering materials and related products. Its purpose is to enable wholesale floor covering distributors to be the most efficient, professional and profitable vehicle for bringing their suppliers' product to market resulting in the highest degree of dealer satisfaction. For more information on NAFCD, its programs and services, visit [www.nafcd.org](http://www.nafcd.org) or call the headquarters office at 312-644-6610.*