

Services Offered by a Retail Lumber Yard

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
Foreword	1
Delivery	5
Credit	9
Planning and Figuring	12
Services of an Architect	20
Financing	23
Unit Selling	26
Personal Contact	29
Construction of Small Items	32
Miscellaneous	35
Conclusion	39
Bibliography	40

FOREWORD

When Mr. John Q. Public goes shopping, he finds the prices on any given commodity practically the same at all places of business handling that commodity. In other words, prices in any locality are pretty well standardized. Going through a town or city the price of gas advertised by the various stations will be the same on all standard brands. Meat markets all sell the same grade of meat at approximately the same price. Grocery stores, hardware stores, dry goods stores, and all of the other innumerable business houses all offer their wares at prices closely corresponding to the prices asked by all other business houses of a similar nature.

To be sure, certain divergences in prices will be found, possibly between stores or possibly within the same store, but John Q. Public quickly learns that those goods sold at a cheaper price are of an inferior quality or different grade, and he soon realizes that he receives just about that for which he pays on each and every purchase. In other words, when dealing with an honest business man, one usually gets his money's worth and no more.

This condition at present and for the past few years has been and is becoming increasingly true. Without a doubt it is partly due to the necessity for marginal selling caused by keen competition, but there are several other factors active in bringing about such a standardization.

One of the biggest of these factors is the improved methods of transportation. Whereas in the past, the consumer found it almost necessary to purchase at the nearest or local store, his shopping range has now widened until he finds it both economical and practical to search out the best markets. Naturally, in order to hold trade at home, prices have been equalized to a large extent.

Another factor, possibly as great as any other, was brought about through the "NRA" a few years back. This act required all businesses of a similar nature within a certain district to organize and standardize their prices. The NRA has long since gone out of action, but the results of it are still in evidence. Sellers, finding that by getting together, they could all demand higher prices without fear of cut-throat competition, have, in a good many instances, continued these organizations, and still get together at regular intervals.

The standardizing of prices leaves the seller with just one weapon by means of which he may build up a better business than his competitors, namely, good merchandizing. Through good merchandizing, some stores have been able to push to the fore and have steadily made money even during the depression while others have barely eked out an existence or have failed entirely. However, the word merchandizing is rather broad in its scope. It includes all those things which cause a person to be desirous of purchasing at

one store rather than another, such as salesmanship, personality, character, services, displays, advertisement, good-will, and so forth. Each of these individual items is a problem which the dealer or seller must work out.

Just as standardization has taken place in the service stations, the grocery stores, the meat markets, so has it come about in the retail lumber business. As with these others, merchandizing likewise plays the leading role in sales.

In this thesis, I am limiting myself, as much as possible, to the discussion of services, one of the items of merchandizing, as applied by the retail lumber business. As the line between services and the other items of merchandizing is often very fine and at times almost indistinguishable, I will endeavor to bring out only those factors which can be considered as services, and will discuss the other items only to the extent that they help explain the operation of the service.

A service naturally affects both parties of a transaction. One party offers it and the other accepts, but before the one will make the offer, he must see some advantage in it for himself. Therefore, I shall discuss services from the standpoint of the yard man, as well as the mode of their operation, and advantages to the customer.

Retail lumber yards are of various sizes and find themselves in various situations. A service which one would find

applicable to offer might be out of range or reason for another. This by itself as much as implies that no set rule of services can be laid out for all yards in general, and in this thesis I will not try to say that any yard should do this or do that, but merely will point out services which are offered by various yards,, and services which it is possible for yards to offer.

DELIVERY

Without a doubt, delivering orders is one of the most common and most universally applied services offered by the retail lumber companies. As it is employed by practically all yards in some way or form, I shall discuss it first.

Lumber yards, for the most part, own and operate their own delivery trucks. Also, for the most part, and this is especially true of the city yards, they find it necessary to deliver nearly all of their orders. They therefore add the average cost of delivery per thousand board feet on to their selling price. In this way they do not have to add anything for each delivery and do not find it necessary to give a discount to those customers who have the facilities and wish to deliver the goods themselves. In other words, no extra charge is placed on the selling price of the lumber as delivering is considered one of the necessary costs of operation.

In larger yards where the volume of sales permits, and again especially in the city where the selling range is somewhat limited, delivery of all items, no matter how small, is made. Moreover, all lumber sent out, but not used on the job, or material which the customer wishes to return for one reason or another, is picked up free of charge. This, of course, is not true of the smaller yards or country yards. Many of them cannot afford to make deliveries of small items as distances are so great that it would cost

far too much to deliver just a few pounds of nails or similar small items. Therefore, they set a minimum size limit on all orders which they will deliver. In such cases they usually operate by delivering every order amounting to over ten dollars, or whatever amount for which they feel they can safely afford to send out a truck.

Another limit to which lumber yards feel it necessary to confine their deliveries, is distance. It would be neither practical nor economical to follow a policy of delivering all orders regardless of distance. This is usually accomplished by making all deliveries within a radius of a certain number of miles, or all deliveries within a certain district. With the small town yards, where the only competition is with yards in nearby towns, in other words where they are the only yard in town, the lumbermen from the various villages can get together and decide upon areas within which all business rightfully belongs to each, and agree to make deliveries only within that area. In following this policy, any customer placing an order which would have to be delivered outside of that area is required to come after the material himself. An alternative, when the yards are on good terms and conditions are so that it is practical, is to turn the order over to the yard which claims the district within which the delivery is to be made.

Owning and operating a truck is an expensive procedure and comprises somewhat of a risk. Yards which find they must make deliveries but do not wish to assume the resulting responsibilities can hire a truck from a trucking concern which will rent the truck and driver for so much per mile. The charge of delivery is handled in the same manner as if the yard owned the truck and business is conducted in the same fashion.

Although the service of delivery is practiced by most yards, some of the smaller town yards are rather fortunately located, and do not always find it necessary. Any yard so located that it has no competition would not have to make any deliveries, but few yards are quite that fortunate. Nevertheless, many of them do not find that they are required to make delivery on part or all of their sales. Most yards so fortunate are in the highly agricultural sections of the country where nearly every farmer owns a truck of his own. Their delivery may be taken care of by giving a discount to all customers delivering their own goods, and hiring a free lance trucker to make all other deliveries. This can be done economically only to the extent that more is not paid out per year to the free lance truckers than it would cost the yard to own and operate a truck.

An alternative to this and operating upon the same principle is placing an extra charge, large enough to cover

the cost of delivering, whenever it is necessary to make a delivery. This system, however, has the disadvantage of appearing to the customer as though he were being charged for a service which he may feel is due him.

CREDIT

One of the most delicate, and usually one of the most essential services offered by the retail lumber company is that of issuing credit. There are few companies indeed, so fortunate that they can do business on a cash and carry basis. This item itself, therefore, has a lot to do with the success or failure of a business.

Extending credit is always a delicate procedure in all cases except where the integrity, honesty, and ability of the customer to pay is above reproach. With all other customers the dealer must work out for himself some basis for extending credit. Taking a risk and learning from experience is one method, but this is often rather expensive and is seldom used except in cases where the risk does not appear to be very great and where the company does not stand to lose much.

Many communities and most cities issue a credit rating at regular intervals to which the dealer may subscribe. This consists of a list of those people on whom it is safe to risk credit, and the amount over which it would not be advisable to go. In other instances, when no credit rating is published or when the customer in question is not on the list, inquiries may be made at other places of business where he may have traded and the desired information thus obtained. At least it is always advisable to make an inquiry whenever such a precaution is at all practical.

In cities and other places where incomes are fairly stable and consistent, credit is usually extended upon the basis of a certain time limit, usually thirty days or sixty days time. This, as a general practice, and where practical, works very well as it gives a complete understanding between the lumber dealer and the customer, but in some localities and under certain circumstances, this cannot be followed. In agricultural districts where crops are seasonal, the customer often only has the money to pay his bills at those periods of the year when he harvests his crops. Under such conditions a definite agreement should be reached with the customer that the bill is to be paid immediately at that time when his money is received. This policy works on all occasions where the customer has a definite date when he will be having money coming in. At any rate, under all circumstances where a definite period of time of allowing credit such as thirty days is not used, a definite understanding should exist between the lumber man and the customer as to the time and conditions of settlement.

Another method of issuing credit so as to give an incentive to keep bills payed up to date, is to give a discount on all bills paid within a certain period of time. Credit may be issued on terms of two per cent if paid within ten days, one per cent if paid within thirty days or some such similar terms.

Some companies, not wishing to clutter up their books with numerous small accounts, refuse to extend credit on sales of less than some minimum amount which they arbitrarily set up, such as \$5.00, \$10.00, etc. In other cases, on larger amounts with customers who wish credit extended over a long period of time, they require that the job be financed through some other agency, usually a bank, or in many cases through the Federal Housing Administration, but this will be discussed more fully in a later chapter.

As previously stated, issuing credit is a delicate operation, and as I have often heard said, it is a good business man who knows how to turn down credit and get cash on a sale without losing a customer. Nevertheless, it is only in this way and by having nerve enough to say "No" when the occasion warrants it, that a business man is enabled to stay in business and make a profit.

PLANNING AND FIGURING

A prerequisite of a good retail lumber yard manager is a detailed knowledge of structures of all types for which he might be called upon to sell a bill of lumber. This includes all variations in types, sizes, and form. Accompanying this, he must have a certain amount of ingenuity and ability at figuring out and planning in order that he will be able to face, with a good background, any situation or circumstance that comes before him. Although it is necessary that he have a fundamental knowledge of such things within his head, he should also have a large file containing plans, pictures, and diagrams of all the various types of structures to which he can refer or to which he can refer the customer.

Houses which are to be built in cities are often required by law to be planned and designed by architects, and even if the law does not require this, it is still a wise thing to do, as a more suitable structure can thus be obtained. Nevertheless, the plans for many small homes are merely taken from some magazine or published book of plans, or are worked out by the individual with the help of carpenters and the lumber dealer. At present, most homes being built are rather small, and in smaller towns and on farms, architects are seldom employed. Similarly, in the city the help of an architect is seldom called upon to plan garages, utility sheds, and other small jobs.

The prospective home builder who does not wish to employ the services of an architect either obtains a supply of house plans from various sources, or calls upon his local lumber dealer for assistance. If he follows the former procedure, he picks out two or three plans which appeal to him and then calls on the lumberman for advice. The lumberman should be able to look at the set of plans and be able to visualize how the completed house will appear. He must point out the advantages of this house, the disadvantages of that house, and the suitability of the house for the location. Thus he guides and advises the home builder in his choice of homes. However, in doing this he must be careful to let the customer decide for himself. The dealer's opinion must be frank and honest, but he should not be stubborn.

The customer who comes to the dealer first with the idea of asking about building, usually has very little knowledge of the type of home he wishes, and starts the inquiry by stating that he would like to build a home. By skilful questioning it is soon discovered how large a house is desired, how much the customer feels that he can put into the house, and the general type of structure which would interest him.

Knowing the type and size of home desired, the planning ability and the ingenuity of the dealer is really brought into play. Few magazines and books of house plans

go into very great detail. They are generally limited to the floor plans and a sketch of how the house should appear from two or three different angles when completed. The general outline of the plan can be followed, but it is frequently necessary to vary certain details to meet individual demands. All variations in the plans which appear advisable to make must be suggested in a clear way which the customer can understand and be backed by sound reasoning.

Similarly, few plans found in magazines are accompanied by a thorough set of specifications. It is the dealer's job to make out these specifications, and to figure the approximate cost of the bill. Although usually, if the customer has permitted the dealer to assist him to this extent, he will buy his material from that dealer, it is nevertheless a good idea to place a few items in these specifications that are handled by that dealer but not by other dealers in the locality. For example, I know of one dealer in the midwest who at one time handled most of his dimension stock in southern long leaf pine while his competitors handled theirs in Douglas fir. When figuring a bill he specified long leaf pine dimension and pointed out several advantages this kind of wood had over fir. When the customer took the bill to other yards to be figured they could not readily supply the pine, and the customer would frequently buy the material from the yard furnishing the pine.

Though wishing to make as much profit on a job as possible, the good dealer will do all within his power to hold the cost of a job down. He will suggest everything that he can to save money. When cheaper material will work fully as well and be as serviceable, he will bring it to the buyer's attention. Where high quality material is not required, he will not try to force the sale of the higher priced product. He will, of course, point out the advantages of the higher quality goods, but at the same time, if the job can be done just as well without going to the greater expense, he will bring it to the consumer's attention. Most home builders, although interested in quality, are more or less interested in expenditures and appreciate any suggestions which will cut the cost. It gives them a feeling of confidence in the dealer, and is a good practice both from the standpoint of the present job and possible future business with the individual. He is made to feel that the lumberman's interest is more in getting him a home than in making the largest possible profit from him.

The lumberman's primary interest, has been in larger structures and jobs, such as building a home, as these jobs call for a large volume of sales in one unit, but more and more yards are finding it possible to build up their volume through numerous small sales. Many of these take the form of remodeling and repairing the home. At

present this is especially applicable, because for the past ten years there has been very little building of new homes, and many people are still not confident enough of the future to go ahead with the large expense of a complete new house. Moreover, many homes are twenty to twenty-five years old or older, and are completely out of style. A remodeling job can often make one of these old houses look like one of the very latest design with only a small part of the expenditure necessary for a new home.

Even more than in house planning, this type of job presents an opportunity to the lumberman to use his ingenuity and planning ability. If an architect is not hired to do the job, the dealer should upon hearing of the prospects of the job, make a personal call on the home and look over the situation with the owner. The owner will tell him the general idea of how he wishes the job finished. The two can then work out the details of the job together. The lumberman, falling back on his experience and knowledge in such things, should be able to offer a suggestion here, a criticism there, and so forth until a satisfactory plan is worked out. By the time they have worked out the plans, the prospect should feel that the dealer is as interested in the job as he himself, and by showing great enthusiasm over the possibilities, the dealer arouses the enthusiasm of the buyer until he is ready to start in on the job immediately. Original and novel ideas are suggested in such

a way that the customer has the feeling that he has thought of them himself. He takes pride in the job, and if it is well executed, will show it off with great enthusiasm to all of his friends.

As mentioned previously, the dealer's willingness to plan and cooperate with the customer does not end with house jobs, but covers all types of structures. Garages and utility sheds are items frequently built in the city, while barn yard buildings are items which make up the largest part of the volume of sales in farming communities. With buildings of this type an architect's service is very seldom employed; consequently the most of the planning for these buildings is done by the customer with the help of the carpenter or contractor and the retail lumberman. It is to the advantage of the dealer if the customer turns to him for assistance rather than the carpenter. However, if the contractor or carpenter is consulted first, the dealer should show just as much willingness to work out the plans with him as with the customer.

Again, as I said previously, he should know all about how these buildings are constructed. His knowledge should be so complete that if a customer came in wishing to build a barn and gave him the dimensions, he could sit down and figure within a few board feet the amount of material it would take to complete the building. Similarly, he must be able to determine what the size of the structure should be

if told what it is expected to hold. For example, if told how much stock or how many cattle a barn will be expected to house, and the amount of hay that will be placed in the hay mow, he should, with a little figuring, be able to determine the size of the barn. If told how many chickens are to be kept, he should be able to tell how large a chicken house or brooder house is necessary to take care of them, or if told how many bushels of corn a crib will be expected to hold he should be able to figure the size of crib necessary to hold it, and so forth.

In offering the service of designing, planning, and figuring, the dealer must show completely his willingness to cooperate though he does not make the sale, or the prospects of making the sale are poor. Often a man desirous of doing some construction will, after receiving an estimate, find the cost to be higher than he expected and not go through with the plans immediately, or for some other reason, changes his mind, but the good-will built up in this fashion is worth the trouble. It may result in selling the job sometime in the future or in bringing other business his way. Similarly, there are some jobs which, due to circumstances, such as their being too far away or in a territory which some friendly competitor feels is his, the dealer does not wish to make the sale. In these cases, the dealer usually gets in contact with the dealer who should have the job and agrees to figure the job a little

higher than he. In this way the customer is given the opportunity to buy from him if for some reason he does not want to trade with his local yard, and the good will of both the customer and competitor is kept. In other words, the dealer should figure all bills even though he does not expect or even want to make the sale.

SERVICE OF AN ARCHITECT

More progressive yards are finding that it pays to employ the services of an architect. With the exception of large city yards, individually owned companies cannot afford to hire an architect, but line companies find it very adaptable. The best opportunities for small privately owned yards to do this are through cooperation with each other. While one yard by itself would not have a volume of sales large enough to warrant it, several yards within a reasonable area, but not competing with each other, may be able to keep an architect busy. When such a situation exists, they can get together and hire an architect jointly to work for all of them.

Yards which cannot afford to employ the service of an architect hire him on a straight salary basis, or, so much per job and guarantee him so many jobs per month or year. He is given full time employment, and is not expected to have a practice of his own to work along with it. The customer wishing to build a home or do a major remodeling job is offered the service if he wishes it, with the understanding that there will be no extra charge if the material is bought from that dealer. On the other hand, if for some reason the structure is not built or the material is purchased as some other yard, a flat fee of thirty-five or forty dollars is charged.

Being a lumberyard and expecting to make their profits from the sale of lumber and building materials, no attempt is made to make the charge of the architect's service larger than just enough to pay for the expenses. The stating of thirty-five or forty dollars need not be taken as an arbitrary price, but should be set at a figure which will be found, on an average, to pay for the expense of drawing up a set of plans. The charge on this basis is not to make a profit but more to insure the making of the sale when advantage is taken of the offer.

Many people, being offered the service on this basis, will raise the objection that if they do buy the material the price will probably be boosted enough to cover the expense. This objection must be overcome and pointed out differently as it indicates distrust and may result in loss of confidence and trade. About all that can be done is to point out that the price on all items remains the same in either case and for all jobs, and that the company is willing to go to this expense in order to make the sale.

The architect so employed performs all of the functions usually performed by an architect. He draws up the plans, makes the designs to meet the builder's approval, makes out the specifications, lets the contract and in general supervises the job until it is completed. During construction time he keeps a close watch and makes frequent inspections

to make sure everything is being done as it should be.

The service of the architect is most often accepted by the people in the lower income brackets who wish to build a home or do a major remodeling job. People with larger incomes will more generally hire a regular independent architect. It is a service which these less fortunate people really appreciate as they would not otherwise be able to afford it. Many cities have building restrictions which require that a blue print be submitted before a building permit will be issued. With this service free, people who would have to hesitate because of the additional expense are enabled to go through with the jobs, and at the same time are permitted to incorporate some of their own ideas into the plans.

As I mentioned before, the service of an architect can best be employed by a line yard. I believe the reason for this is fairly obvious. An architect is paid a fairly high salary. Unless the yard has a volume of sales large enough to stand this expense and keep the architect busy, it could hardly afford to offer this service. Where one yard, even one having a pretty good business, could not afford to hire an architect, line yards made up of five or six or more companies owned by one head can hire an architect to do the work for all of them. For the same reason independently owned yards find it best for several of them to join together in the hiring of an architect.

FINANCING

Few yards have the excess capital to finance customers themselves. Those so fortunate as to be able to carry on this function might possibly be able to greatly increase their profits, but most yards must depend upon other sources or types of businesses to carry out this side of building. However, the dealer can be of service to the customer in this respect. He can familiarize himself with the various firms or agencies that perform this function and have a clear understanding of their terms so that he may advise possible customers and help them in getting a loan which will enable them to build.

Loans for this purpose can be obtained from several different sources. At times, private individuals can be found who have capital they are willing to invest in a building. Under favorable circumstances and at favorable times, banks are willing to make loans on the construction of houses. Certain types of finance companies and building loan associations have been established to perform this function. Likewise, in the past few years, the government has established the Federal Housing Administration whose sole purpose is to finance the building of homes. With little personal expense, all of these offer the dealer the opportunity to perform a service which may increase his sales.

In the days before the depression time, many people had money which they were desirous of investing. A lumber dealer, learning of a person in this position, could refer prospective customers wishing to borrow money to these people and act as a middleman to bring them together and to terms. Since depression time, building has not been considered such a good risk, and fewer people have had money which they feel like investing in this fashion, but occasionally the dealer still finds an opportunity to help out in this manner. Similarly, banks are at times willing to make long time loans for construction purposes and the dealer can advise the customer upon which banks will accommodate him and on what terms. Furthermore, the word of a reliable dealer will usually carry some weight in the decision of a bank to make a loan.

Certain types of finance companies and building loan associations make a practice of loaning money on long terms to home builders. The dealer can familiarize himself with all such firms in the immediate vicinity, learn their terms, their requirements, and the reputation which they have acquired through their business activities. He is thus in a position to advise and assist the man wishing to build but who does not have the cash. He can bring the two together and assist the customer in fulfilling the requirements necessary to obtain the loan. In general, the dealer performs the same services, in this respect, as an automobile

performs in selling a car through a finance company.

In connecting a customer with the Federal Housing Administration, the dealer performs just about the same functions as with the other financing agents. He must be fully familiar with the terms offered by the FHA. When a customer of lesser means wishes to build or makes an inquiry concerning the possibilities of obtaining a Federal Housing Administration loan, the dealer carefully explains all of the terms so that the customer thoroughly understands the set-up and can determine whether or not he is in a position to meet these requirements. At the same time, the advantages of building under these conditions are pointed out carefully. It is brought to the customer's attention that under this plan he can build a new home with as small a monthly out-put of cash as he would have to make if he were paying rent.

UNIT SELLING

It has been found possible to sell a house more or less in the same fashion as a car. The man buying a car does not buy the engine here, the body there, the tires some place else and then contract someone to put the parts together. Instead he goes to an automobile dealer, looks over the complete cars, or chooses a model he wishes from pictures shown him by the dealer, and buys the car in one unit. In the same way, a lumber yard can sell a house as a single unit.

Although a complete home is too large an item to keep in stock to show the customer, he can be taken around and shown the homes of others who have recently built. Previously drawn plans and pictures can be placed at his disposal from which he can draw conclusions as to the type of home he wants. The architect hired by the yard can draw up the plans and specifications to his approval and he need worry no more about the job until it is finished and ready for him to move in. About the only difference of any importance in this from buying a car is that it permits more of the personal ideas and preferences of the customer to be expressed and put into the job than is permitted in buying a car.

The plans are drawn up and an estimate of the cost of the finished job is given to the customer. If they meet

his approval he contracts the yard to complete the job at the figure given. The yard continues with the job from there. Naturally the yard furnishes all of the material which it handles that go into the house. All other items are bought elsewhere by the yard just as any other contractor would do. If the yard has carpenters of its own, they do the job, otherwise it is subcontracted to other contractors, carpenters, masons, plasterers, electricians, etc. The yard's architect watches to see that the building is built as it is supposed to be and the yard or its agents takes care of everything until the job is completed. If it is necessary to finance the job through the Federal Housing Administration or other agents the yard takes care of this as far as it is possible for it to do so, and the customer is given as little trouble as is possible.

When the job is completed the customer moves in. He has only one bill to pay--to the lumber yard. He has been spared the trouble of seeking out a good contractor, good mason, architect, etc., and buying building material here, fixtures there, and so on. In other words, he buys the house as a single unit, just as a man buys a car.

It is this simplicity of building that is selling many homes at the present time. The services offered by a yard have advanced so far that if a customer came in and said that he wished to buy a new home and told how much he was willing to spend, he need say no more to be able to have

a home that would meet with the average person's approval in just a few weeks. This home would be different from any others in the community and modern in every respect. The only thing the customer would have to worry about or bother with would be paying for it upon its completion. Of course, most customers wish to have a better idea of what they are getting before they go ahead with a job, than this, but this shows what can be done.

In order to better show how unit selling is conducted to the advantage of both the customer and the yard, I would like to quote a part of an article printed in the American Lumberman about the Slagle Lumber Company in Greenfield, Ohio. This yard is managed by Roy E. Starns, whose plan of operation is described as follows:

"...The yard hired no specialized help. Among his other abilities, Starn has good training as a draftsman, so he prepares the drawings. Starn helps the owner get his loan, usually through the FHA. He prepares the estimates on the lumber and other items the yard carries, gets bids for excavation, mason and carpenter labor, heating, plumbing and wiring. The owner is technically the general contractor.

"Before the work starts, the owner knows what the completed job will cost. This total figure means happy landings; takes the jitters out of the adventure. Naturally this kind of selling is beyond the reach of the distant competitor whose sales technique consists of a low price without too much emphasis on species or grades, and whose Man Friday is a fleet of trucks that stop at nothing. Starn's general knowledge of all phases of building is of high value to the owner in shaping his preliminary plans. The owner gets the house he's told in advance he'll get, and he knows the price. The sub-contractors get paid according to advance notice, and so does the yard. The Slagle yard handles paint and shelf hardware. Other items not carried are taken care of in sub-contracts."

PERSONAL CONTACT

All sales are not made in the yard. A progressive salesman does not wait for business but goes out after it. This is as true of the selling of lumber as with any other goods. Contacts and friendship made outside of the yard bring many a customer in, and in many other instances clinch a sale. Furthermore, here is another opportunity for the manager to perform a service. This type of salesmanship is best practiced by the small town yard dealing with farm trade.

It is the practice of the manager of some of these country yards to take several days off during a slack period and make a systematic call on all of the customers within his district. The main idea behind such calls should be to build up friendship and good will, but as pointed out previously, a service can also be performed. The best time to make such a call is when the farmer is busy doing something around the farm yard, however, not at times when he is so busy that he resents taking off a few minutes to talk. If it is possible to arrange it, the conversation should take place outside where a view of most of the farm buildings can be readily had. The call should be casual and talk, for the most part, should center around things of interest to the farmer. Farmers are all willing to talk about grain prices, crops, weather, current events, etc. While this conversation is taking place, the dealer should

carefully look over the lay-out, and pick out things which need repair or work done upon them. After a while he can casually mention, that the roof is getting pretty bad, or, if the crib were repaired, it might save building a new one in another year or so. Thus the need for doing some work is brought to the attention of the farmer. Frequently it can be shown where a repair made immediately will save money in the long run. A new roof now will lower the fire hazard or prevent the rest of the building from rotting away. It might even save crops from spoiling to such an extent that it would pay for the job in a few years. Farmers are prone to let repairs like these go as long as possible, or being used to them, do not notice the need, but appreciate having them brought to their attention, and will, if possible, act immediately to fix up the place.

The mere bringing of the need for repair to mind is a service in itself, but the dealer can do still more. He may be able to point out a way of changing or remodeling a building so that it can be used much more advantageously by the farmer. Cheap means of repairing can be mentioned, thereby enabling the farmer to repair where he otherwise would not feel like spending the money. Likewise, there are many ingenious little tricks in building that can be suggested to save both time and labor.

As can be seen, the chief service offered on these trips is that of advising. However, advice properly given

is appreciated. The farmer feels that the dealer is taking a personal interest in his own little problems, and even though he does nothing immediately, he is most apt to call on that dealer first when he does decide to do something.

Personal calls such as these are difficult to make in larger cities, as there are not so many odd buildings around the personal property of a city dweller which can be repaired, and the need for such attention is not so great, as most people living in a city keep their buildings up because of personal pride. However, personal contact can be kept up through clubs, organizations, and so on, and full advantage should be taken of every opportunity that presents itself to make a helpful suggestion.

CONSTRUCTION OF SMALL ITEMS

There are innumerable small items which can be built at the yard and sold on order or kept on display, and sold upon call. If there is much call for this type of items, a special shop can be run in connection with the yard and special workmen or carpenters hired to do the work. Other yards may merely have a work bench, fixed up in some out-of-the-way place of the yard, and the yard help perform this function when they are not busy with the regular work.

Objects all the way from lawn furniture to chicken houses or hog houses can easily be built in the yard and hauled by truck out to the property of the person purchasing them. In the city, this type of service takes the form mostly of lawn chairs, stools, chests, cabinets, etc. These items are small, but require a certain amount of skill in construction, and would necessitate the customer's hiring a special man to do the work. Similarly, farm trade places a large demand on brooder houses, chicken houses, hog houses, outdoor water closets, wagon-tongues, double-trees, broken wooden parts of farm machinery, etc. The farmer has little time to spend on such items himself, and it is a bother to hire a carpenter. When the yard does this type of work, it eliminates the purchasing of the material, hiring a carpenter, or doing the constructing himself, and in general going to a lot of trouble. An order is merely placed for a chicken house, or what ever is

desired, and a few days later it is delivered and placed where it is to stand. Nothing could be simpler nor less inconvenient.

Building these items ahead of time and keeping them on display is at times even more advantageous. The man coming into the yard for some reason or other sees these items and his need for such is brought to mind. Whether he has any intentions of purchasing one or not, he will nearly always inquire about the price. This show of interest is the perfect opportunity to put forth a little sales talk, and the advantages of buying a ready-made article will at times result in a sale where otherwise, there had been no intention of buying.

As pointed out, this is mainly a convenience for the customer, but at the same time there are several advantages to the yard. For one, as I indicated in my last paragraph, it works to increase sales. For another, it gives the yard an opportunity to use up odds and ends which would otherwise be difficult to sell. While a person will turn down a board upon its appearance, when built into some object, the defects do not show up so glaringly, and if the board is serviceable for the use to which it is put, it can be easily moved. The same is true of pieces of odd lengths, widths, or appearance. Not that this should be used as a means of putting over poor material upon the customer, but it presents an opportunity to more completely turn over the stock.

Furthermore, due to demands during part of the year, several men are usually required to operate a yard efficiently. There are, however, short periods of time, or even seasons, such as in the winter, when there is not much to do around the yard. During these periods, the help can be put to work constructing some of these items, either to fill orders or to put them on show. For instance, in the farming areas of the midwest, there is very little building going on during the three months of winter. In the early spring, there is usually a large demand for chicken houses, brooder houses, and hog houses, and a little later in the season, a demand for hay-racks. The yard men can be kept busy building these items during the slack winter months, in anticipation of the spring demands.

This practice permits the yard to make the same profit on the boards that would be made if they were sent out by the piece, and at the same time, permits the yard to charge enough to pay for the labor, and thus help to pay the salaries of the help when they would otherwise be sitting around doing nothing or be let off for a time.

MISCELLANEOUS

There are a number of services that in a strict sense of the word, might more truly be called services than some of the things I have elaborated upon so far. These do not require quite as much explanation, and I have, therefore, grouped them together under the title of "Miscellaneous".

POWER MACHINERY

A powered saw is one of the most used and useful pieces of machinery that a yard can possess. All that is needed is a small, stationary, circular saw, in which the blades can quickly and readily be changed to either rip or cross-cut. Innumerable items desired by customers are of sizes not fully standard in some way or other. The casual customer and carpenter, and all but the larger contractors, are equipped with only hand tools, and it is often very difficult to work the lumber into shape. In just a few minutes' time, the powered saw can do some of this work that would take hours to do by hand. For instance, an order comes in for 15' 2 X 4's. The only thing that would fill this order would be 16' pieces. If 16' pieces are sent out, each piece will have to be cut a foot shorter by hand. The yard can do it with the powered saw in just a few minutes, and with very little effort. Likewise, a board, say, 7" wide is desired. An 8" board can quickly be ripped down, or, if several pieces are ordered, a 14" board can be ripped in two, and the order filled without

bother to the buyer.

Another piece of power machinery used by many yards is a planer. Like the power saw, it can be used both for yard purposes and to perform services for customers.

RENTAL OR LOAN OF TOOLS:

It is impractical and unnecessary to make a practice of renting regular carpenter's tools, but there are certain special tools that the ordinary person does not possess, which the yard can keep on hand to send out for use on the job. These are very seldom rented, but are sent out with the material and charged up to the account of the customer until they are returned. Among the more common of these tools, are shingle-cutters for asbestos shingles or siding, steel post drivers, fence stretchers, special tools for fitting a window-frame, and various others, depending upon the needs for such equipment.

RENTAL OR LOAN OF LUMBER:

A yard is frequently asked to provide lumber for some temporary use, such as a bandstand, bleachers, benches, concessions stands at a social event, etc. These requests can be taken care of by either loaning the lumber or by renting it. In either case, there is no special profit in it for the lumberman, outside of good will, but such demands are usually made by groups of people whom it would be a poor policy to refuse. The usual methods of handling the

situation is to bill the club or organization taking out the lumber for the whole amount, and credit their account when the lumber is returned, not giving full credit if a rental charge is made. In order to be able to afford to do this, the yard man must be sure that the lumber will be protected from the weather, and not battered up or discolored to any great extent. Cooperation such as this is obtained only through warnings, and receiving the promise of one individual to look after the material.

USEFUL ADVERTISEMENTS:

Advertisements given away can take the form of useful items. Giving away of nail aprons is such a common practice that carpenters and customers alike get to expect them, and will even ask for them when they are not offered. Pencils cost little and are always appreciated. Memo-pads are commonly given away, and are especially pleasing to women, as they can be hung in the kitchen, handy for writing down grocery orders and so on. Plasterer's caps, likewise, are popular and useful, along with many other novel or ingenious items.

TAKE CARE OF ALL ORDERS:

It is impossible to carry in stock all sizes and variety of items for which the customer will ask, and it is also impossible not to occasionally run short on some item. Nevertheless, the yard should be so managed that it is

practically never necessary to turn down an order on this account. One method of handling this situation is the selling of a substitute. This is not a good practice, unless the substitute is as good as the item originally asked for, but usually a good substitute can be found. With certain types of items, this situation can be handled by stocking standard items that can be made into the sizes desired. I have already mentioned using a power saw for this purpose, but it can also be done with other equipment. A glass cutting table is not very expensive, and at the same time, makes it possible to fill all orders, either on standard or odd. Window frames come in such numerous and varied sizes that they usually necessitate the carrying in stock of large numbers. Knocked-down window frame stock, that is molded and ready to be nailed together, can be purchased, that will permit the construction of a window frame of almost any size, while stocking only a few of the sizes most commonly called for or ordered. Lime can be put up in ten-cent bags, to take care of the man wishing to bug his potatoes, or make minor repairs. Similarly, almost all items can be broken up into small units if necessary.

Still another way of filling orders that the yard, for some reason or other, cannot supply, is to be on such friendly terms with competitors that the material can be obtained from them. For example, a yard runs out of some size of

boards, which it ordinarily stocks. In order to fill the order, the yard will get the material from its competitor, and send it out as billed by themselves. The other yard may give the borrowing yard a discount on the material, or may not, but in either case the dealer has kept the trade and confidence of his customer.

If the yard is so located that it is near a source of lumber supply, any orders that do not call for immediate delivery can, of course, be put off for possibly a day or so, and the bill filled by phoning in a quick order to be delivered immediately by truck. Another advantage of this is that the trucks can be sent right on out to the job, to be unloaded, and thus the yard does not have to go to the expense of handling or carrying the lumber on its inventory. This practice can, likewise, be followed advantageously with orders for bricks, tile, cement, etc. Frequently, such a situation will permit the carrying of less bulk on hand, and the consequent lowering of overhead costs.

CONCLUSIONS

I have stated in the foreword that no set rules of services can be laid out for all yards. Some yards do not find it necessary to offer as many services as others and some services will be suitable for one yard and totally or in part unsuited to others. It is the job of the manager of each yard to decide what he will offer along this line. I therefore believe that whatever value there is to this thesis lies more in the ideas which are presented than in anything else. I might also say that I do not consider that this paper could in any way be considered a conclusive study of the subject. A subject such as services is a live topic, changing and advancing at all times. Yards are, and should be, constantly finding better means of offering services to offer. To keep up with this change and to give a complete picture of the topic would require a new paper at fairly frequent intervals, and would require a nation-wide survey of yards in every section of the country. My means of acquiring information have, of course, been too limited to make such a conclusive study, but I have included all that I have been able to learn about services through interviews with yard managers, contact with yards, personal experience, and reading in trade magazines.

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