

FCW FLOOR COVERING WEEKLY

The Business Newspaper of the Floor Covering Industry

Letters to the editor

It's easy to be fooled

With almost no measurable inflation in wholesale carpet pricing over the past few decades, broadloom carpeting has been one of the greatest consumer values in the country for quite some time now. This is, in part, evidence that the carpet industry has long been in need of a price increase to counterbalance the rising costs of manufacturing and distribution, and to keep up with pricing inflation in most other industries. The significant price increases currently being implemented are long overdue. Maybe the timing could be better, but that is almost always the case.

In the multi-family arena, an unfortunate challenge exists that could be exacerbated by this sudden and sharp increase in pricing. We believe as many as 25 percent of all carpet installations in our business segment are bait-and-switch goods. It would be a dramatic understatement to say this is terrible for our industry.

How could this be possible? Simply put, it is very easy to be fooled. Once installed, it is visually difficult to identify many carpet products. Making matters worse, manufacturers have in some cases selected color lines for lower-quality products from the color bank of upgrade products.

So, who loses the bait-and-switch game? Almost everyone: The tenant gets a substandard product when he has paid for something else; the property management company is less likely to have a satisfied customer and is almost guaranteed to have to replace the carpet faster than they would have otherwise (and they've paid a premium price on the switched goods, adding insult to injury); the high-integrity flooring contractors lose; and the carpet manufacturer's sales are adversely affected by the substandard substitution. What's worse, they lose many carpet customers for life.

Is there a winner? Only the low-integrity flooring contractors as long as they are not caught red-handed in the switch. Unlike everyone else, they are rewarded with more market share and a significantly higher percentage margin than could be attained honestly.

Every quality participant in the multi-family flooring community should hold himself responsible for policing our industry against this gathering problem. Contractors should raise awareness by offering inspection services and showing both existing and prospective customers how to track MEA numbers. The cream of the flooring contractor crop needs to put their money where their mouths are, guaranteeing that their installed goods meet the specifications put forth by their customers. It's high time that the malpractice of bait-and-switch be put under a bright light for all to see.

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