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## MAINTAINING DESIGN/BUILD:

# Relationships

by Mike Lawrence

Trophy bass and good Design/Build clients are hard to find, tough to get close to, and difficult to keep on the line. Winning fishermen and successful contractors have a few things in common. They know where to look, what to offer, and how to boat their prize.

Of course, in our business, the customer as well as the contractor has to come out of the transaction happy. You can't say the same thing for the bass!

The question is, "How do you know where the quality clients are, how do you attract them, and most importantly, after all the effort you put into the process, how do you keep them?" In other words, how do you maintain a good, ongoing relationship with your Design/Build client base?

Wait: could the word "maintain" be a clue. Suppose it's not Design/Build/Maintain we're talking about. What if it's Maintain/Design/Build?

How many of our best Design/Build clients come to us as a result of our good work in maintaining their existing systems? After all, we're in the business of providing good technical solutions. However, providing solutions on day one doesn't cut it. Continuity is necessary to help ensure the solution remains valid into the future.

Being there allows us to understand our clients' businesses better, thus enabling us to proactively offer additional permanent solutions. Some folks call this partnering, we call it good business.

The cost of a new relationship is high. While it's important that we always find and attract new clients, nothing is more important than keeping and satisfying existing ones. Profits are higher, competition is

reduced, and client satisfaction is increased.

During times where capital expenditures on projects are low, maintenance continues the relationship.

Of course, we'd better be trained and prepared to offer top quality service and maintenance, or we're not even in the tournament.

Let's face it, providing service on the systems you install removes an opportunity for one of your competitors to serve the client. To live this way, you must absolutely provide a level of service that your clients find valuable. This way, everyone is happy about the absence of your competitors.

In keeping with the Maintain/Design/Build concept, how about including first year maintenance with every Design/Build job? Why not include that first year maintenance at cost, or even for free? After all, the additional cost is low, warranty costs will probably decrease since we're keeping the system in top condition, and we're there.

What's the alternative? We all know about the volatility of Design/Build project work. Sales cycles are long, margins can be unpredictable, and business flow will have peaks and valleys. A strong service base helps to mitigate this in several ways. From a pure revenue standpoint, the smooth nature of service revenue offsets the peaks and valleys of project revenue. More importantly, a strong service presence definitely helps in identifying and creating Design/Build opportunities that would have otherwise not been-noticed.

In the end, isn't it true that some of our best Design/Build projects can turn sour if we entrust others to maintain them properly? Doesn't that



lead to sour relationships? It's never the fault of the in-plant maintenance department, is it? It's ours!

And finally, how about offering an additional four-year, full-parts, labor, calibration, and maintenance plan, along with our Design/Build proposal. The price is usually a fraction of the total contract amount. Our ongoing presence protects the owner, keeps our exposure down and our reputation up.

All the client has to do is 'check the box' when he prepares the purchase order. COMP - USA does it, why shouldn't we?

The bottom line is this: don't fish where you have no chance of catching a winner and no chance of holding on to your prize. "Maintain/Design/Build" reminds us that if we want to maintain our client base, we'd better maintain our clients' systems, to maintain our reputations so that we can maintain our profitability. ■

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