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How to find, access and utilize available resources for success

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By David Dawdy

The reality in many of our professional lives is that reduced manpower, reduced staff, tighter margins, increasing competition and increasing workload are markers on the course we will be on for some time to come. The benefit of these conditions is that we're getting leaner, faster and more sophisticated in our approach to this market — and this “work smarter” trend is gaining momentum. We are forced to make better decisions, fewer mistakes and increase our knowledge in all areas to maximize our potentials and realize our goals. Identifying our resources, increasing our versatility, gaining knowledge and hitting “apply” is key to our successful evolution as tradesmen, designers, manufacturers, salespeople and managers in this great industry.

There has always been a vacuum for knowledge in the door business. So this article focuses on the various sources of knowledge at our fingertips. Thankfully, these sources are abundant and easily accessible, if you know where to look. The information available to us within a keystroke is absolutely mind boggling to me. Many of us began our careers in this industry when manufacturers' reps, literature, trade journals, periodicals, libraries and discussions over beverages at a DODA or Far Western show were the principle sources of product and business knowledge; accurate and useful information could be tough to access and painfully slow to digest. If we were fortunate enough to have a good mentor or two, our efforts to gain knowledge were streamlined considerably.

So, where does one find mentoring, education and resources in the door industry today?

Start by joining the **International Door Association (IDA)**. If you haven't heard of IDA or been to one of their international expos, try to make it to Indianapolis this year. Each show features exhibits as well as educational seminars. You will be impressed and you will definitely leave with much more knowledge and many more new friends and ideas than when you left home. The IDA Web site, www.doors.org, is also an excellent resource for industry info and opportunity.

There are also several regional associations that will focus on your area's specific issues and will offer events closer to home if travel isn't an option. Following are just some of the regional groups:

California Operator and Door Association (CODA)

Central States Door Dealer Association (CSDDA)

Garage Door Association of Arizona (GDAA)

Michigan Door and Operator Dealers Association (MIDODA)

DASMA, the **Door and Access Manufacturers Association** is an organization of industry members who serve collectively as an authoritative industry voice for all things door, operator and control related, be it code, fire protection, safety or wind load, to mention a few. At the DASMA Web site (www.dasma.com) you will find an incredible wealth of information. For example, do you know where to find a detailed drawing that will show your contractor exactly where to place the rebar in his masonry wall so it doesn't interfere with the fasteners necessary for the vertical lift door you plan to install? How much easier would that make your job? Or a drawing of a red zone for the contractor to prevent other trades from putting equipment right where the operator, springs or back-hangs need to go? Or where to find a “Red Zone” drawing blank for your opening that helps the contractor prevent other trades from putting equipment right where the operator, springs or back-hangs need to go? I do. It's all located at www.dasma.com.

IDEA, the **Institute of Door Dealer Education and Accreditation**, is sponsored by IDA and DASMA (www.dooreducation.com). It offers a comprehensive, six-part self study and examination course that will prepare, test and certify you for all things door-related (except politics). Do you aspire to be a certified rolling-fire-door technician? Your course is waiting. The IDEA program has helped advance knowledge, skill and professional development within our industry, and can be an indispensable tool to you and your company.

I tend to gravitate toward all things coiling and fire-door related, it seems, and the best sources for argument-ending information is the **National Fire Protection Association** (NFPA – Publication 80, www.nfpa.org); and DASMA Technical Data Sheets, (TDS, found under “Publications” at their Web site). You may also look up topics of interest at the **Underwriters Laboratories** (UL) Web site to learn more about their fire protection standards and see who has listings there (www.ul.com). You can also visit **Factory Mutual** at www.fmglobal.com to reference their listings and standards.

Those annoying little ANSI and ASTM standards keep popping up in specifications, don't they? Well, ANSI stands for **American National Standards Institute** (www.ansi.org), and is a national standards body that exists to provide a degree of fairness and conformity in measuring and assessing the value of products and materials used in everything from building construction to egg production. ASTM is the **American Society for Testing Materials** (www.astm.org), and is an international standards organization that actually develops standards by consensus of several thousand technical committees around the world. ASTM standards may be referenced at their Web site.

If all this fails to slake your thirst for knowledge, simply go to an IDA or regional show and walk up to one of the guys with a little grey hair and introduce yourself. I believe you will be pleasantly surprised at the reception you get and doors that will open for you (pun intended).

Knowledge, or better yet, learning how exploit your resources to consistently gain expertise, will make you a more valuable product representative, service tech, sales manager, installer and owner. Our industry promotes education and training at every level because these things make our industry faster, leaner and better equipped to handle the future. Don't make the mistake that those in the know are selfish with this knowledge. We are all incredibly indebted to the very many who have served and contributed for so many years to develop programs, training and education, and the numerous ways developed to make knowledge so readily available. And we want you to exploit and maximize that opportunity. Remember, you don't have to be the fastest zebra in the herd to outrun a lion; but if you're only quicker than the slowest zebra, the second lion may be right behind the first. Take advantage of your resources today.

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