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"American Hardwood Promotion Update"

By Linda Jovanovich

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"Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow," one of the Thursday morning business sessions at HMA's recent National Conference and Expo, was conducted by HMA Executive Vice President, Linda Jovanovich. Her topic – the 'art' of promoting American Hardwoods. For the industry newbies in the room, it was an eye-opener. For the industry veterans in attendance, it was a walk down memory lane when Linda said ...

Yesterday

- "Almost 3 decades ago, Susan Regan, the public relations representative managing HMA's small budget account at Ketchum Advertising in Pittsburgh was hired away by some forward-thinking industry executives to serve as the Executive Vice President of the HMA.
- Those same legends set out on a campaign to raise \$1 million to be used for promotion efforts geared to increasing sales and public awareness of solid American Hardwoods – with Susan at the helm.
- Additionally at that time, 55 percent of HMA's dues revenue was re-directed towards the promotion of solid American Hardwood products to the design and building communities.
- And in 1993, to increase our messaging muscle, the Hardwood Council – a coalition of hardwood lumber and product associations, along with companies and individuals interested in promoting the increased use of North American hardwood products to design/build professionals, was formed.
- (A bit of trivia, it is interesting to note that the structure of the Hardwood Council was used to form today's Hardwood Federation.)

In the years before the untimely death of Susan Regan, the efforts of the Hardwood Council reached thousands of architects, students and designers. The American Hardwood Information Center at www.hardwoodinfo.com, the authoritative resource for consumers and building professionals seeking factual information about American Hardwoods, was launched and fully funded by the HMA. (a \$250,000 investment)

And in response to the public's environmental concerns, our messaging was enhanced to include the science behind our sustainable product, as HMA's professional writers worked with scientists and U.S. Forest Service labs to make sure we 'walked the walk and talked the talk' accurately and to the point. No other building material could boast the environmental message of wood.

However, the Great Recession of the late 2000s, and its impact on the HMA membership challenged by economic obstacles, prompted HMA to take a more "passive" approach to hardwood promotion.

Today

With a limited promotional budget, we work to be creative in our efforts. (And technology is an integral piece of our promotional puzzle.)

- Social Media allows us to connect with world-wide audiences in a unique way. (We rely on many of you for the fodder we share.) And now, via Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Houzz and Instagram, American Hardwoods has a good social media presence that continues to grow.
- Two Learning Units - "American Hardwoods and Their Role in Carbon Neutral Design," and "Thermally Modified Hardwood and its Role in Architectural Design," - our outreach to architectural and building professionals, are available as online webinars, typically garnering an audience of 350.
- Bi-monthly releases, distributed via our editorial services, continue to increase our exposure and audience. I really cannot comprehend these numbers, but in every instance, across the board, our material is delivered to more than 150 million desktops and mobile devices.

Tomorrow

I'm proud of how far we've been able to stretch our meager, annual promotion budget. But think how much more could be done:

- Get back to being front and center at Greenbuild and the annual AIA convention.
- Supply a key note speaker to headline their event.
- Sponsor the learning pavilion with accredited industry learning units.
- Sponsor a project home at IBS.
- Fund the research and develop the messaging to assist us in regaining market share from the competing products in the marketplace.

No one industry association can carry that burden on its own. The only way I see a comprehensive program developed to answer all the needs of our industry is through collaboration. I'd like to see how aggressive collaboration - pooling business intelligence and funding - could optimize results!"

Visit the **Members Only** section of www.HMAMembers.org for Linda's entire Powerpoint presentation and audio recording.