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The Industry's Business News & Information Resource

Aligned dealers get push during downtimes

By Emily J. Cappiello

There are a number of reasons to join a buying group: networking, corporate backing, a bigger presence, marketing and promotions, pricing. The boost that aligned dealers get from the groups they belong to and the people within that group can really make a difference, especially nowadays.

Barb McBrady, manager of Geffre Interiors in Long Lake, Minn., joined Shaw's aligned program this year because it moved into a bigger space and had more room on the sales floor for displays. "Shaw offered us a good deal on displays and we always sold a lot of Shaw," she explained. Although with the move and the economy, business hasn't been stellar, but McBrady feels she made the right choice. "In the long run, it is definitely going to help us by being aligned with them," she said.

Libby Centers just joined Carpet Network last month. Centers decided to look into flooring franchises because she had a little experience with flooring, but mainly because she was looking for job security as well as a creative outlet. What really drew her in, she said, was how helpful owners Lenny and Christine Rankin were, as well as the other



Retail groups, like Carpet Network, FCA Network and Preferred Brands' Floor to Ceiling group, can aid retailers when times are down, but also when times are good by providing networking opportunities, exclusive product offerings and a larger retail presence.

franchise members. "The people that I talked to were very gracious, welcoming and very helpful," she said. Centers explained that knowing she could do things on her own, but had the network behind her, helped in making the decision to join.

Hit hard in June 2008 by a flood and the recession, Sherri Graham, owner of Grahams Carpet World in Columbus, Ind., credits FCA Network for keeping her busi-



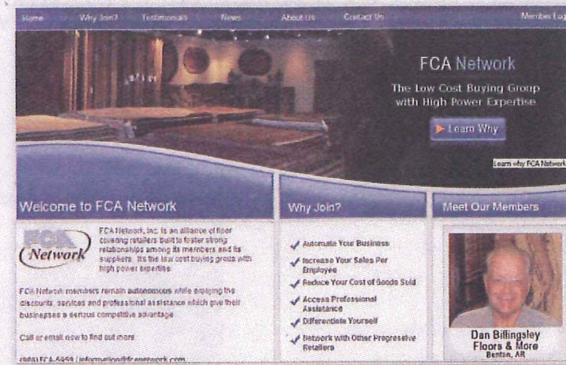
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ness afloat. "Our business was destroyed by a flood. Being a member of the FCA Network we recovered quicker. Olga [Robertson, president, FCA Network] and the mills were really benevolent. In fact, if we weren't a member, I don't know if we would have recovered at all. The combination of the flood and the recession — it would have sunk us," Graham said.

Graham explained that besides the outpouring of support, she likes the fact that Robertson goes to the mills to pick out

products and she never has to worry about the quality she is getting. "[Robertson] goes to the mills and picks the cream of the crop. We can trust her and know that she is getting the bestsellers," Graham said.

Kansas City, Mo.-based Carpet Corner is aligned with both Mohawk Floorscapes and Karastan. President Jim Matthews told FCW he decided to join Floorscapes two-and-a-half years ago because he could do a turnkey and the company would completely remodel his showroom. Matthews aligned two of his seven stores with Floorscapes; those two stores were the only ones that saw growth during the downturn. "I think it was



just redoing the showrooms that made the difference — it helped the customer shop and it helped out my salespeople," he said.

Matthews is also aligned with Karastan, and has been since 1991 when he was looking for an exclusive, higher-end line for the Kansas City area. Even now, there is only one other dealer in the area who carries the Karastan line, which helps Matthews to stay relevant. "Since there is only one other dealer in Kansas City that is aligned with Karastan, customers can't shop all over town," he said.

Preferred Brands has two options for flooring dealers looking to align with the company: World of Floors and Floor to Ceiling. Tiffany Gomes, president of Classic Designs Floor to Ceiling in Lodi, Calif., explained that she decided to become aligned with Floor to Ceiling about three years ago and the shift in the business model actually saved the company when the downturn hit. "During the first 12 months we were open, we were 80 percent flooring; now we are 80 percent kitchen and bath. Flooring has become a commodity and also with the big boxes doing their \$99 installs, it's hard to stay competitive. Now we are an all-in-one-stop shop," she said. Gomes also appreciates having other Floor to Ceiling dealers to talk to, sharing ideas and best practices. "We talk quite a bit, especially to the ones in the area. We talk about best practices and we try to figure out what is working and what's not," she said. **FCW**