

JULY 7, 2005

Growth Strategies

Flooring guy finds solid ground in consulting biz

by ADINA GENN

Christopher Capobianco knows the flooring industry inside and out, upside and down. The Capobiancos have been looking down (at rugs, carpets, wood floors) since the 1930s when Christopher's great grandfather opened Glen Floors, a retail shop in Glen Cove. By World War II, his great uncle launched Cappy's Carpet in Port Jefferson and in the postwar '50s along came his maternal grandfather with Fred's Carpet in East Northport. That's where Christopher Capobianco worked for 15 years before serving as a commercial rep and technical support provider for various big-name floor-covering manufacturers.

But by October 2004, he followed the familiar familial pattern and decided to go into business for himself with his own Patchogue-based Flooring Answers (www.flooringanswers.com), a Web site he designed and a friend helped to build. Launching the company cost him less than \$1,000, which he put towards a new printer, cell phone and software for creating the Web site, as well as letterhead, brochures and invoices.

"I started the company at the urging of friends and colleagues who felt there are small companies, dealers and manufacturers who don't have the full-time staff to handle technical support services," Capobianco said. That includes everything from the normal supervision of floor preparation and installation to full-scale project management.

"A lot of small companies start with a sales team, but when it comes to putting a technical person on the team, they don't have the ability to pay them," he points out. "They hire me on a monthly retainer."

Besides offering technical support, Flooring Answers provides continuing education training for installers. And the company serves as a resource to homeowners, builders and organizations in need of flooring recommendations or analysis in the event of a problematic floor, such as a splitting seam in a vinyl surface. It also provides marketing support for flooring companies, making product presentations to architects and designers.

It's nice, too, when the salesman turns out to be a respected industry seer. A monthly columnist for two trade publications, Floor Covering Installer and National Floor Trends, Capobianco also writes technical manuals and installer guides for clients.

He works with several companies on Long Island, and has clients in California and Philadelphia. "On Long Island there are a lot of flooring dealers, but not too many distributors."

To spread the word, Capobianco sent out press releases to industry magazines, and said he scored coverage in five of them. So far the write-ups have led to one new account and a prospect. Then he launched an e-mail campaign using a trade directory to target his market. You've got to get around, says Capobianco. He speaks at training seminars and trade shows, including Surfaces 2005 Floor Coverings, held in January in Las Vegas.

He's also active in the Long Island Floor Covering Association and the American Society of Testing Materials, organizations in which he's able to share his expertise and network.