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Do you ever wonder how other companies manage to win so much of the house-builders' business?

House-builders trends and changes

PROSPECTS FOR COMPANIES selling or supplying building products are looking good despite a short term slump in first time buyers. There is a considerable shortfall of housing stock to meet demand. There's been heavy criticism and delays in John Prescott's plans to build thousands of new homes but in the medium term they are sure to go ahead. The house-builders' market is a substantial end-user of a large number of building products, including bricks, blocks, cement, roof tiles, joinery, flooring, electrical, drylining, windows, doors and conservatories, paints, plumbing,

rainwater, drainage, central heating, kitchens, and bathroom products. Great news for anyone looking to do business within the house-building industry. Or is it?

The problem with selling to house-builders lies in knowing just who to sell to. Over the past ten years or so the structure of the house-builders' market has undergone tremendous change.

Some of the larger national house-building brands were formerly divisions of major construction companies, but during the 1990s increased consolidation within the construction industry led to the sale of the house-building

divisions. Many larger nationals acquired more than one brand as they sought geographical spread and increased their land-bank holdings by acquiring larger regional house-builders. Not to be left out larger regional house-builders absorbed smaller house-builders.

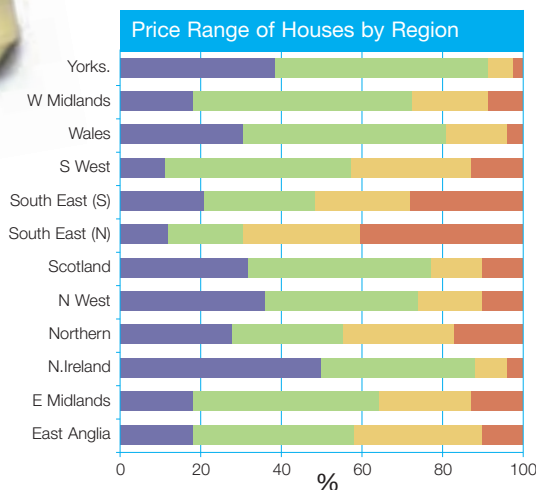
On top of all this every merger or acquisition kick starts a period of reorganisation and restructuring. So how do you begin to peel back the layers? How do you know who is responsible for deciding what? In some groups getting a decision may involve technical people,

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Digging Deeper for Higher Targets

What does the new Windowbase database of Private House Builders tell us about the House Building Industry?

QUITE A LOT actually. Although many customers will only be using the data to track down over 5000 House Building contacts to whom they can sell building materials, a database provides real power to understand the market, and gives opportunities to target different

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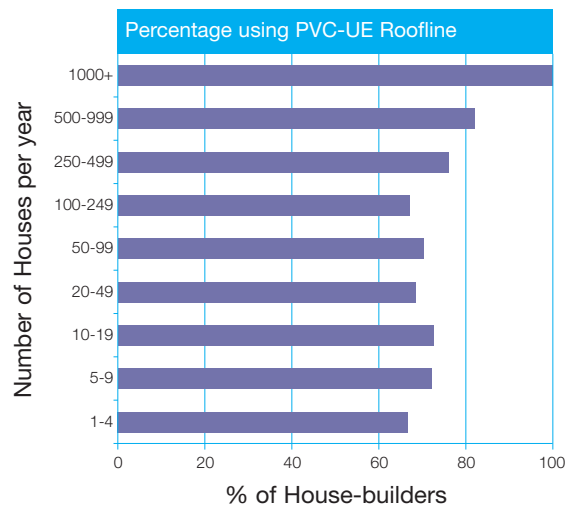
Digging Deeper

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customers for different products.

Not every company was prepared to give full information, but the sheer number of companies across the country asked methodically about their activities gives a very useful cross-section.

Questions were asked about the price ranges of houses sold, the usage of PVC-UE for roof-trim, and the percentage of houses sold complete with conservatories. Other information of use to the Window Industry was also gathered.



The individual answers and the details of the respondents are available to anyone who purchases the Enhanced House Builders database.

The ability to examine the information in this new database in different ways is where its power can be seen.

We are tempted to say, "Isn't it amazing what you can get from a database?" but the fact is, it isn't amazing at all. What is amazing is that it is only the few really professional companies who take a long hard look at the marketing information that is available today.

A comprehensive sales database like this 'Enhanced House Builders Database' enables any company to decide where and how they should be putting their marketing and sales effort, and get in while the competition is still wondering where the market is.

The Windowbase House Builders database is the result of persistent research and phoning of companies reported in various sources as being "House Builders", i.e. companies who take responsibility for building dwellings (mostly in the private sector). Each company is contacted and their response to a series of questions recorded. The first questions validate that they actually build houses and their current address. After checking the contact names (Managing Director and Senior Buyer) and any involvement as part of a group, they are invited to answer further questions. Their responses provide the enhanced data described above.

For the data sheet on house builders or a fuller version of this report, contact Mike Davis or visit www.winbase.co.uk

House-builders trends and changes

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buyers and site managers or regional management. Decision makers may be spread across the country and titles may not be a good guide to influence.

The new Windowbase database of house-builders has done the work for you. We've identified which are the administration offices and found the names of regional managing directors and buyers. We've asked how many new homes each region has responsibility for and the size of the planned programme. We've even collected details of preferred window and door materials and the number of conservatories installed on new build properties.

Many building materials companies think they know who's who in house-

builders. But it's shifting sands. Nothing stands still, and using highly skilled sales people to maintain or develop a detailed and reliable database to work from is a waste of a valuable sales resource.

Do you ever wonder how other companies manage to win so much of the house-builders' business? With better, more accurate data at their fingertips they can get to prospects faster. While your sales team is thumbing its way through out of date directories or attempting to establish who has gone where smart marketers are shaking hands on the deal. Are you ready to exploit the opportunity to the full? Without the Windowbase house-builders database the answer is 'probably not.'

Knowing Bristols from Baths

Are you making the most of your Windowbase data?

LOTS OF OUR CUSTOMERS need a gentle reminder, from time to time, about how to get the best from their investment. Microsoft Access, or Excel, allow you to sort your data into all sorts of groups that are important TO YOU.

When a new order comes in, seemingly out of the blue, everyone might be too busy dealing with it to wonder how it came about. Not very scientific, though, is it? In fact, unless you try out different tactics to different groups of targets, you might never know which works best.

Records are presented in Fields, many of which can be used as the basis for singling out one particular sales hit.

Sort the wheat from the chaff

The most obvious ways of sorting are geographical - start with regions or even postcodes, and try a specifically-targeted campaign. When new enquiries come in, you can then check to see whether it's from, say, BA or BS. BA is the Bath area postcode and BS is Bristol. A different message to each allows you to see what works best.

When Regency went down a few years ago, it took a few minutes (possibly hours but certainly not days) for word to get round. Not much point in having information like this, if there isn't much you can do about it. In that case, sorting



PVC-U window fabricators by profile system allowed a few on-the-ball sales departments to be out there, the same day, making a play for new business. Everyone else came along some weeks later - the early bird and all that.

Take a look at your data and, the next time you're stuck on the M6, have a think about how it could be sorted into new groups, any one of which might make a big difference to your quarter's figures. Messages about getting new sales instantly grab attention but don't usually amount to much. On the other hand, there could be one crucial fact, right there, in your own head, waiting to be unlocked. The company pays for the data but you get the credit for an instant increase in sales.

Conservatories

Conservatories are BIG business - anyone who visited Glassex at the NEC this year will know that. The UK's No. 1 window show is now as much about conservatories.

HOME IMPROVEMENT spending is booming. Rising house prices and low interest rates have made it easy for homeowners to remortgage their property, and remortgaging is at record levels. Figures from the Council of Mortgage Lenders in December show that 43% of all loans are remortgages. Better still, according to the Bank of England, 49% of those who withdrew equity in 2002 spent some of that money on home improvements within six months.

And conservatories are at the top of the home improvement



spending list. A conservatory has moved from an aspirational to a must-have item.

When homeowners buy a conservatory today they no longer want a simple summerhouse or a shell of a room. Over time the use of the additional space created by a conservatory has changed. It may be a living, dining, study or play area or possibly a combination of these. Above all it needs to be flexible and comfortable all year round. Great news for anyone selling conservatories or related products.

But are you making the most of the potential? If you are a conservatory system company,

conservatory fabricator, or if you make or supply any of the vast array of related products - ground works and bases, infill panels, blinds, ventilation, under floor heating, tiling, furniture - you might like to know that of the 10,600 or so window companies on the latest Windowbase update, over 9,300 now sell conservatories, nearly 4,500 of which also fabricate. That's an enormous potential customer base that you should be targeting before your competitors do. But knowing the numbers without knowing the names and how to contact them won't do you much good, will it? Call Mike Davis to put you in touch with your next customers.

No bad debts

THERE ARE over 200 Direct Labour Organisations in this country. A few of them make windows and lots more install them. The same goes for doors, and lots more besides. Between them, they spend millions every year, buying in all sorts of products and services.

And yet so many sales departments overlook them as a source of excellent business. If you suddenly wonder how much your company's doing about staying in touch with these Big Spenders, it's also worth remembering that they are Good Payers, too.

Instead of becoming resigned to getting the occasional bad debt, when small customers go down, taking your money with them, it might be worth maximising your trade with these people. Big councils might well be up to their ears in financial problems but nobody's ever heard of a borough council going bump.

There's a separate database (nothing to do with specifiers) that gives you the inside track to the best part of 400 contacts in DLO's. Try it. Get to know these people . . . because they haven't got the time to be shopping around for new suppliers.

Visit winbase.co.uk if you need more information.

Changing partners

NO POINT in even trying to make contact with architects or surveyors, if you haven't got something new to discuss. Everyone knows that. And that assumes they're in! Partnering is the Buzz-word right now, and it's worth checking that you have a stance on the matter.

EVERYTHING'S GOING to change, apparently, especially in local government. The old mistrust between client and contractor will become a thing of the past (yes, really) and everyone's going to be a member of the same team. Lots of companies have sharpened their act and are getting their feet under various tables. They're going to be partners and, if you're not already thinking along those lines, you could be staying single.

Partnering isn't like marriage. More like a harem, actually. You can team up with lots of clients, all at the same time, without being accused of promiscuity. If you haven't asked a few questions already, it might be worth finding out who all the qualified independent partnering advisers are because one of them - a fairly big set-up in London - only allows two window suppliers on their short-list. Considering they're handling a few dozen clients, all over the country, that's a HUGE chunk of business being handled by a rather tight little community.

In other words, your sales team needs briefing - and sharpish - about making contact with all the various local authorities and housing associations, to find out how far

they've got. In a lot of instances, it isn't very far but many of them have already appointed



their advisers. If you don't know who the advisers are, how are you going to influence their decisions? You might have been supplying all sorts of local authorities and/or housing associations for years, in which case you probably didn't feel a need for the Windowbase specifier data. Now's the time to be asking yourself how you're going to collate a whole new set of

data - in brand new database fields - showing who and where the new decision-makers are. If you don't have an up-to-date database to start from, you haven't got a hope in hell of taking it from there. Fortunately, Windowbase Housing Specifiers has just been updated.

Whatever you do, beware of complacency. You won't necessarily get any warning that one of your best customers isn't continuing to do business with you, especially if you're not a contractor. All that will happen is that everything dries up overnight. You could find yourself, after years of a mutually agreeable relationship, off the team because of someone else's involvement.

It is like marriage, then!

Where's Wimbledon?

QUALITY ASSURANCE, once a business is committed to it, becomes something of a millstone around the neck. It raises customers' expectations, to say the least. All sorts of companies are involved with QA, from window installers and heating engineers to assessment bodies. Many of them are household names. One of them, in particular, is such a household name that we can't print it, and for a very good reason!

If your very existence is synonymous with Quality Assurance, then it's a good idea to check what sort of web presence you have. Nobody does, in this instance. **The Quality Index**, if it's to be true to its name, must contain accurate information. No use publishing something that says, for example, Wimbledon is in Manchester because any idiot knows it isn't. Yet somebody does precisely this! With the postcode M2 1HN, to be precise.

When you're such a big

name in British industry, you can (apparently) afford mistakes like this because they don't make a lot of difference. **The Quality Index** can't. In other words, there's only one comprehensive source of accurate information on who has Quality Assurance . . . and that's a VERY big claim.

All sorts of people need accurate information on who has what certificate, that much is obvious. It's obvious too that they might also need to visit websites for further information about products and services, so

The Quality Index offers precisely that Hot Link.

What's the point of investing in QA to put you head-and-shoulders above the competition, if there's no easy way for would-be customers to know where you are and what you do? It's a rather select band of companies, so thequalityindex.co.uk was created to make access as easy as possible. Take a look some time. Check your details, especially if you're based in



Wimbledon or Manchester! All sorts of products, including doors, windows, sealed units and conservatories plus an all-new guide to the architects, contractors, engineers and surveyors who are also Quality Assured. Talk to each other. Make some money.

Care and grooming

TO BE SUCCESSFUL your sales team need the sales tools to work with. Waste time chasing companies who went out of business two or more years ago or who no longer need the product you sell and you may as well be pouring money down the drain.

If we bother to think about it at all, most of us assume that not too much will have changed in a two to three year old database. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, keeping track of the changes as we validate the many thousands of records in the Windowbase databases has shown that almost all databases have a half-life of six months. In plain English half the records on your database will have changed in some detail in the course of six months. Postcodes, telephone numbers, contact names, locations, email addresses, even company names change - sometimes more than once. And many records suffer two, three or more changes making them all but useless for mailing or marketing

half the records on your database will have changed in some detail in the course of six months

work without regular maintenance. The pace of change is awesome. You couldn't ask for better proof of the claim that the tempo of business life is increasing rapidly.

So how old is your database? What shape is it in? Have you had a good close look recently, or is that something you delegate? Unless you do put in a considerable effort on a regular basis - much of your sales and marketing will be wasted. Anyone who has measured the effectiveness of a database will tell you, accuracy is key.

We have a rolling validation programme that monitors changes and date stamps the changes so you know when a record was last checked for accuracy. We pass information on to you about companies that have gone out of business or changed the nature of their business so you're not left chasing ghosts and you can ensure that dead and gone, does mean dead and buried.

TQI: Hot Links

A HOT LINK, in case you didn't know, is used to skip about from one website to another. You'd like a visitor to **The Quality Index** website to see your company's entry and basic details about quality and then want to know more about you. Specifiers probably know already but installers or house-builders are sure to look further. Even as far as your price lists, if you show them. So they (you) need a hot link.

Buyers and estimators can make their way through your details, without tying up staff at your end. They can make their comparisons, and follow-up calls for confirmation of your prices. Saves everyone's time, helps maintain a margin and keeps prices down.

The Quality Index is therefore an easy-to-remember website that also operates as a search engine, but it's only available to companies with the right credentials. An exclusive club - but anyone can visit, and take a look.

The bonus is that, once they've used **The Quality Index** to access your website, they're less likely to wander off into someone else's.

For further information,

please fill in your details and tick your area of interest below and return to:

Reader's name: _____

Company: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

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