

BY GARRY UPTON

Over the course of 2009, this space will identify opportunities within customers' homes that you may not have observed in the past. The opportunities are based on a recent homeowner survey conducted by Decision Analyst, Inc.

Q How important is the role of a "home comfort consultant" today?


A Customer ownership today is more important than ever before. And it's becoming harder to obtain. Yes, there's still a fear of the unknown for some of your customers that keep them calling you back. But information concerning the HVAC category is much easier for homeowners to get from sources other than you today. Many homeowners tell us they would prefer their contractor be their consultant. A consultant must have an ongoing relationship and know their home comfort desires. You can only do that when you have time to listen (off-season). They must be able to talk with you when they're not just in an emergency situation. Perhaps the following from the 2008 American Home Comfort study will help you better understand homeowners' current

thoughts about your business:

1. Over two thirds of homeowners expect their contractors to act as a consultant. Unfortunately, they say, many contractors let them down.
2. Energy utility costs (up, then down) have helped move even marginally interested homeowners to learn of alternatives to their current home expenses.
3. Green has gotten more of a push in the past year. In spite of higher energy costs during 2008, it has more of a foothold than ever before.
4. Retail, which is the way homeowners buy most of the goods they purchase, is also looking for new customers and new products to sell. HVAC home comfort is seen as one such product: 28 of every 100 homeowners say they will include retail in their next central HVAC consideration. With more retailers in the business, more Internet opportunities for homeowners, your choices

are clear: you can turn over control of sales of home comfort new equipment to others, or you can train your technicians to become the consultants homeowners are looking for. Energy efficiency is still the number one thing customers desire. But do you know:

- The pent-up desires for much better indoor air quality (IAQ)?
- How to win their trust?
- How to help them plan for improved home comfort when it's not just during an emergency?

A great way to know all of this is to accept their payment to get your technicians in front of them when you have the time and they have the desire to listen. That sounds like a service contract to me. 

Garry Upton, of Decision Analyst, Inc., shares his interpretations of its American Home Comfort Study of homeowners, and explores what customers look for in HVAC contractors. To learn more about this study, or to purchase it, contact Garry at gupton@decisionanalyst.com.