

Brothers Partner to Grow Businesses

By John Conrad
Of *The NEWS* Staff

Randy Novak, president-elect of the Sheet Metal & Air Conditioning Contractors' National Association (SMACNA), has urged his fellow contractors to follow his example and become involved in the home performance contracting market. Novak is the president of Novak Heating and Air Conditioning Inc. in Cedar Rapids, and he often works with Home Star Iowa and the firm's chief building analyst, Rob Novak — who just happens to be his brother.

According to Randy, "The biggest thing is that if contractors are struggling in the marketplace, this is a nice way to differentiate their company. There is a whole list of things they can do, everything from insulation to more in-depth, indoor air quality solutions, so they are not just out competing with other companies for the same things."

And in the case of the Novaks, it also doesn't hurt to work with a family member.

More Than Just a Fad

Novak Heating and Air Conditioning Inc. has been in business since 1934 and is now in the third generation of family ownership with 24 employees. Brothers Rob and Randy worked together for several years at the company. In the course of their work with local utilities, Rob volunteered to work with local utilities to establish some Energy Star and home performance programs and became fascinated with the entire concept of the whole-home approach to energy conservation and indoor comfort. The more he analyzed all the factors associated with poor home performance (poor insulation, improperly sealed ductwork, outside air infiltration, etc.), it became very evident to him why many problems were occurring and how easy they were to fix.

Armed with this experience and a belief that energy audits and home performance contracting were more than just a fad, Rob established Home Star Iowa in 2009 and has never looked back. He said, "It is an opportunity [for contractors] to increase the size of the pie, to help people be more comfortable, and to give them better air quality."

Energy Audits

"You have to do a whole-house approach," said Rob. "You need to actually go in and do the testing to figure out what the solutions are."

A Home Star Iowa energy auditor goes into the home and evaluates it from top to bottom. He uses a checklist to make observations about each room and conducts the blower door and duct blaster tests to determine the amount of air

show where the house is leaking, and then the company utilizes computer modeling software to simulate the best course of action to gain the maximum benefit. The company provides a priority list of recommended repairs that serves

"Utilities are developing programs for rebates for proven reductions of energy, and it works out well for the customer — they get the comfort and indoor air quality they've always wanted plus quite a bit of energy savings. It's a true

Novak Heating and Cooling benefits from the recommendation of the audits because the company ends up selling higher efficiency products, sealing ductwork, and making sure that duct is insulated in uninsulated areas. By promoting



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win-win," Rob said.

energy audits, the end result is an



products, sealing ductwork, and making sure that duct is insulated in uninsulated areas. By promoting energy audits, the end result is an increase in the average sale and a customer that recommends Novak to friends and neighbors.

In addition to conducting energy audits, Home Star Iowa also offers training for industry professionals

to become certified and accredited as energy auditors and home performance contractors.

Better Results

Randy urges his fellow SMACNA members to get involved because of the importance of duct systems to energy efficiency, comfort, and IAQ in homes. Leaky ducts can be the

source of contaminants and contribute to mold.

Home Star Iowa does extensive testing of the duct systems utilizing a product called a duct blaster, which is like a miniature blower door. Companies that manufacture duct blasters include Retrotec Inc. and The Energy Conservatory. In the process of doing hundreds of



Rob Novak, chief building analyst at Home Star Iowa, checks out progress of a duct blower during a recent energy audit. Rob has conducted over 100 energy audits for his brother Randy, president of Novak Heating and Air Conditioning. Both claim energy audits help boost an average sale by 35 percent.

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Partnering and Training

energy audits, the Novak brothers indicated that well over 30 percent of the systems were improperly installed, sized, and/or sealed.

Also, in their experience with computer modeling as part of the audit, they have determined that in most of the cases, the heating and cooling system are oversized and the duct system is undersized. So if the house is properly sealed and the right amount of insulation is added, then a much smaller furnace and air conditioner can be installed, and the duct sizing becomes less of an issue. Therefore, a commitment to energy audits and home performance contracting results in more business for the contractor and more comfort and better results for the homeowner.

Although Randy has the luxury of a brother in the energy auditing business, he knows that other contractors may need a little more guidance for how to get involved in home performance contracting. The following are his recommendations for contractors:

- At a minimum, invest in training for one or more people in your organization. Even if you are not doing audits, this kind of education can make a difference in properly sizing and sealing duct systems and equipment. For more information, go to www.homestartraining.com
- Find out who is doing energy audits and home performance contracting in the area and set up partnerships with them. This will result in additional business and happier customers, and can open doors that previously weren't open.
- Find a partner or learn more about training by contacting the Building Performance Institute (BPI) or Residential Energy Services Network (RESNET). Their respective websites are www.bpi.org and www.resnet.us.
- Meet with local utilities to find out who is doing the energy auditing work, and explore the opportunity to work with utilities.

Business Growth

According to the Novak brothers, the average sale for Novak Heating and Air Conditioning is increased by 35 percent based on recommendations from the energy audits Home Star Iowa conducts on behalf of the company.

According to Rob, the sales success comes from educating the homeowners during the audit process so they can see the problem areas and the proper fixes.

Randy added, "It helps convince the customer that there are other things they can do to make themselves more comfortable and save money."