



October 2010



It Must Be True!

Commentary

by Michael Lowe

At first, it came as a shock. It defied common sense.

Then, I laughed. Clearly, it must be a joke, a satire, like so many of my Commentaries.

But, no it wasn't. It was true; I saw it in writing from the Government. The news media were abuzz. Pundits pontificated, pointing to a plethora of proof making graphs. Kip was excited, strategizing on how we should respond to the inevitable deluge of orders. We will need another fax line and another email address to capture them all! Hire two more shifts! Add extra production days! Expand the plant! Happy days will be here again; time to spend, spend, spend!!!

It was late September, 2010 and we had just learned of the proclamation from the National Bureau of Economic Research that the Great Recession was over. They said it had been over for a long time, since June 2009, in fact. The wonderful news had us simultaneously overjoyed and overwhelmed. So much to do; so little time. Time to buy construction related stocks.

Now it is a few weeks later... and, nada. No major uptick in commercial construction spending. No significant change in the amount of

Continued back page

To Stay Still is to Fall Behind



Ash-Lee Rud



Ron Izuno



Bill Woehlke

AB&I believes that it is essential to our ability to serve you well that we continuously adapt and improve. As Kevin McCullough, AB&I's Vice President of Custom Castings, fondly says about AB&I's culture, "AB&I is Excellent and Improving". For us, good enough today is not good enough tomorrow! With this tradition in mind, we are making several changes to grow and to develop a stronger AB&I Sales Team.

First, AB&I is pleased to announce that Ash-Lee Rud has joined the AB&I sales team, as Regional Sales Manager. She will be primarily focusing on contractors and pull through business to AB&I distribution in Northern California. Ash-Lee will play a pivotal role in enabling AB&I to move to Factory representation in Northern California. Ash-Lee's extensive experience with cast iron and the

Northern California commercial construction market will be very helpful in this transition. She has worked for a prominent Northern California cast iron rep, Kliman Sales, for the last 5 years. Additionally, her professionalism and her tireless dedication will be of great benefit to AB&I customers. We look forward to many great things from Ash-Lee.

Teaming up with Ash-Lee Rud, Bill Woehlke will also focus on contractors and pull-through business to AB&I distribution in Northern California, and Ron Izuno will work closely with Ash-Lee and Bill to ensure that AB&I's factory representation works optimally for our distributors and contractors (Note: Ron will continue as the California and Nevada Regional Sales Manager and Bill will also remain the Regional Sales Manager in the North Central region and Arkansas.)

Continued on Page 3



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Four Customer Service Megatrends For the Coming Decade

As social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, emerge as venues for customers to voice both complaints and praise toward their vendors, it is becoming more and more important that Customer Service departments recognize four important trends coming out of this burgeoning technological change. Companies that ignore these trends, and the importance of adopting strategies to deal with social media, do so at their own risk.

These four trends have been identified by Guy Stephens, noted social media guru and founder of the LinkedIn group. His words are worth reading.

Trend 1: The Rise of Help Networks

People have always turned to other people they know for advice and suggestions when encountering a problem. With Facebook and Twitter, this reality is strengthened by virtue of the expanded universe of friends and colleagues. Now, a few clicks on a keyboard can share experiences with or invite suggestions from hundreds, or even thousands, of people in the same business or profession. A plumber who questions the economy of using a figure fitting as opposed to a built system can now query his fellow plumbers electronically to get a variety of views. Similar queries can be launched to find the best price or best availability of a given product. Information is shared at the speed of light, eliminating the need for multiple phone calls and endless waiting on hold.

Trend 2: Customer Service "On The Go"

With the pervasive use of smartphones, like the Blackberry or iPhone, Customer Service representatives are no longer bound to their desk or workstation. As long as they have access to the Internet through a wireless connection, they can provide information and assistance to their customers. Just as the Internet made geographical proximity between vendor and customer less important, mobile devices have worked to

detach the customer service function from the office environment. Salespeople have touted their around-the-clock availability, thanks to cell phones, for over a decade, and this feature will spread into the world of customer service going forward.

Trend 3: The Decentralization of Trust

As knowledge spreads virally over the Internet through channels like YouTube and Twitter, the demand for a centralized locus of knowledge will diminish. For example, if a contractor wants to confirm the best way to install a coupling, he can call the distributor who sold him the product and hope for an explanation he can follow, or go to YouTube and search "How to install a no-hub coupling." Which do you think will yield the best result? As knowledge decentralizes, trust in that knowledge will also decentralize. Customer service departments will no longer be the primary go-to point for product

information. Easily available third-party testimonials and reviews will take priority over sales and customer service contacts.

Trend 4: The Intermediation of Business Processes

Up to now, if a customer had a complaint, he or she would call the company. Now, that customer is just as likely to go to Twitter or YouTube to voice their concern, taking the complaint process completely out of the hands of the company and into the viral universe of the Internet. This involvement of the "Internet as intermediary" is a major trend.

Savvy companies must recognize these trends and adopt policies and practices that put them to good use. Customer Service departments may have to radically change their vision, and understand that their main role is to share information over a variety of platforms, not just by telephone or email. The goal is to provide good service and build trust, and recognizing new and exciting ways to accomplish that goal will emerge as a primary challenge to good managers everywhere.



The AB&I Customer Service Team



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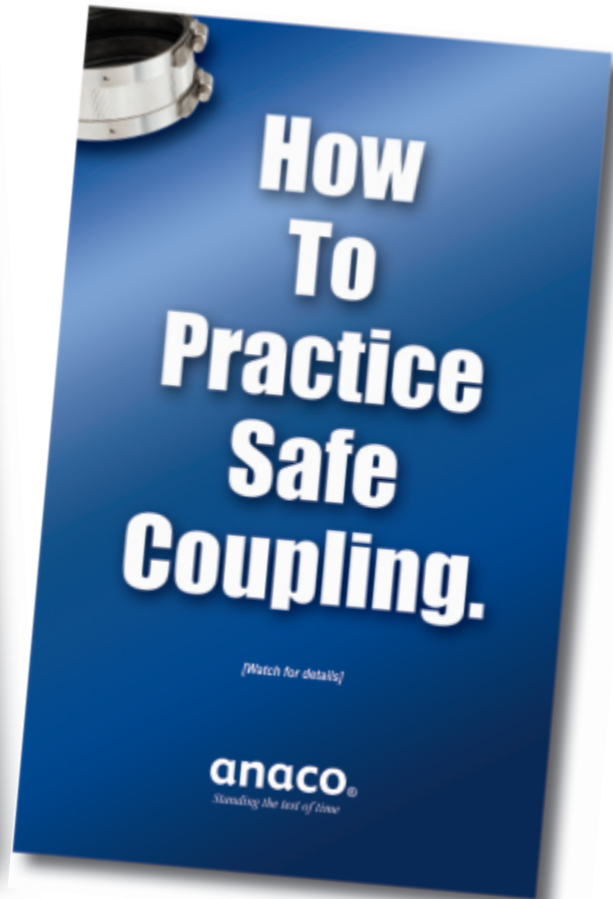
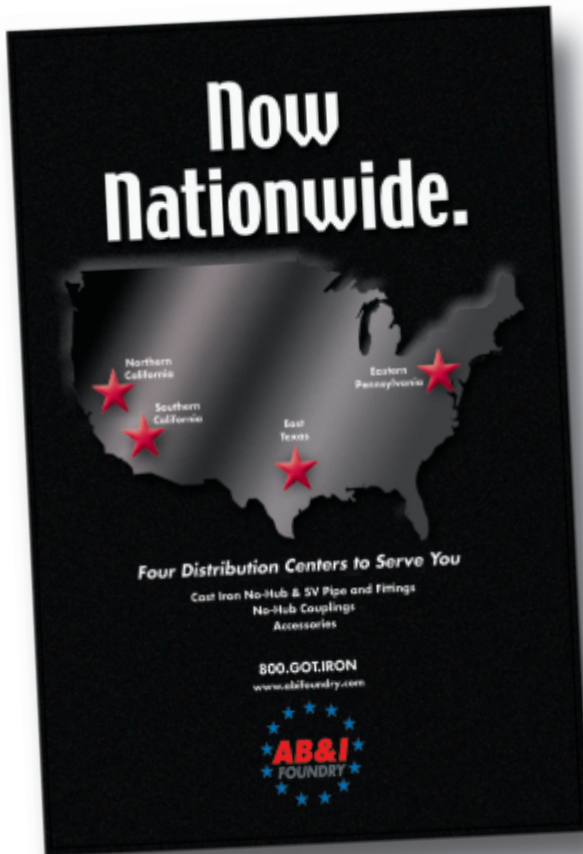
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Watch for AB&I, Anaco Ad Campaigns Starting Soon



Changes are coming to the advertising and marketing programs at Anaco and AB&I.

An aggressive print advertising and public relations campaign will be commencing in the next few months. This campaign will promote the significant improvements to products and customer service that are currently underway at the two companies. "We're planning to have a significant presence in the trade media over the next twelve or so months," said Michael Lowe, AB&I vice president for marketing and sales. "Look for us in the trades that go to contractors, distributors, and specifiers."

NorCal Sales Team

Continued from Page 1

Lastly, gradually over the next few months, PPG will stop representing AB&I at the contractor and distributor levels in Northern California as we transition to Factory representation. PPG, however, will continue to work with engineers, regarding cast iron specifications, and PPG will continue to represent Anaco and Husky couplings at the contractor, distributor, and Engineer levels. PPG continues to be an integral part of our sales team. The changes above are designed to allow both AB&I and PPG to focus on their



strengths, in order to best serve our Northern California business partners.

Thank you for your support, flexibility, and feedback. The road to success is paved by people who endeavor to do better.

Get Your *Items* Newsletter by Email!

To start receiving this newsletter by email, please contact AB&I's customer service department at 800-GOT-IRON, or send an email to woodbury@volcano.net.

Guest Commentary by Kip Wixson

Recession Ends!

Continued from front page

orders. Just an extra fax line, sitting idle. Kip has even moved on and is now preparing for the Raiders' Super Bowl appearance in 2011.

And, I am a little puzzled. If the Great Recession has been over for more than a year, why haven't people realized it? Why don't people realize they are better off? Why haven't they started erecting thousands of cranes? Why don't they understand that they need to buy much, much more cast iron and couplings?

I saw it in writing from the Government...The Great Recession is over! It must be true?

Guess it was a joke after all...who knew the Obama administration was actually a comedy troupe (now, things in Washington D.C. are making sense.)

I bet you are glad that your tax dollars were spent by the National Bureau of Economic Research to tell you that the Great Recession is over...

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The Monthly Chuckle...

A Spooky Quiz on Halloween...

Few people know much about Halloween and its origins. Test your knowledge of this October holiday...

1. Which terrible creatures are also known as lycanthropes?

- Wolfmen
- Witches
- Trolls
- Goblins



2. The Romans called Halloween "Pomona Day." Who was Pomona?

- Goddess of East Los Angeles
- The Goddess of Evil and Danger
- The Wife of Wolfman Jack
- The Goddess of Fruits and Gardens



3. How much did the world's largest pumpkin weigh?

- 648 lbs
- 977 lbs
- 1356 lbs
- 1524 lbs

4. This custom began as a way of finding out who would get married first.

- Tossing a garter
- Bobbing for apples
- Overturning outhouses
- Extorting for candy

5. What priests first celebrated what we call Halloween?

- Druids
- Christians
- Romans
- Neanderthals



6. The first reader to answer all these questions correctly will receive..

- 100 Cap and Trade carbon credits
- A Loveletter from the IRS
- Absolutely nothing
- A bag of flaming dog dung on his/her porch

Best Political Quotes of All Time?

"There they are: See No Evil, Hear No Evil, and...Evil."

- Bob Dole, seeing presidents Carter, Ford and Nixon at a White House event.

"I have left orders to be awakened at any time in case of national emergency - even if I'm in a Cabinet meeting."

- President Reagan

"Being president is like running a cemetery. You have a lot of people under you but nobody's listening."

President Clinton



"If I were two faced, would I be wearing this one?"

- President Lincoln

"Politics is the art of looking for trouble everywhere, finding it, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedies."

- Groucho Marx

"Recession is when your neighbor loses his job. Depression is when you lose your job. Recovery is when Jimmy Carter loses his job."

- President Reagan

"Don't be so humble - you're not that great."

- Golda Meir, to a visiting diplomat

"I hope you're all Republicans."

- President Reagan, to the surgeons while entering the operating room after being shot



"I just got this wire from my generous daddy. 'Dear Jack, don't buy a single vote more than you need. I'll be damned if I'm going to pay for a landslide.'"

- John F. Kennedy

Answers: 1. Wolfman, 2. Goddess of Fruits and Gardens, 3. 1524 lbs, 4. Bobbing for apples, 5. Druids, 6. Absolutely nothing.

