

CKCA Plant Tours – Good for Business!

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The CKCA works diligently to set up plant tours for it's members at both the Regional as well as the National Conferences. It is one of the main reasons that members attend and is one of the most difficult activities to set up. The entire premise of the CKCA is that, we as members, all benefit when we learn from one another. Part of that education rests on our confidence in hosting a tour of our respective plants for our fellow members.

Don't be afraid of hosting a tour, embrace it

While attending a National Conference many years ago Mr. Hewlett Sr. (Ottawa Valley) was the President of the CKCA and was giving a wonderful speech about the association and within the body of that speech encouraged members to host a plant tour. Using his famous wit, he stated "At the end of the day what do we do? We all make boxes with pretty doors, so don't be afraid of hosting a plant tour, embrace it."

The first step is overcoming our fear that if we open our plant our competitors will some how discover all our manufacturing secrets and this will lead to our losing our competitive edge. In reality our members are being given a controlled tour of your facility and you determine what will be on that tour or what will be omitted. As manufacturers your fellow members are looking to see machinery in action and if they are contemplating a purchase they want to have the ability to ask you how the process took place in your plant. The pro's the con's, how did you make the decision to purchase which machine over another brand etc.?



Learn from each other

The main objective of the plant tours is to learn from each other and in so doing we all become stronger in competing against foreign suppliers who enter our markets. In some case's they have received a trade perk that gives them an unfair advantage due to their labour costs, non- compliance to environmental laws or inferior materials that do not meet the CKCA Certification Standards. We are all in the same boat so by sharing, learning and speaking to one another we will all be able to compete against them.

A plant tour provides us all with an opportunity to see how work actually gets done and sometimes we learn things in the most unexpected ways. One example of this is the Cummins Engine plant in Mexico, they painted machines in different colours based on the capability to perform their designated operations: Green for a machine that could do a task easily, yellow for a machine that was more difficult to use and red for a machine that was very difficult in holding the required tolerances. This simple innovation resulted in workers paying attention to where it was required the most. In a multilingual work place in which communication is a source of confusion, the colour code helped workers determine which machine demanded more of their attention during its operation, no translation required.

Hosting a plant tour can help your business

The other obstacle is the perceived notion that your plant would not be of any interest to anyone, on the contrary, in fact, you just may find that the tour will actually be helpful to you. In a small plant setting your fellow members will be touring your facility and those that have larger plants will be able to give you feedback on how you can make your plant more efficient. You may have a very simple way of tracking your orders that would be helpful to other members who may be going through a learning curve on tracking production.

Instill pride and give your staff a unique opportunity!

If we embrace the idea of hosting a plant tour then look at this event as means for your team to get excited about working for you. It gives your people an opportunity to get cleaned up, involving your employees by letting them explain what task he or she does in their cell makes them feel important. New company t-shirts and the projection of a positive face to your members will also instill confidence in your team. You have made the decision that you are proud of your people, your plant and the product they produce and you are hosting a company tour so other member's in the industry can learn from your team.

At a recent plant tour with Lucvaa Kitchens in Vaughan, Ontario, the on-staff engineers were the tour guides. The rationale for this was engineers rarely get the opportunity to share their knowledge with others in the industry, so the engineers at Lucvaa really enjoyed the opportunity and as Lucvaa told us "the engineers loved it".

The goal of the CKCA remains one of education and promoting common industry goals, that leads to all our members learning from one another to help solve problems that are common to everyone within the industry. If you like going on plant tours and you feel that they are important then you should also reciprocate that opportunity to your fellow members. Think about it and when the CKCA calls and asks if you would like to open you plant for a tour, accept it and embrace it.



"We always felt that being a part of the CKCA was a benefit for us, simply because it was a community of Canadian cabinet manufacturers and related product suppliers. We learn a lot from each other. But we were not getting anything in terms of new business until these past few months.

Lucvaa hosted a factory tour for the members of the CKCA during the 2017 Regional Event in Vaughan, Ontario. Not only were all the members who attended very interested in how our manufacturing process worked, they asked truly thought-provoking questions. Our Engineering Team enjoyed giving the tours to the members. They rarely have the opportunity to share their knowledge of the industry with outsiders and they learned a lot from the members, who gave shared their own experiences.



After the visit, we felt great. Not only about ourselves as a whole, but about the CKCA. In the weeks following the visit, we received a number of dealer requests from designers and contractors we've never worked with before. Skeptical, I inquired as to how these dealers found us. Most of them came to us by way of the CKCA website. Now we have 2 new dealers in Lindsey & Collingwood, and more inquiries still coming.

We did not expect it, but the CKCA visit was beneficial for our company in terms of opening us up to new markets in Southern Ontario, by way of the new dealers, and a boost in company morale. I believe any organization that opens its doors to the CKCA members will enjoy many unexpected rewards."

Gajen Arumugam
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