

# Floor Design delivers world class training for flooring contractors

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Contractors were treated to practical demonstrations of Bona's latest low VOC lacquers, adhesives and dust free sanding systems.

How can a manufacturer deliver 'real world' business benefits to flooring contractors? One way is by working in partnership with distributors to deliver high quality training to their contractor customers.

According to Alec Stacey, Bona's Technical Manager, "A training environment is the only effective method of putting across the cost and performance benefits of new systems, as well as ensuring people really understand the correct application techniques."



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*'A training environment is the only effective method of putting across the performance benefits of new systems' – Alec Stacey, Bona*

A recent event organised in conjunction with distributors, Floor Design, who supply wood and laminate flooring throughout the Irish Republic, is a great example of how Bona's enthusiastic approach to training works in practice. In Ireland, where the market has been badly hit by the recession, contractors are as concerned about the survival of their business as their UK peers. Mindful of this, Floor Design's MD, Gerard Coffey, still believed the time was right to invite customers along for some training. He said, "When people are busy they don't have time to consider new things. But when things slow down they have time to ask themselves if there's a different way of working – and how they can be better than the next guy. The market may be very depressed now but it will come back. We're offering them new options and ideas so they can look forward to the medium term."

At the two-day Floor Design event, Alec Stacey gave practical demonstrations of Bona's newest lacquers, silane-based moisture barrier and adhesives, buffer applied stains and sanding and vacuum systems.

So what did the contractors get out of it? Charlie Dudek, a cabinet maker by profession, has been installing and finishing wooden floors for 21 years. He said, "We still need to learn. There are always going to be new products and technologies. I want to make sure I have as many options as possible to offer my customers. Even in today's climate, I can win business by offering innovations such as dust free sanding and low solvent, no-smell lacquers."

Bernard Bolgen, a contractor who had been loyal to 'cheap', fast drying, solvent based lacquers, agreed. "Even with my experience, it's still worth taking the time to come along and make sure I'm applying products correctly, particularly these new silane-based adhesives. But today I've also learned there's a new, economical alternative to the solvent lacquers I've been using for 15 years! It's really easy to use and I'm going to try it!"



*Manufacturer, distributor and contractor – everyone benefits from high quality training.*



*When things slow down there's time to ask yourself if there's a different way of working and how you can be better than the next guy.*



*Contractors should arm themselves with as many options as possible for their customers.*

Niall Duffin said he had always found stains particularly challenging to apply successfully. After watching Alec applying Bona's stain with a buffing machine, he said, "When you've got a large area to stain, it's really hard on the knees! It's been great to come and discover a low solvent product which you can put on with a buffer!"

Derek Coade has been installing wooden floors for 24 years and has worked all over Europe. He said, "I've been an advocate of waterborne products for years and originally used Bona lacquers in 1987 on large specification jobs. But, in spite of all the benefits of low solvent systems, I always missed the great colouration that came from using solvent based products. However today I discovered Bona's Prime Deep which gives you a fantastic rich colour and I'm looking forward to trying it."

Alec continued, "Many contractors are 'apprenticed' into the industry, often learning techniques from people who have learnt them a long time ago. Some of these techniques may be outdated but contractors stick with them because that's the way they have always worked – for example sticking down floors with bitumen.

In my experience you can send contractors literature or explain techniques over the phone, but the only method which really lets me put over new techniques effectively is in a training environment. I can demonstrate how our products should be applied, the contractors can have a go and really take on board how the products perform. There are still so many misconceptions about the cost of some of the new 'greener' systems, and these events also give me the chance to fully explain their cost benefits – which can be significant and often surprising!"

Bona makes no profit from its in house training programme which is held at the company's UK HQ in Milton Keynes, and simply charges a nominal course fee to cover costs. Like other training events put on by Bona's distributor customers, the Floor Design events were free of charge. But, as Alec points out, "Everyone benefits from events like these. Ours are premium products and we need to know people are using them correctly. No one wants to be called back to site."

A proactive distributor can also use training as an opportunity to bring new customers on board. Floor Design's Gerard Coffey continues, "Lacquers are technical products. We're passionate about what we do and if we are going to be successful with them we need to really understand them. At these events our own staff get a chance to see that we're working with world class products and we also get the chance to introduce the products to new users. From experience I know that once they've worked with them, we'll get repeat sales and start to build new long term relationships."

Bona's Jack Weavers concludes, "Our sustainability messages are important of course. But we're also very aware of contractors' real world, commercial needs. Good quality, technically led training is one way we can support contractors during slow times to ensure they are armed with every possible option to offer their customers. We're keen to arrange similar events with all our distributor customers, alongside the usual technical support through our help line and site visits. As a concerned manufacturer, it's our business to stay tuned in to the real world needs of every link in the supply chain and deliver commercially beneficial, as well as ecological, solutions.