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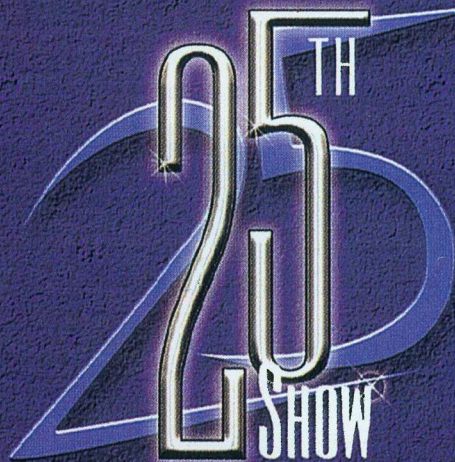
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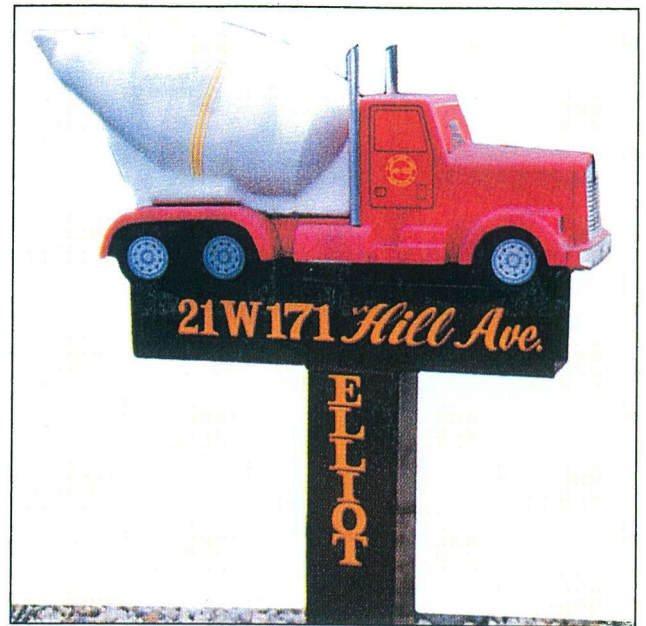
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A positive Image always pays off



A successful concrete construction company understands the importance of making a good first impression. Here are some tips for establishing a positive company image.

By **ROB ELLIOT**
H., 'MeW''

When Elliot Construction first started on the road to dressing up the company's vehicles, we didn't fully realize what an important part company image would eventually play in our business. In fact, we were just trying to improve the appearance of the red Ford trucks we were using, which at the time were designed with an indentation running the entire length of both sides. We saw no real reason why the designers built this feature into the trucks, and we didn't like the way they looked. So we decided to paint those sections of our red trucks a bright yellow, and these have been Elliot Construction's colors for more than 40 years. Today, a revised, customized version of that distinctive yellow band has become an important part of our overall company identity, setting our vehicles and equipment apart from those of all other concrete contractors in the Chicago area.

Everybody and everything that represents your business creates an



Clean, brightly colored trucks can act as moving billboards, creating an awareness of your company. Elliot Construction's red and yellow color scheme distinguishes every truck in its fleet, even the miniature ready-mix truck on top of the company's mailbox (top photo).

image and promotes an identity. It's up to you to decide if this company image turns out to be positive or negative. The components of a positive company image are many, but the ones most likely to be noticed by potential customers include:

- Clean, well-maintained equipment
- Neat, clean personnel on the job-site (as clean as you can be

in the concrete business, anyway)

- High-quality printed materials, including brochures, flyers and business cards
- A professional attitude

Equipment

Clean and well-maintained equipment has numerous benefits, not the least of which are increased safety

on the jobsite, less downtime and longer equipment life. But many contractors may not realize what an important role equipment plays in overall company image—and in a company's bottom line.

We now have about 60 pieces of equipment that travel throughout the Chicago area, and when people see the equipment on the road, they immediately know who we are. We have even received new business because of this. A clean, brightly colored fleet of trucks and other equipment can act as moving billboards, creating an awareness of your company in the minds of your customers.

Personnel

Well-maintained equipment also has a positive effect on personnel since workers naturally take more pride in a company that takes pride in its image. Just ask yourself, which truck would a worker wearing dirty, tattered clothing be more likely to ride in: a new truck with a crisp logo and fresh paint job or a beat-up rusty old pickup? Which truck would he be more likely to lean a concrete-encrusted form against? And which truck would he be more inclined to climb into without cleaning the mud and concrete off his boots?

It becomes obvious that taking pride in your company's image has benefits down the line. We are able to attract and retain top-notch, qualified employees who dress neatly and keep our jobsites and equipment as clean as possible.



Potential customers are impressed by contractors who take the time and effort to keep their equipment clean and well-maintained.

Printed materials

Whether consciously or not, people place a premium on professional-looking printed materials. Words spelled incorrectly, typos, a cheap printing job, hastily created cut-and-paste logos from a basic clip art file—all of these reek of amateurism and can tarnish your company image. A prospective customer who sees such blunders in a company's printed materials may wonder whether the company can perform top-quality work when it cares so little about how it looks to others.

Consistency also is important. Be sure to use the same company logo and colors wherever they appear, whether on the front of a promotional brochure, the side of a truck, or the back of company-sponsored softball-team jerseys. You work hard to build and maintain a positive company image, and you don't want to lose the effect by varying company visuals.

We are fortunate to have in-house people who are qualified to turn out professional-quality brochures and other literature. If your company doesn't have that ability, it would be worthwhile to invest money upfront in making your company look as good as you know it is, rather than save a few dollars and have your image suffer. You don't have to hire

a high-powered advertising or design firm. Independent contractors and even local print shops can design top-quality printed materials that reflect your company image positively.

Attitude

A great deal has been written and said about the importance of turning out a quality job, but quality is more than just a good end product. Quality begins with how you appear to your prospective and current customers. If you have shoddy, dirty equipment and unkempt personnel, you may never get a chance to show anyone what a great job you can do. Also, I believe potential customers know that a successful contractor takes pride in himself and his company. That contractor also will be willing to invest some of the earnings from his success into buying decent equipment, and he will take the time and effort to keep it clean and well-maintained. Rarely do I find quality contractors that don't take pride in their company's appearance.

Always remember that it's much easier to make a positive first impression than to undo a negative one. And first impressions, fair or not, are typically the lasting impressions people have of us.

Of course, it takes time and money to keep equipment clean, well-maintained and painted, and to maintain the perception of your company as reliable and professional, in keeping with the quality of the work you perform. But the costs certainly aren't tremendous, especially when you consider the dividends such a positive company image can accrue. Our company motto is: "Quality pays—it doesn't cost." *is*

Rob Elliot is president of Elliot Construction Corp., Glen Ellyn, Ill. Elliot Construction has been serving the concrete construction needs of the suburban Chicago area since the company's incorporation in January 1955.

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