

Window Film News:

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An interview with Michael J. Feldman

President - Advanced Film Solutions, Inc. Tampa Bay, Florida.

Question:

You have been involved in the window film business for decades; what do you find most different about being a retail dealer versus being the National Sales Manager of 3M Window Films?

Answer:

"First I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to have this conversation with you. "Necessity is the Mother of Invention" and there is an entirely different perspective you need to have to be successful as a retail business owner as compared to being a corporate sales manager. It's the effectiveness and immediacy of a business plan and flawless execution that comes to mind. At 3M we were always concerned with getting territory coverage throughout the USA. The market share was limited since 3M had hardly invested in window film for almost 25 years while we were part of the Consumer Home Improvement Markets. That changed in 1996 when window film was split away into a separate organization with deck coating and Fire barrier products then known as Specified Construction Products.

Trying to recruit new dealers was the mantra. As an independent business, we are much more involved in local market conditions and meeting our local consumers' expectations.

One's influence in the overall scope of success in a corporate strategic plan is by its nature quite limited. My personal influence on the daily operation at Advanced Film Solutions is by comparison an entirely different matter."

Q: What would you say is the most surprising aspect of window film as opposed to what you may have believed while you were a corporate citizen?

A: "Excellent question. We tend to become introspective when you are involved in corporate machinations. We are never as good as we think we are, when we are doing well, nor as bad as we think we are when sales go the wrong way. We also tend to overestimate our competition at times and underestimate them simultaneously.

As an independent business, we have the opportunity to select solutions that are not dictated or myopic. The result is a powerful portfolio of solutions that outperform our local world of window film dealers.

The power of a brand to offset the product limitations does not work as well in the "Real World" as I used to think. Today's consumer is much savvier and they are open to truly listening to your sales solution presentation. So I guess in short; I have been pleasantly surprised that we can overcome the brand recognition of my competitors and win the battle in the home so frequently."

Q: How many times have you won against your former dealers?

A: "I have never lost to any 3M dealer in over 300 straight homes."

Q: No questions- -just "Wow!"

A: "Yup."

Q: Did you know about the competitive window film products features, advantages and benefits while you were employed at 3M for those 33 years; or did you discover these products when you left 3M?

A: "Actually I always have believed that you need to know your competitors' products as well or better than the competitor themselves! The Internet makes gathering statistical evidence quite simple. Pure numbers like performance on glass types, visible light transmissions, etc. can be easily obtained. Selling techniques and strategic emphasis can also be researched simply by watching the tactical approach of the competition and how they execute their tactical plan in the field. I would say that I had a fairly comprehensive idea of what the competition had to offer while I was 100% geared to defeating them.

Once I left 3M I knew exactly which products I needed to offer as a dealer to be as successful as possible. The very first call I made was to CP Films to acquire VISTA and FormulaOne Performance Films. As a convert to CP Films I am now a staunch advocate for their product solutions portfolio. My own personal perspective is that being an outsider, I can see the dynamics perhaps more clearly than someone who has been part of their culture for decades. It reminds me of a convert to a religious belief. Quite often the recent convert is the most zealous parishioner!"

Q: You mentioned FormulaOne Films for cars and we understand that you were mostly involved in Flat glass at 3M; why the car film part of your new business given your prior lack of car film enthusiasm?

A: "You are correct in pointing out my previous experiences were consistently flat glass related. This was the core competency of my Florida sales at 3M. We grew the flat glass business by 9 times over the last decade when I was accountable for this state's sales numbers. Our car tinting business was extremely limited since we had de facto abdicated the car tinting business back in the 1980's. In 1994 we came out with a repackaged Panther film but the performance issues created a strong negative impression among car tinters at that time and for the balance of the 1990's into 2002. That experience and the lack of a competitive car film at that time and forward didn't stop me from understanding who was successful at car tinting and why? As a business model having a car film business and a residential and commercial business at the same time adds to the complexity of daily operations. Nevertheless these two distinct business models have a great degree of overlap and shared skill sets. My goals for Advanced Film Solutions are to be the premier outlet for both flat glass and car tinting films. So far – so good."

Q: We have to ask you how you view the recent economic situation and how you are dealing with the new reality of depreciated housing resale markets and higher cost of energy, etc.

A: "Perhaps my perspective is skewed by having no preconceived notion of good times versus bad times as a dealer. Every new project completed is positive for Advanced Film Solutions. We certainly hear from competitive dealers as well as most window film manufacturer's that this is the worst year they have had since 2001. Sales for my competition have frankly tanked in 2007 based not only on the slower economy but here in Florida the additional MIA Hurricane situation. Who would have imagined after 2005 that we would have no hurricanes for two straight summers!

We have completed over 350 home installations since we opened our doors. As a 3M Manager I can only recall one dealer that did as much business as we have done in the last five to six months.

That during these months of economic decline and zero hurricanes is noteworthy. In my opinion there is a growing awareness for Green Initiatives and reducing our Carbon Footprint. We have tried to communicate the essential cost benefit of window films for reduced energy consumption and ROI. We have tried to communicate the aesthetic benefits and practical solutions that these films offer consumers including the myriad of health benefits by reducing dangerous UVA and UVB rays in homes as well as cars. Fundamentally, consumers understand and can

relate to these real cost savings that offset their mood of reduced economic viability.”

Q: Finally; do you miss being a small cog in a big corporation?

A: “No”