

April 2021

RV PRO

RV-PRO.COM



BOB TIFFIN

THE INTERVIEW

Tiffin talks about his company's humble beginnings, plans for new RV models moving forward, and the decision to join forces with THOR Industries.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- *Fiver Hitches Evolving with the Market*
- *OEM Fridge Suppliers Keeping Things Cool*
- *Dealer Trends: Opening New Stores*



A Conversation About QUALITY PART 2

As long as the dealer will accept the product on their lot to sell to their customers, the factory feels little or no pressure to improve the level of product quality.

Editor's note: The following is the second in a two-part series on RV dealerships and quality. Part 1 ran in the March issue.

What's the industry's favorite sport? I'd say it is the "blame game."

At my core, I am a "dealer guy." Almost all my work life centers around how the dealership operates. Stop and consider how many times a month or week you hear someone in a dealership blaming the "factory" for a problem they face: Can't get product. Can't get parts. Can't get paid on warranty.

By far, the most common of those has been to bemoan the level of product quality when the units arrive at the stores. That complaint is followed closely by the quality of the units, as represented by warranty issues.

A relatively new RV dealership owner recently expressed to me his complete dis-

gust at the apparent acceptance of subpar performance. His contact with the manufacturer left him even more frustrated. It seemed to him that the manufacturer had little or no concern that the product it was delivering had so many issues. His assessment was that the factory just doesn't care.

Blame Doesn't Solve Anything

It is easy to shift the blame ... but it does not accomplish much.

It seems most of us would rather blame someone else rather than to look for any and all things that are within our control and fix them. The control that dealers have over quality is to stop buying from the companies that do not provide a quality product. (However, history shows us that a substandard product will just about always find a place on a sales lot somewhere.) That is even more true today with the shortage of inventory.



By Chuck Marzahn

Chuck Marzahn moderates virtual 20 Groups for RV dealers in the U.S. and Canada. He can be reached for comment and questions at Chuck@RV-VDG.com.

What gives the dealer the idea that quality is lacking?

In a recent 20 Group meeting, a member was griping about the units coming to his business. Some were missing parts. Some had noticeable appearance issues. The thing that really set him off was the motorized unit that had to be towed to his lot because of a chassis issue.

I understand his frustration. The manufacturer seemingly dumped a problem in his lap and left the resolution to him. The dealer could not sell it in the condition on arrival and had to undertake the steps involving yet another manufacturer, the chassis builder, to get it to a sellable condition. And the floor-plan expense continues.

Over the past 25 years, I have often heard one of the more common comments regarding quality. The dealer voices an understanding that the dealership's pre-delivery shop is the last hundred feet of the assembly line. The dealer must undertake what is perceived to be "finishing the job." And the dealer does so against the prevailing concern that many of the repairs and fixes will not be fully covered by warranty. Meanwhile, RV techs have been known to have an over-developed sense of fairness. They can all cite instances where they view the relationship as something like the manufacturer taking advantage of them and the dealership.

To get an indication of how seriously some dealers have taken the issue, consider that some are using a third-party vendor near the factory to take delivery of the unit from the factory and put it through the facility's own pre-delivery inspection (PDI). The advantages of this are that the vendor can get it done before it hits the dealer's lot. The proximity to the factory means a greater chance of parts availability and timely resolution of any discovered warranty concerns.

In my mind, the jury is still out. While I applaud the out-of-the-box approach to solving the problem, I have a fundamental challenge in thinking I should involve a third party in a process that so closely impacts my customer's satisfaction.

Take This 'Fill in the Blank' Quiz

Think of the product or brand you have seen a dealer stock and then drop several times over the years. Often, it has a great "look." And it sells.

However, the retail customers are soon morphed into the exact opposite of raving fans. I am betting you don't have to think hard to come up with a product name to fill in that blank.

What has always amazed me is the dealers who choose to learn that lesson over and over. They stock and sell a poor-quality product. The customer eagerly buys it. Then, in a short time due to quality issues, the customers hate it.

So, the dealer drops the product because of poor customer satisfaction and warranty difficulties. Then, a couple years later, the dealer picks the line back up. I just don't get it.

Here is another "fill in the blank" question. Think of a product that has a sterling reputation for quality. Again, I am betting you don't have to think long.

My mind goes to a particular diesel pusher. Also, a particular fifth wheel. Oh, and a great example in the travel trailer segment. Are those brands open in your market? Hopefully, they are on your sales lot!

But they aren't "open," are they?

There is some economic impact resulting from quality to be certain. But the difficulty in our industry comes on the other end. So many dealers want product. That is, *any* product.



There are so many manufacturers to choose from. The result is that any and all low-quality products can find a home on a dealer's lot without any trouble. So long as dealers buy low-quality product, it will exist.

There are so many manufacturers to choose from. The result is that the low-quality product can find a home on a dealer's lot without any trouble. So long as dealers buy low-quality product, it will exist.

It's a fairly bleak outlook, isn't it?

It seems the manufacturer accepts a quality level that is less than the reasonable end-user customer will find acceptable. Further, it seems the dealer has accepted the role of cleaning up after the builder so they can sell the unit and keep the customer happy and buying more product. Both the dealer and the OEM are locked in a struggle to fund or restrict the cost of doing those corrections under warranty. And so it continues for the foreseeable future.

Follow the Money

But what of the recent sale boom?

We are so pleased to see fresh, first-time customers buying RVs. One of my greatest fears is that we will not meet the expectations those new customers have.

Attention RV Centers

Give your clients the best option in Sealants
RapidsealSL® backed by a 10-Year Leak Free Warranty.



www.rvseal.com • 480-347-9283

10yr Maintenance Free

You see, they don't know how what's been "acceptable" to the veterans of the industry. They know only the experience of buying a car or a house as a big ticket or durable goods purchase. And they have been taught to be demanding. We are seeing it on the drive of every service department. What will be the long-term impact of this laissez-faire attitude regarding product quality?

The progressive manufacturer is doing the necessary homework to improve the product. Those companies are making gains in reducing the costs of warranty. They are finding that the cost of doing it right the first time is far less expensive than having to do a repair, to pay for a lawsuit, or to ignore advance quality production processes. And in the less concrete effects, they are seeing more loyal customers and dealers.

Our rental 20 Groups routinely share information with other members on what's breaking on units. And we share ways those recurring problems can be fixed. I wonder how much time manufacturers spend making assessments of recurring warranty issues with an eye toward fixing the process during assembly or holding a parts supplier more accountable for the high rate of failure.

The Data Already Exists

There have been several dealer councils held by manufacturers over the years. They could be so valuable. However, they must be understood in the proper way.

Think about this: The dealers see every post-production problem that exists. Long ago, the car business found a way to catalog and collate the issues discovered on warranty claims, customer complaints, and through reported technician direct input.

Making use of that input, they changed to production processes to minimize or eliminate the root causes of those commonly recurring issues. The result was a stronger product that ultimately built customer satisfaction and loyalty.

I fear the link between the factory and the customer is stunted in our industry. I have long held that the factory views the dealer as the customer – instead of the end-user.

If the dealer will accept the product on their sales lot to sell to their customers, the factory feels little or no pressure to improve the level of product quality. There are, as mentioned above, several manufacturers who clearly do care, and who take serious pride in the quality of their units. I hope to talk more about some of them soon.

In the end, the only time a positive change will occur is when the manufacturer sees an economic impact resulting from the lack or presence of good quality. In a *for-profit* model of business, it is perfectly understandable. If the manufacturer can sell more units at a greater profit because of high quality, it will be a focus.

The opposite also applies. If a company sees no impact from selling a lower-grade and cheaper unit, there will be no movement to better quality. Where quality has no impact on profit, there will be only the cheapest and worst results. **RVZ**



Read Part 1 of the Series:

<https://nbm.uberflip.com/i/1341091-march-21/93?>



All of these have passed our rigid quality standards. If we sell it... we stand behind it!!!

Industries Served: • Recreational Vehicle • Marine Boatbuilders
• Cargo Trailers • Truck Equipment • Utility Boxes • Fenestration
• Clean Energy • Green Houses • Metal Buildings

LaVanture Products is proud to announce a new sealant line. The line includes Urethanes, MS polymers, Hybrids and Silicones. LaVanture has partnered with a number of high-quality manufacturers to provide great products at great prices.

We stock complete lines of high-quality EPDM Seals, Trim Seals, Edge Trims, Butyl Tapes, Caulks and Sealants.

PVC Foam and High Bond Tapes:
As the exclusive distributor of Gaska Tape products, we offer high density foam tapes, Hi-Bond tapes, vinyl glazing tape, and polyethylene foam tapes at competitive prices.

INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS
For Challenging Applications

Call for our new catalogs.

**LAVANTURE PRODUCTS, Post Office Box 2088,
Remington Industrial Park, 3806
Gallatin Way, Elkhart, IN 46515-2088
Phone: 800-348-7625, Fax: 800-348-7629
E-mail: sales@lavanture.com
www.lavanture.com | www.conspicuity.com**

