

by Dan Apple

Time for a Rat Killin'



Congratulations, you've arrived!

All of the hard work and sacrifice to start and manage your garage door dealership has paid off. Your business is profitable, you have a great team of employees and it seems that the hard part is over. Finally, you're ready for your investment to begin providing big dividends. You've run a tight ship and provided good service at a fair price for a very long time. You get great reviews from your customers and many are referring you to their friends and family. Life is good.

Time to spike the ball and do your touchdown dance, right? Then one day you get a call from one of your customers cancelling the service order they just placed telling you that ROA Garage Door Co. will take care of their problem for \$49.95 which is about ½ what you quoted them. Sound familiar? These folks are not legitimate competition. Rather they are con artists and they give our industry a black eye every single day. Your job as a professional garage door dealer is to fight these charlatans. But how? Well first you have to understand how this rat operates.

The Set Up

P. T. Barnum was credited with saying "there's a sucker born every minute". ROA Garage Door Co. is counting on it. By now we all know about the R.O.A.'s imbedded in the garage door industry and in many cases have a first hand



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understanding of how they operate. They are more interested in selling their "franchises" and pumping up garage door repair ticket prices than providing honest, reasonable service to their customers. Their misleading advertising and propensity to grossly overcharge unsuspecting homeowners for garage door service have gained national media attention. No matter how much their unethical practices have been placed in the spotlight by the media and the garage door industry, for some reason they're still here and keep turning up like a bad penny. Wouldn't you think consumers by now would have gotten the memo?

The Twist

By now you've figured out that my fictitious garage door company, ROA, stands for Rip Off Artists and not return on assets. That is the kindest term I can use in this forum. They are typically in the business of selling "franchises" to unsuspecting people looking for a new career with a business of their own and pony up large sums of money for their slice of the American pie. The innocent franchisees, often retired firemen or people on second careers, trust these scalawags to teach them the business and support them with advertising, material suppliers and training. Ah yes, training. In some cases two to three weeks of training. Training for minimal technical skills, training for

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product sales and training on how to extract an average "minimum" ticket for each and every service call of \$800 - \$1,000 and up. From the first day they are brainwashed into believing that if they respond to a broken spring service request, it is their duty to convince the customer to "overhaul" the garage door, providing all new hardware including rollers, bearings, cables, tubular shaft, hinges, etc. The thinking is that if the spring is 10 years old and worn out, then so are the rest of the mechanical components.

Since they typically recruit from outside of the industry, these franchisees are none the wiser and easily turn into disciples, especially when they see the dollars involved. In many cases the cost of a replacement garage door would be less! It's like taking your car to the shop for a tune up and the mechanic rebuilding the engine, charging you big bucks for each part used (and the labor) instead of a lump sum discounted price for a complete engine.

The Sting

You've heard or read about some of these outrageous goings on through articles previously published in this magazine and other industry trade journals. You've probably seen the video from NBC's Rosson Reports.

Well here's one more. A first hand account from one of my neighbors here in Southwest Florida. Last April my buddy Andy, knowing my garage door industry background, called me to ask what to do about his garage door opener that had died. He said that he'd already called a service company listed on Google but before he'd let them do the work he thought it would be wise to let me look over the estimate since it was way more than he had assumed it would be.

When I reviewed the estimate I was shocked. All that was needed was a replacement gear kit for the garage door opener. Considering my buddy as their prey, ROA Garage Door Co. quoted a price of \$905 which included the gear kit, new rollers and labor. To use a famous line from radio celebrity, Paul Harvey, here's "the rest of the story". I told my friend to contact the local IDEA accredited door dealer and not tell them what was wrong. By that afternoon the GDO's gear kit was replaced, the garage door was adjusted and lubricated and the total bill was \$165. Andy asked me why the ROA's price was so much higher, to which I replied... "because they can". Good guys 1, bad guys 0.



But how many times do unsuspecting homeowners get nailed by guys like ROA? I'm sorry to say that it is far too often.

Go to the Mattresses

So what can you do to fight the ROA's of the world? The short answer is, plenty. I advise my clients to do three things.

1. **Follow the Golden Rule.** You know, treat people as you wish to be treated. I'm sure you already do that.
2. **Always remember that the best defense is a good offense.** Attack! Go after this guy. Not by playing his game but by playing yours. What's his game? Deceive, cheat, steal...never mind your soul, never mind your fellow man, just maximize that ticket price regardless of what you have to do. What's your game? Provide great service at a good value, treating each customer as you would want to be treated. ROA has a "one and done" view of customers whereas you are trying to win customers for life.
3. **The third thing is to sound off.** Tell people about how your company does business. Contrast how you do business versus how ROA comes to market. I'm not saying to demonize the competition, just state the facts for the customer and let them choose who they want to hire to fix their garage door.

So when you have to mix it up with the ROA in your market you have to "go to the mattresses" to use Godfather vernacular. No, getting tough with this type of competition doesn't mean hiring Luca Brasi to rub them out. It means ratcheting up your sales and marketing weapons. As I said you need a better offense. Here are some things that will help you do this.

- **Develop the 3 main reasons customers should do business with your company** rather than ROA. An example would be:
 - Customer satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.
 - Free estimates before the work is done.
 - Locally owned and operated by the _____ family since _____.
- **Quote fixed, flat rate repair prices on common repairs** such as spring replacements, circuit board or gear kit replacement and garage door "tune up". ROA wants to do these piecemeal and pad that time and material bill as much as possible, charging for every nut, bolt, screw and squirt of lube.

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- **Include the garage door “tune up”** with fixed price repair jobs and GDO replacements. ROA always wants to charge a premium for those.
- **Provide your credentials straight up front.** Contractor’s license number, IDEA Accreditation, technician certification, IDA membership or whatever you have that will instill confidence in your customer that you are credible and trustworthy. The key here is to ask them if ROA is willing to provide similar information about their company. Think they’d be anxious to volunteer this information to a customer? Neither do I!
- **Encourage customers to ask for a quote BEFORE the work is done.** Most reputable dealers do this as standard practice since they try to minimize surprises with their customers when it comes to pricing.
- **Remind customers to ask companies like ROA to describe in detail what the \$49.95 “service call” covers.** That alone may give your customer pause when they hear the mumbo-jumbo response to that question. Remember, the \$49.95 is just the bait to get them in the door.
- **Use picture I.D. cards for all of your techs.** You are proud of your guys and want the customer to know the professional they are dealing with at their home. ROA wants to maintain a low profile in this regard. You can just imagine why, right?
- **Volunteer references.** Be prepared to offer references in your most popular zip codes of customers that have done business with your company for years. While many may use an Angie’s List review, Yelp or other website that offers customer comments about your business, it is still hard to beat talking to a live customer over the phone.
- **Provide “Good Will Service Calls”.** You dispatch a tech to an elderly lady’s home and discover that the problem is a simple push of the vacation switch button. Give her a pass, charge her nothing and write off the cost of the service call to a good will account in your marketing budget. It’ll pay big dividends in the future I assure. Plus it’s the right thing to do. ROA sees her as their prey and charges accordingly.
- **Shine a light on rats.** I’m in the process of trapping what we call “palm-rats” here in Florida. While they like lurking about in palm trees, hence the name, they’re pretty much the same rat as you know in your town. One thing about rats, they hate the light of day. They navigate in the darkness of night and are seldom seen in daylight. If you want rats to scatter, just shine a bright light on them and watch them run. The same applies to companies like

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ROA. Shine a light on the garage door rats! Expose them. Bring their practices out into the light of day. The bullet points listed above will help you do this. Encourage customers to help you. When they ask difficult questions to ROA, that shines a light on what they’re doing. If a customer is hung up on the \$49.95 come on, encourage them to contact two other local garage door companies for a comparison service rate quote. Most reasonable consumers will smell a rat when they discover they have two quotes close in price and one that is way low. While you do not want to give business to a competitor, your tactic is the honest way to help the customer navigate to the truth. And guess what? They’ll usually remember who helped steer them to this conclusion.

The Take Away

It does no good to sit around and gripe about the ROA’s of the world. There will always be some fly in the ointment. Some rat that needs “killin’” as we’d say in the south. Your job is to understand how they operate, contrast the way your company operates with theirs and guide the customer to an informed decision.

So stop complaining about ROA and start gaming them. Use their unscrupulous tactics against them. If you are smart and well practiced, they’ll never know what hit them. Just like the vermin I caught recently in my new rat trap!

So when it comes to fighting and winning against ROA Garage Door Co., your best defense is a good offense. The best news is that it will cost you only the time to develop and implement your strategy. You already have what you need to do this. *It’s time for a rat killin’.* Go and get them!



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