

## The ZERODRAFT Revolution

Wherever your work takes you in the home energy business it's more and more likely that you'll come across Zerodraft. At press time there were more than 50 weatherization installers who base their livelihoods in some way or another on Zerodraft. Almost half include the word in their company names.

Steve Tratt, Zerodraft National Sales Manager, says that the company was formed more than ten years ago. One of North America's pioneer air-sealing consulting/contracting Firms, Canam Building Envelope Specialists, wanted better support from materials manufacturers. After years of dissatisfaction and constant frustration, Canam decided to manufacture its own high-end weatherstripping products for a variety of retrofit window and door applications.

"Even worse than weatherstripping manufacturers," says Tony Woods, president of both Canam and Zerodraft, "were the suppliers of foam and other sealant products. "They completely failed to understand the market and to give any kind of support to their contractors. From the outset we realized that there could be a business opportunity to sell product to other contractors and created a brand identity. And so the Zerodraft name was born."

About four years ago, the product line expanded to include 1- and 2-component polyurethane foam sealants, a blower door, an air leakage detector (commonly known as the 'Smoke Puffer') and most recently, caulking.

"No matter how good the products are, it's not enough to help entrepreneurial contractors, especially small weatherization companies, build profitable businesses," says Tony Woods.

### A Complete Business Package

The answer was to create a ready-made business package, complete with training, not only for air sealing, but as Tony Woods describes it, "the critical 'House as a System' concept. All truly successful weatherization improvements are based on this approach." The company offers whole and half-day courses in 'House as a System'. No weatherization installer can become a Zerodraft Approved Applicator without participating. Three certification courses, *Certified Foam Sealant Technician*, *Certified Weatherstripping Technician* and *Certified Home Air Leakage Retrofit Estimator*, are currently being developed under contract with Natural Resources Canada. Each of these courses has *House as a System* as a prerequisite.

Tony and Steve decided to share everything they had learned about running a successful air sealing business with their new and prospective customers. They left nothing out. Zerodraft customers get an unparalleled package of marketing strategies, marketing and advertising materials, guidance on sales prospecting, writing sound engineering and business proposals, expanding into the commercial market and even, most importantly, how to close a deal. They also get field support, including Zerodraft's most experienced installers who work with them on their first job or two.

### **Feedback from the Field**

What do they say in the field? Sam Waterbury, co-owner of Zerodraft Building Envelope Specialists of Utica, New York, has a long history in construction, especially building science, and is doing his MBA. "As a business owner I enjoy no longer getting complaints from homeowners about work that 'doesn't work'," he says.

Anthony Marmo, owner of Clover Heating and Cooling, operating as Zerodraft of Metropolitan New York, is President of the Building Performance Contractors Association of New York. He praises Zerodraft for the technical and business support they give to help him run a good business making houses safer, more comfortable and energy efficient. His first introduction was at a Zerodraft training seminar held at the BASF Training Center in Hudson Falls, NY. Anthony says there are other places to get theoretical and even good practical training, but what is unique is the Zerodraft business package that helps him make sound proposals to home owners, with accurate costing.

Zerodraft trained qualified applicators are encouraged to expand their residential businesses out from single-family homes, first into multi-unit residential and then into commercial buildings. Sam Waterbury took that encouragement seriously and his company has just received a letter of intent from Atlantic Energy in Saratoga Springs, NY, for a 9-building retrofit of the Auburn School System. The project includes, among other things, complete air sealing and weatherstripping retrofit of roof-mounted HVAC, roof/wall intersections, commercial doors and windows.

Concerned about the number of roof failures, roofing contractor Mike Montaldi of Buffalo, NY decided to look to building science for the answer, found Zerodraft and attended the two-day introductory training course in Mississauga, Ontario. He now addresses not just the roof, but also the whole house—solving problems from mold and mildew to ice dams. He recently named his weatherization division Zerodraft of Western New York.

"Anyone can buy our product," says Steve Tratt, "but no-one is going to build a big air sealing business without a comprehensive support package. All of our customers are encouraged to take advantage of the training. Their business success means more sales for us and more credibility for the brand. One feeds the other."

Zerodraft offers all contractors using its products a free customizable web page. Many small firms use this storefront as a way of educating their customers; their own local home page links directly to the detailed technical material available on [www.zerodraft.com](http://www.zerodraft.com).

### **Matching the Market**

If you've ever invested, you know about market timing. Marketing professionals understand the concept: satisfy a need better than anyone else, and if the need doesn't seem to exist, create it in the minds of your target audience.

The President's National Energy Plan recommended funding increases for WAP of \$\$1.4 billion over the next 10 years to help weatherize 1.2 million homes or close to 2 percent of

total dwellings. Canada, which is a signatory to Kyoto, is planning incentives to stimulate energy-saving measures in all types of building.

DOE calculates that for every dollar spent on weatherization, the first simple return on investment is \$1.30 in energy cost savings over the life of the weatherized home. Other financial benefits include increased housing affordability, increased property values, job creation and lower owner and renter turnover. Zerodraft believes that this business case applies not only to low-income homes, but also to the other 98 percent of the population who can better afford to pay for their own weatherization. It also applies to non-residential buildings.

The business case for better weatherization in all types of buildings continues to build. For example, Zerodraft applicators are learning as part of their ongoing training courses that rapid smoke spread is the cause of most high-rise fire fatalities. They also learn that air sealing in high rises slows smoke spread and saves lives.

Doug Anderson of the Environmental Protection Agency's ENERGY STAR Program sees Zerodraft as helping to promote the weatherization concept and the business opportunity of envelope improvement in the retrofit marketplace. "This is the type of private sector organization that is very much in line with the ENERGY STAR Home Sealing concept and our efforts to grow the contractor base with a successful business model."

Helen Perrine, Chair of Affordable Comfort, makes an interesting observation. "I believe Zerodraft has been able to take the complexities of building science and create a product and process that helps people get to work without a lot of worry and study about the theory, but still respect the physics. The reality we all face is that contractors need to make money. Zerodraft looks like the kind of business opportunity that can be grasped quickly and easily, but still has integrity."

Improving building performance is a key theme that the Zerodraft team stresses constantly. Jim Fitzgerald, President of the Building Performance Institute (BPI) says "I've traveled as a consultant through 40 states and three provinces trying to get better housing performance by integrating air sealing into the construction process and finding people to do the work. I've struggled with the difference between what's available from the manufacturer, what the builder can actually do and what's deliverable in the real world.

"For the first time, to my knowledge, thanks to Zerodraft, we have actual complete air sealing able to be delivered in the location it's needed by people who are qualified and able to do it. Zerodraft allows you to give the homeowner the option of quality. As a contractor, or a building performance person, you can be more confident that the problems of inappropriate transportation of air heat and moisture are finally solved. "

Before Zerodraft arrived on the scene, many of the approved applicators would have turned down invitations from business and design groups to make technical presentations, because they did not feel confident in their abilities. Now, Zerodraft technical personnel fly in and co-present with the approved applicator. The result is usually a satisfied audience and an entrepreneur who feels confident enough to 'go it alone' next time.