

The January 2023 Network™ News

AMERICA'S WINDOW COVERING BUYING NETWORK

2023

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Member Spotlight

Maryanne Nowacki | Accent on Windows | Williamsville, NY

Maryanne Nowacki is the owner of Accent on Windows in Williamsville, NY. She has been in business almost 26 years and has been a Network member since 2018.

Tell us about how you got started in the window coverings business.

I started in the industry in a very unusual way. I was an English teacher before I had children and then a stay-at-home mom for several years. I went back to work after a divorce, selling office supplies and furniture. After working in sales, I became a headhunter. I really loved the counseling aspect of that work, so I went back to school and got my master's degree in counseling.

After I remarried, we moved from the Buffalo area to Massachusetts. I got a job working for the state in the unemployment field. I was managing an outplacement center for professionals needing to change careers. As part of the work there, I took this free college course, something about "The Empowered Employee." The course focused on helping job changers explore what they most wanted to do. It was totally unexpected, but I realized that I loved decorating and loved window treatments — my mother always had the big drapery look in our home — I was fascinated by that. I've always loved fabrics and sewing, too, including making clothes. I was even sewing draperies for our home.

I told a friend of mine back in Buffalo that I was thinking of changing careers. I knew that a great way to do that would be to shadow someone. My friend put me in touch with a woman who had her own business. This woman, Karen, was going to be moving down to Florida when her house sold, but she offered to teach me the business in the meantime if I moved to Buffalo! So, I told my husband that I wanted to leave Massachusetts, move back to Buffalo, and start a window treatment business! Of course, he thought I was out of my mind to do this, but for some reason, he agreed, but only if he could find a job that would handle our move.

So much was serendipitous. My husband found a new job, the company moved us, and Karen's house didn't sell for a year while she trained me on the business. When I started, I knew nothing about blinds and shades. I'd never even heard of Hunter Douglas, I thought they were a fan company. But I did love fabric! I thought, when I go out on my own, I'll make my customers' drapes. I quickly learned that there was no way I was going to do that and make

money! Karen introduced me to the local rep from Lafayette Venetian Blind, to a local workroom, and to drapery hardware companies. She worked with me for almost a year. Then in March of 1997, I had my business name and got started on my own. So many things were a matter of fate and good fortune. That's my story!

What products do you sell and what trends are you seeing in your market?

I focus on the residential market primarily — blinds, shades, and drapery — although I do some smaller commercial jobs, like car dealerships, our city hall, and the board of education buildings.

The staple product in this market has always been honeycomb shades. I used to sell a lot of the 3/8" size, but we've moved mostly into the larger sizes. Top-down-bottom-up and, of course, cordless and motorization have become very popular. I'm always talking about the R-values — insulation. Wood blinds are a little less popular because people want something they can raise off the window for the view. I do very few shutters.

The trend now has been "less is more" in soft fashions even though I love styles with all the dressmaker details, like welts and buttons and multiple fabrics on one treatment. Unfortunately, we don't get many calls for that anymore. Roman shades are timeless, cornices are timeless. Sheers are coming back, with a roller shade for privacy. Stationary panels are big. We do a lot of lined drapes, too. Insulating values are important in the Northeast!

How do you handle installation?

When I started, my husband was my installer. We did it together. He would schedule the install and report back if I had done anything wrong! I learned always to bring brackets with me to confirm mounting depth. After my husband passed away, I used a contract installer for a time. My son was a backup before — now he's my primary installer.

What marketing has been most effective for your business?

When I started, we did the home show for a number of years. We developed a huge base of clients. The home shows could generate five appointments a day! I'd be gone from 8 in the morning to 10 at night. I've cut back

on that level of work! Right now, it's mostly repeat and referral business – word of mouth. That is still the main source of leads for me – referrals. I'm doing business with people who I first saw when their kids were in highchairs – now they're out of college! I have a large network of customers and friends that call me and refer me.

Tell us about the Network vendors that you use.

Lafayette is a primary vendor for me. I was initially apprehensive about joining the Network, but my rep told me he had lots of customers that were members. I trusted him, and I haven't looked back – for a bunch of reasons! First of course, the discounts and promotions. I also love the magazine. I even picked out one of the paint colors in a recent feature for my bedroom! It helps me follow trends.

I like the Lafayette drapery program. About 10 years ago, I downsized to a townhouse, so I got rid of some of my fabric lines and books. I needed to consolidate. I like that I can go to Lafayette's materials library and plug in colors and search for what I need.

I've been selling the Somfy motorization through Lafayette as well – I've been keeping track for the spiffs they're running now!

When I started with The Network, I was primarily focused on the discount and promotions. But I've found through the webinars and newsletter about other great opportunities like JF Fabrics and RM COCO. It's good to have options!

What are some challenges you've encountered?

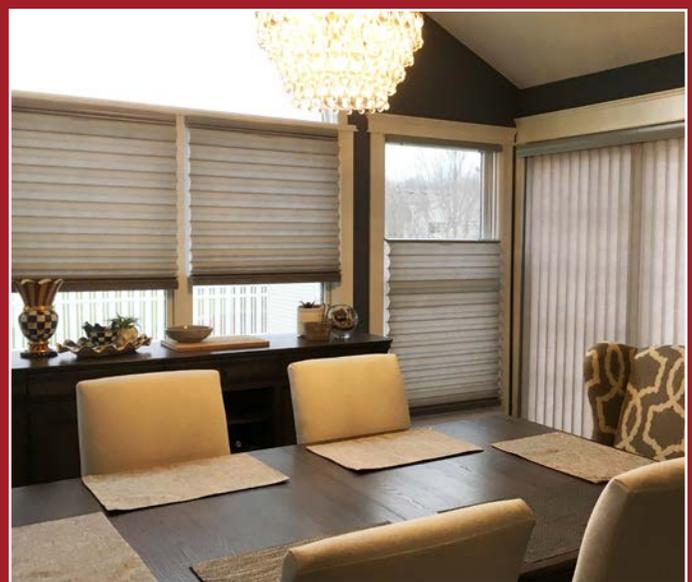
Always listen carefully to your customer and build a good rapport with them. I listen to the customer. I don't try to talk the customer into something they're not interested in getting. That could be my counseling background, listen to what the customer wants, observe what's going on in the house.

For my business, service sets me apart. I keep every one of my client file folders. If someone needs a repair or a part, I'll try to fix it or give a referral or advice. I really like to help people – that's what I'm here for! And when I leave the customer's house, I want to know that they're happy, that I've helped them in some way, whether I could sell them or not.

From day one, every customer that I called on has gotten a handwritten thank you note. I still do it. I remember getting a call from a customer I saw years before – she still had my note, she kept it. I want my customers to know I have a relationship with them. That's how I built my business, through relationships. I don't have a storefront; I work out of my home. Maybe if I were to do it over again, I might have a store, but I might not be able to be as involved as I am now.

I have no regrets. I have loved this business – sometimes I don't love it as much ... [laughs]. But it has been good, and I hope to do it for more years ahead. ■

Completed Installations



*To learn more about Accent on Windows,
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