

STATS, LIES AND CLEVER QUESTIONING

Bill Kenyon and Neil Sarsfield, part of a team of technical support engineers at Ultraframe, share their experiences of the conservatory industry.

No doubt most people have heard of the famous quotation by Benjamin Disraeli, a former prime minister, "There are lies, damn lies and statistics". Essentially, it is concerned with the accurate collection and presentation of facts. In dealings with queries and questions from installation companies, we have to obtain the facts before we can offer advice and instruction. However, whilst this sounds easy in principle, in practice it is more difficult.

On the occasion that we are approached the installation problem has often escalated - the homeowner may be holding back a cheque following previously unsuccessful attempts to remedy the perceived problem. It is in these highly charged and emotional circumstances that establishing the facts becomes vital in ensuring a speedy and effective response.

Clearly call backs are something that all in the industry wish to avoid as they eat into the installers profit margins. Moreover, self employed fitters may be tempted by a "quick fix" when a more long term, permanent solution is called for.

When an installation problem occurs, it is usually the homeowner/client who will call the installation manager and attempt to describe the potential problem. Probing questions at this stage will enable the scene to be set, clearly and accurately. The next stage is for the installation manager to question the fitters on what has occurred - in many respects this is the most critical stage. Careful prompting and probing is necessary to tease out the exact story of what has occurred. It may be more accurate to ask the fitter what hasn't happened. Try to ask open ended questions, ones that can't easily be brushed off with a Yes or No answer. Questions starting "How, why what,

when, where" elicit more detailed answers. Spending time at this stage collecting the facts will reap dividends in that a more detailed brief passed onto Ultraframe will enable a more accurate first time technical solution to be proposed.

Unfortunately, all too often when a solution has been proposed it proves embarrassing to the installation manager that the fitters have been economical with the facts i.e. left something out which usually means further wasted visits to site.

Our team of 4 dedicated technical support engineers are there purely to offer advice and guidance and maximising the effectiveness of this team depends upon the accuracy of the information supplied - the old adage "rubbish in - rubbish out" quite clearly applies.

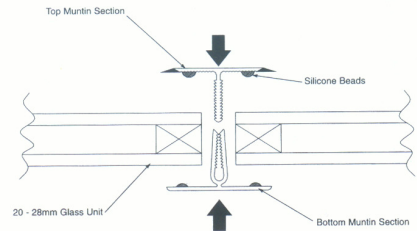
Problem solving on site - Case Study

- A site meeting was called on a commercial project that was to include 12 people - main contractors, architects, QS, client - to resolve a problem that had proven difficult to resolve. Needless to say, the situation was highly charged and solicitors were in the wings.

- The call to Ultraframe was taken from the Installation Manager who assured us his fitter was beyond reproach, had done everything by the book but couldn't give details of what remedial work had been carried out. In all the fitter had visited site 4 times!

- Ultraframe's technical support team then spoke to the fitter direct. After careful probing it was found that a critical component in this large roof, namely a muntin bar joining two large double glazed units, had not been properly installed using silicone beads in the unit which needed to be applied before the double glazed units were pushed home. It was found that the fitter had, on subsequent remedial visits, simply siliconed the surface of the joint, which continually broke down in the weeks that followed.

- In conclusion, the cost of undertaking corrective action was never going to be cheap because of the size of the roof the requirements for scaffolding. However, by failing to investigate properly at the initial stages, additional costs were incurred and, more importantly, goodwill between the installer and his client was damaged beyond repair.



Typical Questioning Sequence

Prefab or bar length?
Date installed?
Order No?
Size and shape of roof?
Who has installed it?
Have you seen the installation?
Who has seen the installation?
Were you there when it was fitted?
Confirm the line of communication

Type of ridge - MK 2,3,4?
Length of ridge?
How many sections did the ridge cap come in?

What exactly is the problem?
When was it first reported to you?

What is the ridge connected to at the back?
What material have they used to flash with - lead / flashband / silicone?
Have you used the pre-supplied flashing trim?

What solution have you proposed to date?
What have you done to test your solution?

