FEDERATION OF MASTER BUILDERS

Campaigns Participation Pack

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Introduction

The construction industry is vital to the overall competitiveness of the UK economy. Nearly 300,000 companies including many small and medium sized family and local businesses are connected to the industry which employs almost three million people, representing around 9% of UK employment.

The construction industry is also an important driver of growth for other sectors without which there would be a loss of domestic production, capacity and skills. The industry is worth around £124 billion per annum and contributes between 8 and 10% of the UK's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Small and Medium sized businesses are the backbone of the construction industry with some 95% of all construction companies employing fewer than 50 people.

Despite its importance to the UK, the construction industry has suffered over the last few years and many companies are still struggling to survive. Belonging to the Federation of Master Builders (FMB), the largest trade association in the UK building industry, can help your company in many ways; from help lines to job leads but also by getting your voice heard by decision makers. The FMB makes sure its members' interests are represented at every level of decision making, but you can make a real difference by getting involved too.

The FMB's participation pack has been designed to help members who want to get more involved in the FMB's campaigning and lobbying activities. It also contains information on publicising your campaigning and lobbying work as well as how to make the most of online communications.

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FMB Campaigns

The FMB campaigns continually on behalf of its members to try and establish the best policy environment for their businesses. Here is an overview of some our long-running campaigns.

Building a Greener Britain

The FMB's Building a Greener Britain campaign aims to get everyone thinking about how to cut carbon from the built environment in order to move towards a greener, more energy efficient Britain. The campaign sets out to encourage all those in the building sector, customers, opinion formers and the Government to do all they can to transform our existing building stock.

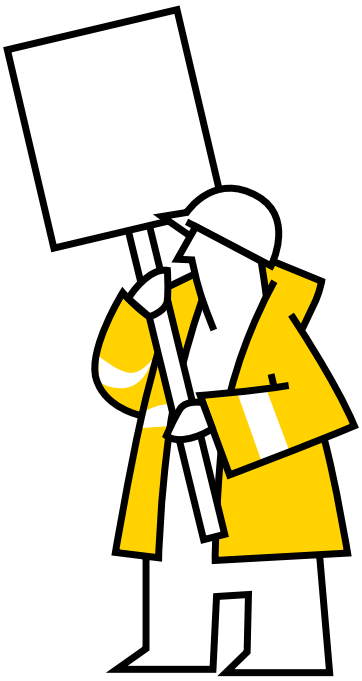
The FMB is working with politicians, officials and industry professionals to present a series of practical policy recommendations aimed at the Government, which will help encourage households and businesses to make their buildings greener.

For more information on Building a Greener Britain please visit: www.buildingagreenerbritain.org.uk

Cut the VAT

The FMB leads the Cut the VAT Coalition, which believes that reducing VAT from 20% to 5% for all domestic repair, maintenance and home improvement work would create thousands of jobs and help the Government achieve its target of cutting carbon emissions by 80% by 2050. It would also benefit millions of UK homeowners and small businesses by helping to eliminate cowboy builders, help those who cannot afford vital repairs to their homes, bring our empty properties back into use and reduce full poverty.

For more information on Cut the VAT please visit: www.cutthevat.co.uk



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Get Britain Building

Get Britain Building is calling for the creation of a new business environment to help the UK construction industry thrive and prosper even through difficult times. Get Britain Building has developed a ten point plan which it believes will help the British construction sector survive the recession. You can also watch the Get Britain Building campaign film on the website http://www.getbritainbuilding.org/video.asp. Get Britain Building is supported by a coalition of organisations including the FMB.

For more information please visit: www.getbritainbuilding.org

The Cross-Industry Construction Apprenticeship Task Force

The Cross-Industry Construction Apprenticeship Task Force (CCATF) is a campaign to increase the number of construction apprenticeships. It is a cross-industry initiative designed to engage with employers and the Government in order to increase this vital investment in the future of the industry. Since December 2007 the CCATF has adopted a two-pronged approach: first, to encourage more employers to take on apprentices and second to influence government policy to ensure the best environment for construction apprenticeship training is created.

For more information please visit: www.ccatf.org.uk

Nail the rogues

The FMB has linked up with Trading Standards to advise consumers on how they can avoid being ripped off by rogue traders. Through the Nail the Rogues campaign homeowners can find help and advice for spotting and avoiding rogue traders as well as advice about finding a reputable builder. Homeowners can also visit the Nail the Rogues website to order free door stickers to help keep rogue traders away.

For more information please visit: www.nailtherogues.org.uk

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Lobbying

Lobbying usually means trying to influence those responsible for making the rules. MPs and government ministers are the people most commonly lobbied because they tend make the decisions that have the biggest impact, but you can lobby anyone responsible for making a decision that affects you.

Why should I bother?

It's important to have your say. The FMB will keep MPs abreast of all the issues of importance to its members, but direct and personal contact between constituents and MPs at a local level can be even more effective. Also, the more an MP hears about an issue, the more likely they are to take action.

MPs have direct access to government ministers. They can influence a change to the status quo, or offer up a bright idea for ministers to introduce. Even if the MP does not agree with your point of view, they will still write to the relevant minister on your behalf and forward on the reply. If the Government disagrees, MPs are very good at raising the public profile of an issue and gathering much wider support through the media or during debates.

It's so easy. The FMB will provide template letters or emails on the major issues for you to personalise, and even if your concern is specific we can help you to write something or come along to a meeting with you.

How do I get in touch?

MPs have strict rules about only talking to their constituents and no one else's. The easiest way to find out the name of your MP is online: http://findyourmp.parliament.uk, or you can call the House of Commons Switchboard on 020 7219 3000.

All MPs have contact details on their website, or you can try the local telephone directory.

Letters and emails work very well. MPs will often assume that a large number of other constituents share the same concern, even if they only receive one letter on the issue.

Most MPs hold surgeries for constituents on Fridays, and sometimes on Saturdays. Call the office to find out details or to arrange a specific meeting.

Don't forget! If you do arrange a meeting with your MP, tell us. We can provide helpful advice, and briefing materials if you want them.

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How do I know my MP will be interested?

MPs are not experts in every area of policy, even ministers often don't know as much as the people actually affected by their decisions day to day. This is why governments rely on organisations with specialist knowledge like the FMB to help them make the best policy decisions.

Your MP could learn a lot very quickly about running a construction business from a short conversation with you, which will help them when they need to speak in a debate or respond to another constituent's query.

MPs need the support of their constituents, and the support of local employers is even more important. When you contact your MP be very clear that you are a constituent and make sure the MP has your contact details so they can reply. Always speak directly from your own experience and remember your MP is likely to be sympathetic to some extent because you provide jobs for their voters, or potential voters!

It is worth finding out about your MP's specific interests, usually by visiting their website. Are they a government minister? Or a do they hold a position in an opposition party, often called a 'shadow minister'? Do they sit on any committees?

Always be specific. Make sure the MP knows exactly what you are asking for. MPs will listen to problems, but if you think you have a solution this will make it much easier for the MP to take action.

What about devolved government?

Many issues related to housing, planning, skills and education are now decided by the devolved institutions representing Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Even if an issue is still the responsibility of politicians in Westminster, members of the devolved institutions can help you to raise awareness and gain publicity. So find out who your local politicians are and talk to them too.

Even if you don't feel like getting in touch with an MP or a minister personally, remember to tell us about your frustrations. Email us at externalaffairs@fmb.org.uk or call 020 7092 3887.

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Publicity

If your company is going to get involved in campaigning and lobbying you'll want other people to know about it, especially if you can convince them to add their support. The easiest way to do this is through your local media. It's also a good way to raise awareness of your company at virtually no cost. Local media are usually keen to cover local stories, especially when there is an MP involved or a more national or even international element to your story. So how do you go about contacting the media and getting them to cover your story?

Who to contact

- To start with you'll need a good knowledge of your local newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations and programmes as well as websites. Read, listen or watch them. Find out when they are published or broadcast.
- Think about which programmes and publications would be interested in your story.
- Then find the names of relevant journalists and producers. For example, if you think your local newspaper would be interested in your story find out the name of the journalist that looks after your area. Find their contact details by reading the publication; looking at the publication, programme or station's website; or by calling directly.

How to contact

- Most journalists these days prefer to be contacted by email. So drop them an email introducing yourself and your company. If you can afford to and think you'll attempt to get stories published regularly you might like to arrange to meet with the journalist or producer; an offer of a drink or food usually goes down well!
- If there is no reply to your email don't be offended or give up; journalists are usually very busy and get hundreds of emails a day. Besides they may not have received the email.
- The next step is to call them. Introduce yourself, your company and the FMB. Explain a bit about the campaign or lobbying work you are doing. It can be helpful to have a script at the ready if you think you will get tongue tied or forget important elements.
- Once you have made contact it will help in ensuring coverage of your stories. But as with all relationships you can't let it go stale. Remember to keep in contact and send them your news but don't harass them or contact them too often or they will get fed up and stop reading your emails or taking your calls.

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Writing a press release

The point of a press release is to pass on news. Your story must be newsworthy and timely. This can be difficult as what is interesting to you may not be to other people. Try to put yourself in other people's shoes when deciding what to write or indeed whether to write it at all.

Your press release must address these questions: who, what, where, when and why?

When writing your press releases you should try to write as a journalist would – stick to the facts, don't use fluff or jargon. This will also give it more chance of being covered. Your press release should be simple and plain; use a basic font such as Arial or Times New Roman. Try to keep your press release to one page.

Most press releases follow a similar structure, this helps journalists understand the story quickly. Remember journalists see many press releases every day and will probably make a decision on whether to cover yours by the time they have finished reading the first paragraph. The format to follow is:

Headline - This should be clear, bold and in the centre of the page. It should be short but make clear what the release is about. Avoid using humour as it's very subjective and difficult to get right.

Date and for immediate release - This lets journalists know that it's a new story and that they can use it as soon as they want.

Body - This is where you explain the story, including addressing the Who, what, where, when and why questions. Keep it concise and clear.

Quote - You can add a quote to give your press release further authority. The quote should be from someone directly involved with the story and should add to the story, not repeat it. Make sure you include full name details for the quote along with their connection to the story. Most importantly make sure you get their permission to be quoted in the press release.

ENDS - At the end of your release write ENDS so the journalist knows the story has finished.

Notes to editors - If you need clarify anything from the story or add extra information or sources add it to the notes to editors. Also make sure you add your contact details in case the journalist wants more information etc.

Finally, make sure you spell check your press release but remember nothing beats having it proof read. Proof read it yourself then ask someone else to proof read it too.

Then when you are happy with the press release use your database of local journalists and send the press release by email to each of them.

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Communicating online

Getting the most from your company website

Your company website is the modern equivalent of a shop window; it displays your wares and provides potential clients and other interested parties with a way to contact you. Your website does not need to be very flashy, sometimes simpler is better.

The main things your website should contain are your company contact details and information. Things like a gallery and news sections can also be useful. Adding a links page or linking to other websites can also help with your Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) too.

SEO is one of the most effective methods of marketing for anyone who wants to build their business. SEO can give your company the competitive edge by ensuring that it appears on the search results page when a potential customer looks for tradesmen in their area. Your website designer should be able to advise you on the best way to optimise your website for search engines. If you have a small site it may only amount to some minor work.

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Getting the most from social media

Using social media can be another good way to reach potential clients and other interested parties as well as publicising your involvement in the FMB's campaigns and your own lobbying activities. Plus social media is free to use!

Twitter

Use Twitter to create short updates (of up to 140 characters) about your company, the services you offer, projects your company is working on, your lobbying activities and your involvement in FMB campaigns. You can also retweet the FMB's news etc. You might find Twitter can help you reach potential clients, or other useful contacts.

Facebook

You can use Facebook to create a fan page for your company and get previous clients to 'like' you, they can also use it to leave testimonials. You can also use it as a gallery facility to show photos of your previous works (remember not to reveal too much about clients' details, it may be worth asking their permission before adding photos too). You can even link your Facebook page to Twitter so that your tweets automatically update your Facebook status. Facebook also has useful analytics tool which can show you how many people have viewed your page and provide other helpful feedback.

YouTube and Flickr

You can use these to create photo galleries and videos of projects. You can then link these to your Facebook page and website. You will of course need the equipment to be able to film the videos and take the photos but many modern digital cameras can do all of this.

Twibbons

Show your support for FMB campaigns by using a twibbon. Twibbons are badges which can be 'pinned' to a Twitter and/or Facebook picture to show support for a cause. From time to time we will create Twibbons for FMB campaigns. When we do please show your support by adding the Twibbon to your profile picture.

Useful links

FMB campaigns: www.fmb.org.uk/news/campaigns

Find out how Parliament works: www.parliament.uk

Set up an email alert to keep track of what your MP is saying and doing: www.theyworkforyou.com

News and tips from the PR and lobbying world: www.prweek.com/uk

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR): the professional body for the public relations industry. It also runs useful courses on media relations and communications. www.cipr.co.uk

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