

# WOOD AND FIBER SCIENCE

JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY OF WOOD SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

VOLUME 39

OCTOBER 2007

NUMBER 4

## “SELLING” THE SOCIETY OF WOOD SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY TO STUDENTS

A web-based SWST Student Survey was conducted in January–February, 2007 resulting in 116 undergraduate and 88 graduate student responses from 18 U.S. and 3 Canadian universities.<sup>1</sup> The respondent profile is as follows: 85 percent male; mean age of 25 years; median age of 23 years; 76 percent wood products majors; 14 percent forestry majors; and 10 percent “other” (includes wildlife, construction management, engineering, etc.). Only 9 percent of the 204 respondents are current members of SWST, and an additional 10 percent have never been a member and are not interested in the Society. However, over three-quarters of respondents (n = 154) have never been a member of SWST, but are interested in learning more about the Society.

With regard to SWST services, 77 percent of respondents have never used the SWST web site and 62 percent (n = 124) are not aware of the SWST web site. Further, 72 percent of respondents are not aware of the SWST Annual Meeting, but 59 percent would be interested in learning more about this venue. And 57 percent of responding students (including 31 percent of graduate students) are not aware of *Wood and Fiber Science*.

When asked the two most important issues facing the profession of Wood Science and Technology today, the six most common student

responses were as follows: need for innovation/R&D/new products (n = 39); environmental issues (n = 33); international competition (n = 33); declining interest in the field (n = 20); wood utilization (n = 19); and diminishing wood supply (n = 17). Students said that the three best things about SWST included: information dissemination (n = 34); networking (n = 19); and R&D (n = 12).

What does this tell us? First and foremost, the survey results suggest a lack of awareness of the existence and benefits of SWST. What can we do about it?

Well, to begin with, we can simply educate our students about the features, advantages, and benefits (or FAB) of the SWST. In my Wood Products Sales and Sales Management class, we use the FAB selling technique, as outlined by Charles Futrell in his excellent “Fundamentals of Selling” textbook, for our mock sales class presentations. Futrell calls it the **SELL SEQUENCE** whereby the salesperson shows the **Feature** (physical characteristics), explains the **Advantage** (performance characteristics), which leads into the **Benefit** (results from an advantage), and then lets the customer talk by asking a follow-up question about the benefit (referred to as a Trial Close).

**Features** may include the journal *Wood and Fiber Science*, the SWST Newsletter, our student poster contest opportunities, and the SWST web site *Member Section* benefits. **Advantages** could be the enhanced knowledge and technical skills student members obtain in a variety of disciplines as a result of membership. Other advantages might include the outstanding interna-

<sup>1</sup> For the complete *Summary Report*, please see the SWST website [www.swst.org](http://www.swst.org) under “Publications”; “Student Survey–2007”: Smith, M. T. and P. M. Smith, 2007. SWST Student Survey Summary Report, February, 2007. 11 pps.

tional network of government and industrial wood scientists and technologists our students are exposed to in our academic programs and technical meetings. Or perhaps even the advantageous level of respect and credibility one gains through SWST membership. **Benefits** for students may include getting a good job offer and/or a great career advancement opportunity (resulting from the knowledge, network, credential, respect, and credibility), or being able to articulate an environmental position at a social gathering from a scientific position vs. an emotional or media sound bite perspective—and impressing your friends and acquaintances! And finally, the **Trial Close** may involve follow-up questions to students such as: What do you think? Is this important to you? Do you want a career with

opportunities for advancement, good pay, and/or great location? Do you want to know more about the incredible, natural, renewable, recyclable world of wood?

Have we in the wood science and technology profession ever really considered the Features, Advantages, and Benefits of our product—the SWST? Perhaps it is time for all of us to consider the **FABulous** nature of our Society so that we are better prepared to **SELL** it to our current and prospective students.

PAUL M. SMITH

*Professor of Forest Products Marketing  
Pennsylvania State University  
University Park, PA*