

# Innovative Ideas in the Digital Marketing of Hot-Dip Galvanized Steel

## **Overview**

Digital marketing of hot-dip galvanized steel is not just a way to avoid costly printing of newsletters, magazines, and educational publications. It delivers information to architects, engineers, and specifiers in a format they are comfortable with, at the speed they expect, and in a way with virtually no negative impact on the physical environment. It is the American Galvanizers Association (AGA) contention the millennial generation, i.e. future specifiers, absolutely demands information this way and the baby boomers are quickly adapting to it.

Just as no one marketing outlet or medium in the 90's and first decade of this millennium was adequate to implement a successful messaging strategy, so too in 2015 a multi-faceted digital strategy is required to reach the chain of influencers involved in the decision-making process whether to utilize hot-dip galvanizing or some other corrosion protection system. This paper will identify the many digital communication methods the AGA uses to market hot-dip galvanized steel and how they are all integrated to capture the broadest audience of specifiers.

## **Objective of AGA Digital Marketing**

The third major revision to the AGA web site since 2005 was launched in October of 2013 specifically to have a responsive site, i.e. it reacts to whatever device (laptop, smart phone, I-pad) the user may have. Containing more than 1000 distinct pages, the web site ([www.galvanizeit.org](http://www.galvanizeit.org)) is comprehensive and the core of our communication strategy with both AGA members and the primary target audience of architects and engineers (A&Es). The objective of all other digital activities is to catch the attention of the viewer, provide basic information to satisfy initial inquires about hot-dip galvanized steel (HDG), and ultimately drive traffic to the web site where the viewer has access to information to answer most pertinent questions about design, specifications, fabrication, and performance.

## **Digital Marketing Initiatives**

Many of the initiatives described below are extensions of or an evolution from the traditional and very important marketing efforts employed by AGA and most of galvanizing associations around the world for the past several decades. Those traditional efforts such as in-person seminars, printed newsletters, trade show exhibits, and telephone/email communications are still critical elements of the marketing plan, but as time goes on they are waning in importance, feasibility, or effectiveness.

## Digital Publications Online

All AGA publications to assist A&Es to better understand performance, design and fabrication issues, inspection, and specifications are available online via the AGA web

## American Galvanizers Association

The AGA is a non-profit trade association dedicated to serving the needs of after-fabrication galvanizers, fabricators, architects, specifiers, and engineers. The AGA provides technical support on today's innovative applications and state-of-the-art technological developments in hot-dip galvanizing for corrosion control.

Find a Galvanizer

State or Province

site. These publications are free of charge and although this has meant a decrease of approximately \$20,000 in revenue each year (galvanizers purchase the publications and distribute them to A&Es), the manual distribution by AGA member galvanizers of 25,000 copies per year is dwarfed by the downloading of 60,000 – 80,000 per month of just the top five publications. It is important to note, millennials don't purchase information; they expect it to be free and they demand it be readily available on their mobile devices. The top five publications will continue to be professionally printed for those galvanizer members that like to have something to give to A&Es and fabricators, and for those A&Es of the baby boomer generation (born between 1948 – 1962) that still like to have a hard copy of information. The balance of the 50 different publications will be available in print until inventory is depleted.

Recognizing the global nature of commerce and the close proximity of French and Spanish speaking cultures in Quebec, Canada and Mexico, respectively, AGA is gradually having key publications translated. As it turns out this has led to additional web site traffic from Latin and South America – all beneficial to global awareness of HDG steel.

### Web Site News Postings

On weekly basis relevant articles about new uses for HDG steel, developments in process technology, healthy zinc metal, completed projects, and other pertinent industry news are posted to the AGA web site. Coming up with new articles is a challenging task for the AGA staff, but this regular posting improves site traffic. It also helps the all-important search engines such as Google, Yahoo, and Bing rank the AGA website as the authority on the subject. This ultimately means AGA is the number one site listed for many topics related to HDG and corrosion protection systems.

### Social Media Visibility

The AGA is present on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Posts to these social media outlets encourage visitors to visit the AGA web site. These visitors represent nearly 1% of the average 45,000 visitors each month. In addition, AGA technical staff engages in a discussion group on LinkedIn where galvanizers exchange ideas and pose questions regarding process improvement.

### Webinars of the *Galvanize It!* seminar

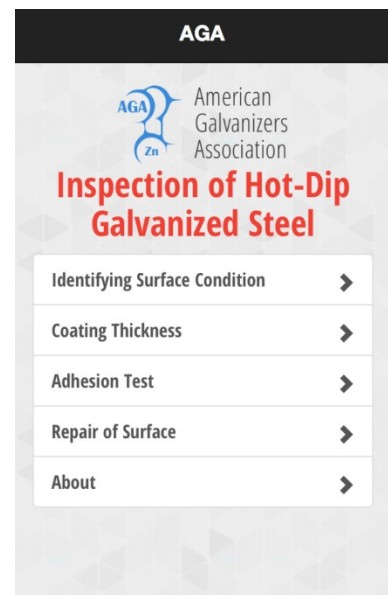
It is very difficult for an association staff of eight people to provide in-person seminars over the expanse of North America and so about ten years ago a concerted effort was made to train the galvanizer personnel to do this in their local geographic area. Not only did this offload this important marketing activity to members, but it freed up staff time to develop webinar content and promote monthly webinars to A&Es who prefer to learn at their desk as opposed to a conference room. Webinars allow AGA staff to reach remote areas of the country and educate hundreds of people from many different companies. A key element of the webinar is it is certified by the agencies providing the continuing education credits necessary for A&Es to maintain their professional license. The webinars offered include the Core (Galvanizing 101), Design, Sustainability, and three directed at the specific markets of Power, Transportation, and Parking Structures. Several thousand individual A&Es participate each year. In addition to the availability of the live webinars on these topics, the material can be viewed online in a course to be taken at any time. This flexibility has increased the number of overall participants significantly over the past few years.

Plans are in development for webinar content specifically for AGA members. Topic areas include environmental reporting/compliance, safety, and kettle chemistry.

### Online/Print Advertisement

About 5% of the AGA budget is spent traditionally to advertise in key publications read by the A&E community. Different themes have been used in the campaigns run over the past 8 years and each has had varying effectiveness. The ads are different from traditional advertising in that they are actionable. They include a QR code and a link to a specific landing page on the AGA web site. Each landing page gives the reader

specific options depending on the intent of the ad, (promotion of the seminar program, life-cycle cost calculator information, etc.) and allows for tracking of the source and total number of responses to the actionable advertisement. The current “I Galvanize Because” campaign where specifiers of HDG projects provide testimonials has been the most effective so far and includes the same elements all the past campaigns have used. Banner ads and e-sources have also proven very effective in driving traffic to the AGA website where specifiers can find more information regarding seminars, galvanizer locations, etc.



### SEO Investment

In 2011 and again in 2013, AGA contracted with a consultant to improve the site rankings amongst search engines. This search engine optimization (SEO) involved modifying content to use virtually all keywords A&Es might use to look for HDG. It involved linking content within the site and some “magic” known only to those experienced in SEO. This elevated the AGA site to “authority” status for many new search terms while maintaining authority status for many other search terms, meaning the site is listed first or at least on the first page of most search engine lists when information revolving around galvanizing is searched for. In addition to this effort, AGA designs and develops all digital initiatives to comply with SEO best practices to further improve/maintain the authority ranking of the AGA site. One effort of note in 2013 included adding a new section to the site addressing corrosion- not necessarily related to HDG but included generic terms used by the public. This new section delivered thousands of new visitors to the site each month. These specific visitors may not be specifiers of HDG steel today, but they may be students who will become specifiers in the future, specifiers looking for a corrosion solution but didn’t know about galvanizing, or the general public who may influence governmental/political decisions to use eco-friendly, sustainable zinc coated products like HDG steel.

### Online Inspection Course & Certification

Inspection of HDG steel is the most common reason A&Es contact AGA and it is usually the most contentious. Furthermore, A&Es and inspectors require continuing education and so AGA developed an online course for inspectors. Requiring an hour of time to read and review the material prior to taking a test to certify completion, the course exposes the user to sampling methods required by ASTM specifications, common surface conditions, and reasons why certain HDG steel surfaces exhibit specific appearances. Thousands of inspectors have taken the course around the world and they hopefully promote the advantages of HDG steel to others.

## Inspection App

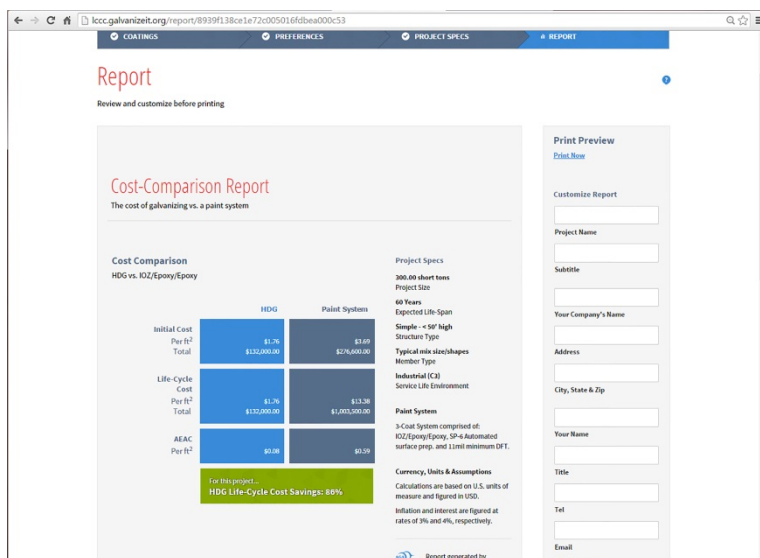
Information “at the ready” was the driving force behind putting inspection specifications, photos, and description of the HDG surface conditions on a downloadable App. AGA wanted interested parties to have access to relevant data whether in the shop or on a remote job site. So, evolving from the online inspection course, AGA contracted to have the information organized in such a way a neophyte to HDG steel could discern what he/she is looking at, describe how that surface condition develops, who is responsible for the condition, and prescribe a remedy, if any. This tool has eliminated many disputes.

## KnowledgeBase

A separate area of the AGA web site contains several hundred questions and brief answers. It is called the KnowledgeBase (KB) and is intended to be expanded with many more Q&As. Since many of the inquiries received by AGA staff and member galvanizers are of a simple nature, the KB was conceived to provide the quick response many people expect and designed to be easily searchable. The KB area has proven very popular with millennials and is one of the fastest growing areas of contact within the web site.

## Life-cycle Cost Calculator

Since our industry personnel have for decades made the claim HDG steel requires little to no maintenance for 70 years or more, without ever making it easy to quantify the life-cycle cost savings, in 2009 AGA developed an online tool that allows anyone to compare the initial and life-cycle cost of HDG to over 30 distinct paint systems. Because



the savings from utilizing HDG are often three to four times that of paint, quantifying those savings in front of a potential customer and/or A&E has proven very effective in getting HDG specified on many major projects. Perhaps more important, HDG is now often less expensive initially than most paint systems due to the relative stability in zinc and HDG prices over the past five years, and the rapidly escalating cost of paint material and application. The

paint cost data was collected from the paint industry by a noted paint industry consultant and the life-cycle cost calculator can be found online at <http://lcc.galvanizeit.org/> The cost data for paint and HDG have been updated three

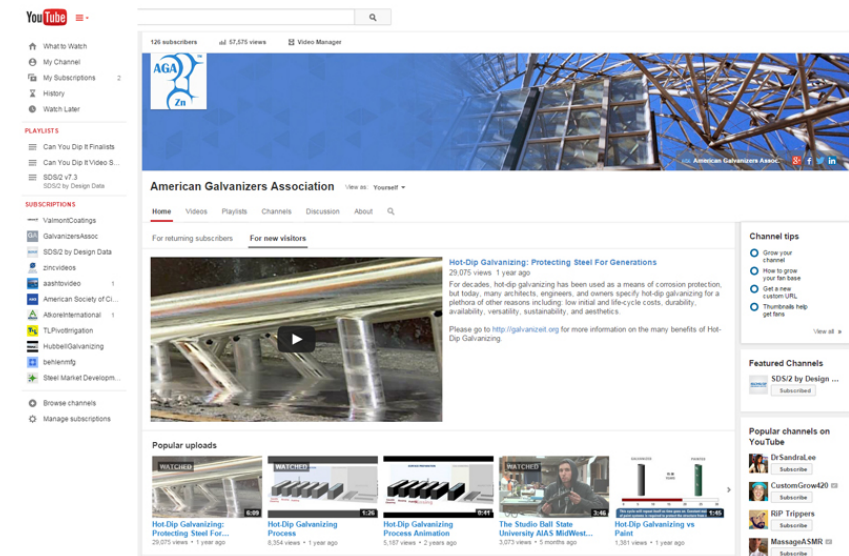
times in the last six years and a new wrinkle of providing a paint cost comparison to duplex systems was added in 2014.

## Digital Future

Online video content has dramatically increased in the last few years. The subject matter of videos tends to be in short, easy-to-consume segments. Whether you think this to be the lazy way to learn or be entertained, it is the reality. Online consumers prefer to see five seconds of images to determine if the rest of the video warrants attention. It is their way of managing and consuming the vast volume of information created each and every day.

And so the next step in AGA's marketing strategy is to develop video content mirroring much of the textual and photo content on the web site and in the printed literature. When contracted out, this can be a very expensive venture, so the marketing staff is undergoing training to develop a videography skill set. So far, four videos have been completed and many more are being planned. These videos highlight the durability of HDG steel by focusing on

in-place projects (racetracks, bridges, architectural pieces). Use of video to demonstrate touch-up and repair of HDG steel is also planned to educate both galvanizers and users of HDG steel. Since its upload to YouTube in July of 2013, the AGA's main marketing video thus far has had over 29,000 views, which contributes to half of the



total views on our YouTube channel. We hope the additions of more videos will another outlet to increase traffic to galvaniziet.org.

It is evident to anyone looking at AGA online content including downloadable publications, the project gallery, and videos, there is a singular brand identity. This brand identity is part of the objective to integrate AGA digital media into a unified message, one easily grasped by our consumers. This brand identity complements the impact of the unified message AGA promotes to the world, i.e. HDG steel is durable, sustainable, lowest in life-cycle cost, often lowest in initial cost, and readily available.

Summary: For the past ten years, the focus of the AGA Marketing Department has been to put information in the hands of specifiers as quickly and professionally as possible.

This has been accomplished mostly by expanding our web site to include all of our technical and promotional literature. For the past five years we have used digital means such as SEO, social media, and online advertising to drive traffic to the web site. There is no doubt our effort has been integral to the success our industry in North America has enjoyed for the last decade in terms of a 3% average annual expansion. However, as the amount of information available to anyone in the world explodes exponentially each week, month, and year, it become more difficult to navigate through it all to find answers. This is true for the AGA web site as it has grown to more than 1000 pages. In reaction to this expansive information growth, users have grown impatient and now desire summaries, capsules, and snippets of readily available information, in many different formats, including video. And so our next steps in the digital world are to develop videos based on the online information currently available, which in turn was developed to be a summary of the lengthy printed information. This then gives a reader all the information they could possibly want to know about hot-dip galvanizing in multiple formats.

For millennials, time and patience are short; for baby boomers, perhaps not so much. What AGA has determined is our past success depended on printed publications and our present success relies on online availability of information. Tomorrow's success is contingent upon delivery of content in a format of brief images and sound.