Congratulations on your membership in the Service Roundtable. Part of your membership includes a subscription to the HVAC Roundtable (HVAC.Roundtable@serviceroundtable.com) and/or the Plumbing Roundtable (Plumbers.Roundtable@serviceroundtable.com), each industry's best email based discussion list.

Remember, there is much, much more to the Service Roundtable than these discussion lists. Each week, for example, new business tools with retail values ranging from hundreds of dollars to more than one thousand dollars each are added to the download center.

Here are some tips to get the most out of the Roundtable discussion lists...

The Purpose of the Roundtable discussion lists is Education, Idea Exchange, and Problem Solving

The Roundtable discussion lists represent the industry's largest conversations, taking place 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you have a question or problem, the Roundtable discussion lists are a great place to get the answer. On the Roundtable discussion lists you have some of the brightest minds in the world of contracting. You also have some of the industry's best consultants. Ask a question and you will get an answer.

Or, you can simply monitor the questions others pose. You will see contractors raise and debate issues you may not have considered. The Roundtable discussion lists are the pulse of the HVAC and plumbing industries. Every day, you can learn something new on the Roundtable discussion lists.

Be Professional

Use professional language and conduct on the Roundtable discussion lists. Keep the discussion clean. Keep the overall tone positive. You will not agree with everyone who posts. When you disagree and feel compelled to offer a contrasting view (which is one of the things that makes the Roundtable discussion lists valuable), do it professionally.

Before Posting, Search the Archives

There is a great archive of old Roundtable discussion list posts with a powerful search function. To access the archive, login to the Service Roundtable, click on "HVAC.Roundtable" on the HVAC site or "Plumbers.Roundtable" on the plumbing site from the programs list to the left, and then click on the archives button when the page loads. It's a good idea to search the archives before asking a question. See if the topic has already come up and been addressed.
How to Post To The Roundtable Discussion Lists

Reply to an existing post or send an email to HVAC.Roundtable@serviceroundtable.com or Plumbers.Roundtable@serviceroundtable.com. Remember, when you reply or send a post to the Roundtable discussion lists, everyone on the list will see it. If you want to respond to the sender of a post, copy their email address from the header of the email ("...sent on behalf of john.doe@serviceroundtable.com").

Managing Roundtable Discussion List Mail

Some Service Roundtable members find the volume of discussion list email to be overwhelming at first. There are several simple ways to manage list mail. First, remember that you do NOT have to read every post. If you're busy and don't have time for them, delete them unread.

Second, in your email program, set up a "folder" for "Roundtable," and then create a "rule" to automatically send any mail from HVAC.Roundtable-owner@serviceroundtable.com (HVAC) or Plumbers.Roundtable-owner@serviceroundtable.com (plumbing) to this folder. When you create this folder, Roundtable discussion list mail does not clutter up your inbox. You can read it when you get time.

Third, switch to "digest mode" if the volume is overwhelming. In digest mode, you will receive one email each day that contains all of the day's posts. You can change to digest mode by logging into the Service Roundtable site, clicking on the "Member Services" tab.

Fourth, you can always unsubscribe yourself from the Roundtable discussion lists. You will still receive all other announcements. You can still search the list archives. But you will not receive list posts. Click on the "Member Services" tab to unsubscribe.

Add Value When Posting

When posting to the Roundtable discussion lists, try to make sure you are adding value to the conversation (remember, a lot of people will receive and download your email). When you build upon the discussion, answer questions, pose new ones, offer a different viewpoint or perspective, share your experience, and so on, you are building value. When you post "me too," "I agree," or "thanks," you are not. Send these "off-list" to the sender. Before you click the "send" button, ask yourself if the message is one you would appreciate seeing if someone else sent it.
Keeping Replies Targeted

When you reply to an email, be sure to include the relevant text from the previous post in your reply so that the reader has context. For AOL users, this requires copying and pasting (blame AOL). Delete the part of the message that is not relevant to your comments.

Subject Line Modification

Discussion list threads tend to wander. When the subject strays, change or modify the subject line to help those who scan by subject line to determine what to read and what to skip.

Be Careful About Criticism

It's great to offer insight and let others share the benefit of your experience, even when it's not positive. Sometimes the best lessons are those that caused bumps and bruises. However, when criticizing others (e.g., individuals, groups, manufacturers, distributors, etc.), keep it factual and informative and make sure it passes the "added value test" before sending. Please do not use the Roundtable discussion lists to vent or "flame" others.

No one wants to hear colorful descriptions about another's ancestry and read instructions for anatomically impossible feats. In short, be professional.

If You Wouldn't Talk About It at Your Local Trade Association Meeting, Don't Talk About It on the Roundtable Discussion Lists

Everyone knows there are certain subjects that are to be avoided. Do not discuss what you charge, except in general terms (e.g., "I charge a diagnostic for everyone but service agreement customers"). Do not discuss manufacturer pricing to you. Use your good judgment.

The Focus is Contracting

Please keep the discussion on the business of contracting, and not football, religion, politics, jokes, etc. (see the part about adding value). It's okay to interject humor into your posts and take a light tone, but remember not everyone can tell you're writing "tongue-in-cheek."
Think Before You Post

Pause a beat or two before you release a post. Reread it. Spell check it. And if it's controversial, think about it. Remember, once it's released, it cannot be taken back.

Forwarding Posts

There will be times when you will want to forward a Roundtable discussion list post to a friend. If you do, either ask permission of the writer of the post (privately -- off list) or strip any identifying information about the poster from the email. Delete his or her email address, name, and so on. This is minimal courtesy.

Give Credit

Always try to give credit to others for great ideas, quotes, etc. It's just polite. Do not forward copyrighted material without permission. This can get everyone in trouble. It's also nice to "sign" your emails with your name, company, and location.

Keep It Non-Commercial

If someone asks about a particular problem and you know of a solution, offer it. If you discover a new product or service you think is fantastic and want to share it, feel free. However, please do not use the Roundtable discussion lists to promote your best buddy's product, service, training class, etc. (even if they ask). Few people want to read commercials. Send a private email if you want.

If a vendor offers you an incentive or discount to say nice things about them or worse, writes copy for you to post as your own, refrain from doing it and email the request to matt.michel@serviceroundtable.com. The Roundtable discussion lists are effective because they are an open and honest exchange. If you post something a vendor wrote for you as your own words, the honest exchange is lost. No one knows what to believe and your credibility becomes suspect.

If you have a stake in a product or service you are discussing, please disclose it. It damages your credibility when people discover the connection later. Make it a positive association, such as “I believe in this product so much that I made an investment in the company.”
You can use the Roundtable discussion lists to announce additions you've made to the Service Roundtable Marketplace. Also, you can promote anything you want below your signature.

Keep Attachments to a Minimum

Many Service Roundtable members connect to the Internet by dial-up. In some parts of the country, broadband is not even available and the fastest dial-up connection may be 28.8K. As a courtesy to dial-up subscribers, please keep attachments to a minimum. If you would like to share something with the Roundtables, email it to matt.michel@serviceroundtable.com (for HVAC) or randall.hilton@serviceroundtable.com (for plumbing). They will add it to the Service Roundtable download center.

Plain Text is Better

Not everyone can read rich text or html text. Thus, it's better to post using plain text (i.e., ASCII text).

Keep Your Anti-Virus Software Up-To-Date

The Service Roundtable has invested in expensive, special mail list virus scanning software. All mail that passes through a Service Roundtable mail server is scanned for viruses. Yet, nothing is perfect. Virus protection remains a "social responsibility" for anyone using the Internet. Please keep your anti-virus software up-to-date.