

LBM JOURNAL[®]

STRATEGIES FOR LUMBER/BUILDING MATERIAL DISTRIBUTION PROS

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2021 \$10 U.S.

IN DEPTH:

TECH TOOLS

TO PLAN FOR THE FUTURE, SKIP CRYSTAL BALLS OR PALM READING AND LOOK TO TECHNOLOGY

DOUBLING-DOWN ON
RANSOMWARE PROTECTION

REAL ISSUES. REAL ANSWERS.
GROWING FORWARD

2021 LBM STRATEGIES CONFERENCE
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Learning and stretching

The mind, once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

IF RALPH WALDO EMERSON is right, and I happen to think he is, then there was a whole lot of mind stretching going on in Boston in mid-October. That's when more than 200 LBM pros from across the U.S. came together for the LBM Strategies Conference to not only learn smart strategies and success stories from others, but also to share their ideas and insights on some of the toughest challenges facing our industry. Something powerful happens when industry pros who are not only at the top of their game yet understand that there's still much they don't know, all get together in the same place.

The fact that this event had record attendance, and despite many companies being busier than ever, spoke to how important and valuable it is to connect, live and in person, with others. I'm a big believer in the power of technology to help us work better and smarter, but having attended a number of virtual events, including our own online version of LBM Strategies in 2020, there's no doubt in my mind that live-and-in-person cannot be replicated in the digital realm.

While the event was hosted by LBM Journal, this was not our event. All we did was open the door...the people on stage and in the audience made the magic happen. Of the 24 presenters, 17 were dealers and distributors. When they got on stage, they shared their company's secret sauce. What they do, how they do it, and why it sets them apart from their competition. With so many companies struggling to attract, hire, and retain good people, Jennifer Zuern and the team from Zuern Lumber, and Bill Hayward from Hayward Lumber shared how they make their companies a great place to work. Jim Smucker shared how the team at Keim is preparing for the opposite of a white-hot market. John Perna shared how Hamilton Building Supply leverages its home-grown membership program to drive profits and value. Greg Templeman shared how Sunpro takes the emotion and subjectivity out of pricing. Sunny Bowman talked about how Dakota County Lumber's focus on "The Perfect Delivery" sets the company apart from larger pro dealers. And so on...

We are all fortunate to belong to an industry that's rich with good, smart, successful people who want to share what they know and to learn. And one great way to tap into this priceless resource is to explore the Events tab at LBMJournal.com. In addition to the LBM Strategies Conference 2022 and NAHB's International Builders Show in February, there's a host of other events where you can learn, stretch, and connect with other LBM pros.

In the words of the great Zig Ziglar, "If you're not willing to learn, no one can help you. If you are determined to learn, no one can stop you."

— Rick Schumacher
Executive Editor & Publisher



Rick@LBMJournal.com



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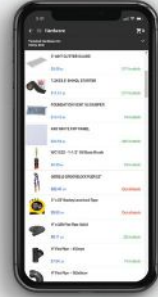
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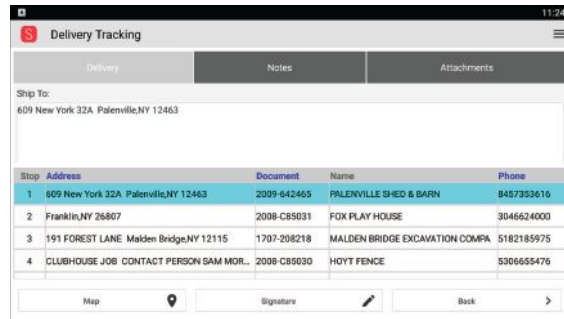
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Technology issue

I ARRIVED at LBM Journal in 2015 after a stint at a digital marketing agency and before that, five years at an online media startup. Frankly, at my age and that stage in my career, I was relieved when people would say things such as “Our industry isn’t quick to adapt to new technology.” I was perfectly happy to be done “adapting” for a while. But I soon realized that there was a certain generation of LBM pro who would tell me how the industry is slow to take on new technologies. The more multi-generational family businesses I got to know through writing our monthly dealer profiles, the more I learned that while the older generation was known to be slow to latch on to new tech, the generation following in their footsteps was eager to get their hands on technologies that would move their business forward in ways their parents hadn’t imagined.

This month’s issue focuses on technology tools for LBM dealers, a topic that we think is becoming more important every year. In fact, our 2022 editorial calendar calls for two separate technology-themed In Depth articles. In this issue, Mike Berger, our astute In Depth feature writer, analyzes the industry’s best technology. On page 42, you’ll find in his article some tools that I suspect you’re not using yet at your company, as well as new ways to utilize the software tools you already have.

A strong advocate for technology in the LBM space, columnist Shane Soule demonstrates on page 33 how readers can use tech tools to increase profits at their companies through the integration of GPS software, ERP integration, dashboards, and SmartViews. As Shane says, “The good news is you are probably closer than you think to identifying the least profitable 15% of your business and implementing a plan to improve it.”

Also in this month’s issue is a feature article on ransomware protection (page 40), an increasingly necessary, though not often discussed, tool for lumber dealers and any retailer utilizing e-commerce and credit card transactions. If you think a lumber and building materials business is immune from attacks on its software, think again. Ransomware is real and is happening in our industry.

Amid all this technology talk, I’d be remiss not to mention this year’s LBM Strategies Conference, a recap of which you’ll see on page 16. If you want to get to know the best and brightest in the LBM industry, be sure to take a look at who presented at and attended the conference. They’re the ones to follow. If you want to get to know them in person, lock in an early bird rate to next year’s LBM Strategies Conference 2022 in Denver Oct. 12-14. Learn more at LBMStrategies.com.

— James Anderson
Editor



james@LBMJournal.com



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UPDATES

PEOPLE

Samara Toole has joined **AZEK** as chief marketing officer.

Brett Katsma has been hired by the **SPAX** parent company, Altenloh, Brinck & Co. US, Inc., as product manager.

BlueLinx has named **Ryan Taylor** VP of investor relations and treasury.

INDUSTRY

Great Southern Wood Preserving's YellaWood brand sponsored the fall NASCAR Cup Series Playoffs race at Talladega Superspeedway.

Knauf Insulation plans a 600,000 square feet state-of-the-art facility to be constructed in McGregor, Texas.

DISTRIBUTION

Cameron Ashley Building Products has opened its newest distribution center in Denver.

Palmer-Donavin is adding manufactured stone panels from **Affinity Stone** to its exterior siding offering.

Weyerhaeuser Distribution has expanded its **AZEK** portfolio into Texas.

Sherwood Lumber will distribute **Ply Gem Stone** and **ClipStone** products in early 2022.

Russin will distribute Black Label, **Tropical Forest Products'** new brand of lpe and other tropical hardwoods.

DSI has added **Sherwood Lumber** to its distribution network.

Hutting will distribute **Silvermine Stone** through its New England locations.

BlueLinx will offer **MoistureShield** composite decking products to its East Coast dealers.

CO-OPS & BUYING GROUPS

Do it Best held its fall market at the Indiana Convention Center Sept. 27-30. The event offered key industry insights, proven best practices, and exclusive purchasing opportunities for member-owners. The co-op celebrated a record-setting year, with \$5.19 billion in sales and a \$170 million member rebate.

Do it Best named its Vendors of the Year at its fall market. LBM-related winners were **Metal Sales, Quickrete, Canfor, UFPI Deckorators,** and **RoyOMartin.**



SAMARA TOOLE



BRETT KATSMAS

Ace Hardware brought together more than 10,000 total attendees at an in-person convention Sept. 21-23 in Orlando, Florida.

Leaders from **LMC** dealers across the country gathered in Atlanta this October for LMC's annual Leadership Summit.

Orgill's Tifton, Georgia distribution center celebrated its 25th anniversary.

LBM Advantage has hired **Dave DeJoy** as chief financial officer.

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

Specialty Building Products is acquiring **Reeb Millwork Corporation,** and **DW Distribution.**

ECI Software has acquired the **eCommonSense** platform.

ASSOCIATIONS

Trusscore and **BlueTape** have joined the **National Lumber and Building Material Dealers Association's** Manufacturers and Services Council.

The Lumbermen's Association of Texas has selected State Rep. Jeff Leach (R-Plano) as a LAT Legislative Champion award recipient.

Send news and updates about your organization to James@LBMJournal.com

STRONG DEMAND BOOSTS BUILDER CONFIDENCE DESPITE SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTIONS

Strong consumer demand helped push builder confidence higher in October despite growing affordability challenges stemming from rising material prices and shortages. Builder sentiment in the market for newly built single-family homes moved four points higher to 80 in October, according to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB)/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index (HMI).

"Although demand and home sales remain strong, builders continue to grapple with ongoing supply chain disruptions and labor shortages that are delaying completion times and putting upward pressure on building material and home prices," said NAHB Chairman Chuck Fowke.

"Builders are getting increasingly concerned about affordability hurdles ahead for most buyers," said NAHB Chief Economist Robert Dietz. "Building material price increases and bottlenecks persist and interest rates are expected to rise in coming months as the Fed begins to taper its purchase of U.S. Treasuries and mortgage-backed debt. Policymakers must focus on fixing the broken supply chain. This will spur more construction and help ease upward pressure on home prices."

All three major HMI indices posted gains in October. The index gauging current sales conditions rose five points to 87, the component measuring sales expectations in the next six months posted a three-point gain to 84 and the gauge charting traffic of prospective buyers moved four points higher to 65.

LOOKING AT THE THREE-MONTH MOVING AVERAGES FOR REGIONAL HMI SCORES:

NORTHEAST HELD STEADY AT	72
MIDWEST ROSE ONE-POINT TO	69 ▲
WEST REMAINED UNCHANGED AT	83
SOUTH REMAINED UNCHANGED AT	80



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CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY GAINS JOBS IN SEPTEMBER

Despite a miss on overall jobs projections for September, both residential and non-residential construction fields added workers.

The construction industry added 22,000 jobs on net in September, according to an Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) analysis of data released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Overall, the industry has recovered 912,000 (81.9%) of the jobs lost during earlier stages of the pandemic.

Of jobs gained in September, the National Association of Home Builders reports that residential and non-residential) added 22,000 jobs in September. Both residential construction (+3,400) and non-residential construction (+18,600) had job gains over the month.

UPCOMING EVENTS

DEC 8-9 NORTHEASTERN RETAIL LUMBER ASSOCIATION (NRLA)
128th LBM EXPO | Providence, RI
nrla.org

JAN 11 WISCONSIN LUMBER DEALERS LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE
Wisconsin Dells, WI | nlassn.org

FEB 1-2 NORTHWESTERN LUMBER ASSOCIATION (NLA) EXPO NEBRASKA
La Vista, NE | nlassn.org

FEB 2-3 BUILDING MATERIAL SUPPLIERS ASSOCIATION LEARNING EXCHANGE & EXPO Hickory, NC | mybmsa.org

FEB 3-4 NORTHWESTERN LUMBER ASSOCIATION (NLA) EXPO IOWA
West Des Moines, IA | nlassn.org

FEB 8-10 INTERNATIONAL BUILDERS SHOW | Orlando, FL | buildersshow.com

FEB 11-14 DO IT BEST SPRING MARKET
Indianapolis, IN | doitbestonline.com

FEB 21-23 LBM ADVANTAGE 2022 ANNUAL BUYING SHOW
Kissimmee, FL | lbmadvantage.com

MAR 7-8 NORTHWESTERN LUMBER ASSOCIATION (NLA) EXPO NORTH
St. Cloud, MN | nlassn.org

MAR 23-25 LMC ANNUAL MEETING
Tampa, FL | lmc.net

TOUGH CALL ANSWERS

ANSWERS TO OUR SEPTEMBER TOUGH CALL SURVEY:

YOU WANT HOW MUCH?

AN APPLICANT FOR AN ENTRY LEVEL POSITION WANTS MORE MONEY THAN YOUR EXPERIENCED TEAM MEMBERS EARN. HERE'S HOW READERS WOULD HANDLE THIS TOUGH CALL.

SURVEY RESULTS FROM LBMJOURNAL.COM

51.4%
NEGOTIATE. Tell Chuck you'd love to have him come aboard but can't start him that high. Offer a lower wage with the promise of a raise after six months, benefits, etc.

6.9%
DO IT QUIETLY. The market determines wages, you don't. Chuck may be the best prospect you'll have for a long time. Offer him the job, and ask him to not discuss pay with his new coworkers.

20.8%
DO IT BIG. Say yes to Chuck's number, then give your existing team raises to ensure that they're all earning more than the new guy.

20.9%
JUST SAY NO. Just like lumber prices peaked before returning to earth, this too shall pass. Don't feel pressured to overpay. Wait until things become more normal, then move forward.



THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO VOTED ON THE SEPTEMBER SURVEY. SEE PAGE 56 FOR THE NOVEMBER/DECEMBER TOUGH CALL: "THE EXPENSIVE INVENTORY BLUES"

NLBMDA URGES BIDEN TO FOCUS ON PRICE VOLATILITY AND SUPPLY CHAIN ISSUES

The National Lumber and Building Material Dealers Association announced to its members that it has sent a letter to President Biden expressing concerns with the continued volatility in lumber prices and disruptions to the building material supply chain.

NLBMDA urged President Biden to prioritize this ongoing crisis and act to address price volatility, labor shortages, and supply chain choke points. The letter also requests a meeting with Department of Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo to discuss the impact of lumber price volatility on LBM dealers and examine solutions that will provide stability to the market.

NLBMDA MEETS WITH BIDEN ADMINISTRATION ON VACCINE MANDATE CONCERNS

The National Lumber and Building Material Dealers Association (NLBMDA) met with officials from the White House's Office of Management and Budget, Department of Labor, and Small Business Administration to express concerns regarding the Biden administration's proposed Emergency Temporary Standard on mandatory vaccination and testing requirements for private employers.

NAHB: BUILDERS REPORT WORST LOT SHORTAGE EVER

While builders continue to grapple with labor and material supply-side challenges, they are confronting what could be an even more urgent problem—an extreme lot shortage.

The National Association of Home Builders reports that in a recent survey, 76% of builders reported that the overall supply of developed lots in their areas was low to very low. This is an all-time record—by a wide margin—since NAHB began collecting the information in the 1990s. The previous record was 65%, recorded in 2018.

SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSING STARTS FLAT IN SEPTEMBER

Single-family housing starts held steady in September as strong demand helped to offset ongoing building material supply chain disruptions. Meanwhile, declines in multifamily production helped to push overall housing starts in September down 1.6% to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.56 million, according to a report from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Census Bureau.

The September reading of 1.56 million starts is the number of housing units builders would begin if development kept this pace for the next 12 months. Within this overall number, single-family housing starts were essentially unchanged from the previous month at a 1.08 million seasonally adjusted annual rate, and are up 20.5% year-to-date. The multifamily sector, which includes apartment buildings and condos, decreased 5.0% to a 475,000 pace

On a regional and year-to-date basis (January through September of 2021 compared to that same time frame a year ago), combined single-family and multifamily housing starts are 28.9% higher in the Northeast, 12.1% higher in the Midwest, 18.6% higher in the South and 22.6% higher in the West.

Overall permits decreased 7.7% to a 1.59 million unit annualized rate in September. Single-family permits decreased 0.9% to a 1.04 million unit rate.

Multifamily permits decreased 18.3% to a 548,000 pace.

Looking at regional permit data on a year-to-date basis, permits are 19.6% higher in the Northeast, 19.9% higher in the Midwest, 22.9% higher in the South and 25.0% higher in the West.

BY THE YARD NEWS FROM LUMBERYARDS AROUND THE COUNTRY

BUILDERS GENERAL CELEBRATES 90 YEARS

In celebration of the company's 90th anniversary, Builders' General stores have honored 14 current employees who have given the company more than 30 years of dedication and commitment. Thirty-year employees include: Rolando Lancero Jr., Steph Osieczonek, Carmen Petrillo, Larry Ferraro, Patsy Covello Jr., Bryan Jones, Phil Libbin, Tom Ankiewicz, Jim Porcelli, Dan Brister, Cindy Jones, Mike Hendrickson, Mike English, and Dave Holman.

KOOPMAN LUMBER EXPANDS WITH FAIRHAVEN ACQUISITION

Koopman Lumber is growing on the Massachusetts South Coast with the acquisition of Fairhaven Lumber. The company now has 10 locations in Massachusetts.

GRIFFIN LUMBER & HARDWARE ACQUIRES BALDWIN BUILDERS SUPPLY

Baldwin Builders Supply will be the sixth retail LBM location for Griffin Lumber & Hardware, joining its current locations in Cordele, Leesburg, Tifton, Forsyth, and Griffin, Georgia.

HANCOCK LUMBER CEO RECEIVES LEADERSHIP AWARD

The Maine Development Foundation honored Kevin Hancock with the Kenneth M. Curtis Leadership Award. The award that recognizes extraordinary achievements by Leadership Maine graduates.

MILL CREEK ACQUIRING FOX BUILDING SUPPLY

Mill Creek Lumber & Supply Company will acquire Fox Building Supply. The announcement was made jointly by Jeff Dunn, president of Mill Creek Lumber & Supply Company, and Jim Fox, manager of Fox Building Supply.

KODIAK BUILDING PARTNERS ACQUIRES CARL'S BUILDING SUPPLY

Kodiak Building Partners has acquired Carl's Building Supply of Port Hadlock, Washington. Carl's will join the Retail Lumber and Gypsum group of Kodiak.

KODIAK BUILDING PARTNERS SPONSORS DENVER THANKSGIVING MEAL FUNDRAISER

Kodiak Building Partners recently sponsored the Daddy Bruce Randolph Thanksgiving Feed-a-Family Luncheon & Auction.

US LBM ANNOUNCES NEW EXECUTIVE HIRES

Don Riley has joined US LBM as executive vice president and chief operating officer, Manish Shanbhag is executive vice president and general counsel, and Pat Managan has been promoted to the role of senior vice president of supply chain.

US LBM ACQUIRES OLDHAM LUMBER COMPANY

US LBM has expanded in Texas with the acquisition of Oldham Lumber Company, which serves pro builders in North Texas, including the Dallas-Fort Worth metro.

NATION'S BEST MAKES ACQUISITIONS IN OKLAHOMA AND TEXAS

Nation's Best has acquired Ron's Lumber & Home Center in Howe, Oklahoma and Gilmer Lumber in Gilmer, Texas.

MCCOY'S BUILDING SUPPLY EXPANDING TO SPICEWOOD, TEXAS

McCoy's Building Supply recently poured the foundation for a new store in Spicewood, Texas. The project is scheduled to open in summer 2022.

DEALERS, GOT NEWS?

Send info on your company's new location, anniversary, expansion, local recognition, honors and awards, new hires, promotions, or other news to James@LBMJournal.com.

Q: The technology powering today's ERP platforms offers companies more data than ever. How does Koopman leverage the data from your Epicor software?

A: BisTrack gives us the ability to customize dashboards to individual users needs by putting the information and data that they need on a daily basis at their fingertips. They can also push information out to the employees for tasks to be completed or an area that needs attention. Smart Views can be used to calculate data automatically rather using manual spreadsheets, which saves us time. With customization, the possibilities are endless, so its really a matter of harnessing the data for the company's benefit.

Q: While our industry battles unprecedented supply chain issues, how does Epicor help you maintain accurate inventory counts in real time?

A: BisTrack has barcoding and scanning abilities to quickly receive and track inventory. Related documents is a tool that stores all the paperwork and information digitally relating to an individual order. By having the purchase order, acknowledgement, packing slip, stock receipt and supplier invoice easily viewed, inventory issues can be solved quickly.

Q: How do Epicor's technology tools help manage margins and navigate pricing issues?

A: The benefit of BisTrack is the many ways to change and manage pricing and margins so that you can really dial-in what is best for your customer base. Our previous system was "one size fits all," but now we have the benefit of changing metrics through imports, price rules, price bands, buying rules, selling discounts, promotions, bulk pricing, etc. It comes down to having a bunch of "tools in the toolbox," which will allow us to be much more dynamic going forward. The future of our business will be much more heavily focused on e-commerce sales, so our ability to make changes quickly will determine our ultimate success.

Q: Fleet management is more important than ever as drivers are hard to find. How does your software help you manage your deliveries?

A: The fleet management software that we use from BisTrack helps us to eliminate downtime for our drivers and trucks which is tremendously important in today's climate. We use GPS Insight which integrates right into BisTrack and tracks the time of each truck's runs and uses a geo-fence to help capture time in and out of the yard. We also use GPS Insight and the Delivery Dispatch in tandem as a customer service tool that the sales team can pull up to get real time information on the location of the delivery trucks.



Denise Brookhouse is the CFO of Koopman Lumber in Whitinsville, Mass. Denise, her husband, Tony, and her brother, Dirk Koopman, make up the third generation leadership team at Koopman Lumber.

Q: Many of Epicor's services are available in real time and for mobile devices. How does Koopman take advantage of these offerings?

A: We utilize the BisTrack Delivery app to offer real time invoicing on orders while on the jobsite as well as to take pictures of delivery drops and credit pick-ups and obtain signatures from customer electronically. This allows the sales team, the company, and the customer to ensure the delivery is completed in full and on time. GPS Insight also integrates with Epicor to drive reporting around truck usage and maintenance to allow for planning of downtime on the trucks. We can get real time feedback through reports that tell us about idle-time, electrical systems, and fuel usage. We can also drive safety using the reporting around the truck checklists done on mobile phones by the drivers. The system also tracks speeding violations to be used by the managers for follow up safety conversations with our drivers. ■



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2021 LBM STRATEGIES CONFERENCE RECAP

More than 200 LBM professionals gathered together in person for LBM Strategies Conference 2021 Oct. 12-15 in Boston. The attendees, who represented leading LBM dealers and distributors from throughout the U.S., gathered to learn, connect, and get back to work armed with practical, tactical solutions to today's toughest business challenges.

Two new events kicked off LBM Strategies 2021. First, was a tour of two National Lumber locations in nearby Mansfield, Massachusetts. More than 100 conference attendees visited National Lumber where they toured the yard, offices, moulding and millwork facilities, and warehouse. Following the tour, attendees took part in a 90-minute Women in LBM Workshop, in which topics included how to increase diversity and inclusion in the LBM industry, and how to identify leadership traits in women.

Like years before, the following day and a half were filled with presentations from front-line LBM operators and employees sharing real-world experiences and proven successes from their companies. Speakers representing LBM companies from across the country addressed issues urgent to the industry including topics ranging from making a company a Best Place to Work, pricing strategies, technology tips, operational excellence, mergers and acquisitions, and much more.

As always, the connections made between attendees that allow our industry to grow and thrive are at the heart of LBM Strategies. Each day was filled with networking opportunities, meals, cocktail receptions, and private dinners where quality, in-person relationships are forged, and fresh connections established.

For more photos, visit LBMJournal.com and watch LBMStrategies.com for announcements about LBM Strategies 2022.



LBM STRATEGIES 
2021 CONFERENCE





LBM Strategies has established itself as the premier high-level educational and networking conference serving our industry, consistently attracting more dealers and distributor attendees than any competing event, and 2021's conference in Boston was no exception. Here are what some attendees had to say:



"I enjoyed meeting other dealers that were working on similar initiatives to what we are doing as well as those that are a little further along on the life cycle of continuous improvement."

"The event provided a credit manager the ability to look at other areas of the company business to help model, build, and develop my purpose in my company. The format allowed time to enjoy the city we were in. Excellent experience."



"Most valuable was the opportunity to sit in on sessions and network with those around us, switching up tables each time."

"I love Boston. The speakers were almost all excellent, covering timely topics."

"The tour was great and provided some feedback to take back home. The location was great!"

"The chance to make new contacts and get new ideas are invaluable. Continuous improvement is important!"



PHOTOS BY: PROMEDIA PRODUCTIONS



2021 CONFERENCE RECAP



An annual tradition at LBM Strategies, the LBM community honored LBM CENTURY CLUB members. THE LBM CENTURY CLUB was created to recognize dealers who've been in business for more than 100 years. There's no cost to join this exclusive club—managing to survive and thrive for more than a century is the price of admission.

A total of 188 companies belong to the Century Club, and combined they've been in business for 23,481 years.

Century Club members who were in attendance in Boston were recognized:



Henry Poor Lumber	est. 1908	103 years
Mid-Cape Home Centers	est. 1895	126 years
Sanford & Hawley, Inc.	est. 1884	137 years
Morsches Builders Mart	est. 1871	150 years
Gilcrest/Jewett Lumber	est. 1856	165 years
Hancock Lumber	est. 1848	173 years

Those six companies have all attended prior LBM Strategies Conferences.

LBM CENTURY CLUB members attending the annual conference for the first time were invited onstage and honored with a plaque. At this year's conference, those LBM dealers included:

Marcus Lumber	est. 1920	101 years
Krempp Lumber	est. 1918	103 years
Preston Feather	est. 1915	106 years
Arnold Lumber	est. 1911	110 years
Keim	est. 1911	110 years

The 11 companies recognized on stage at LBM Strategies 2021 have a combined 1,486 years of serving their communities.





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2021 CONFERENCE RECAP



For the first time, the LBM Strategies Conference recognized the companies that were included in the first-ever LBM JOURNAL 100, our listing of the top 100 LBM dealers by revenue. Unlike other rankings of top dealers which include estimates of company revenues, the LBM JOURNAL 100 relies on companies who want to be considered for the listing to submit their revenue. If you think your company deserves a spot on the list, watch LBMJournal.com this spring, when we'll begin compiling data for the 2022 LBM JOURNAL 100.

Attendees from 22 of the LBM 100 companies were in attendance:

- No. 97 ITC Millwork | Stallings, NC
- No. 89 Hamilton Building Supply | Hamilton, NJ
- No. 87 Dakota County Lumber | Farmington, MN
- No. 77 Townsend Building Supply | Enterprise, AL
- No. 75 Goldsboro Building Supply | Goldsboro, NC
- No. 69 Yoder's Building Services | Fairplay, SC
- No. 68 The Lester Group | Martinsville, VA
- No. 67 Arnold Lumber | West Kingston, RI
- No. 63 Cassity Jones Lumber | Longview, TX
- No. 60 Wilson Lumber | Huntsville, AL
- No. 56 Zuern Building Products | Slinger, WI
- No. 50 TAL Holdings | Vancouver, WA
- No. 49 Your Building Centers | Williamsport, PA
- No. 38 Hayward Score | Pebble Beach, CA
- No. 35 Koopman Lumber | Whitinsville, MA
- No. 33 Keim | Charm, OH
- No. 30 Hancock Lumber | Casco, ME
- No. 28 Mill Creek Lumber | Broken Arrow, OK
- No. 23 Sunpro | Orem, UT
- No. 17 National Lumber | Mansfield, MA
- No. 11 The Parr Company | Hillsboro, OR
- No. 6 Kodiak Building Partners | Highlands Ranch, CO

Also recognized at this year's conference, are LBM DEALER OF THE YEAR recipients. The DEALER OF THE YEAR program awards four companies each year that are continually moving the needle for the LBM industry.

LBM Dealer of the Year, revenues of less than \$10 million:
Kremp Lumber | Jasper, Ind.

LBM Dealer of the Year, revenues of \$10-\$50 million:
Hamilton Building Supply | Hamilton, NJ

LBM Dealer of the Year, revenues of \$50-\$100 million:
Zuern Building Products | Slinger, WI

LBM Dealer of the Year, revenues of more than \$100 million:
Keim | Charm, Ohio

(Note: for the first time ever, there was a tie for one position: Ganahl Lumber of Anaheim, California was also a Dealer of the Year at the \$100 million-plus level.)

96% of attendees surveyed after the conference indicated that they were highly likely to recommend LBM Strategies Conferences to other LBM industry professionals. 65% of those surveyed said that they are either already registered or definitely plan to attend next year.

Registration is now open for LBM Strategies 2022, to be held October 12-14 at the Hyatt Regency Denver Tech Center. Learn more at LBMStrategies.com

LBM STRATEGIES

2022 CONFERENCE

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LBM CENTURY CLUB HONORS 100-YEAR-OLD BUSINESSES

The LBM Century Club was founded on the simple belief that companies that have been around for 100 years deserve to be recognized. Launched in 2016, the LBM Century Club has grown to 188 members, with more coming in each month. In all, the companies have provided 23,481 years of combined service to their communities.

2021 INDUCTEES:

ALKI LUMBER & HARDWARE Seattle, WA	est. 1921	KREMPP LUMBER COMPANY Jasper, IN	est. 1918
BETHEL MILLS, INC. Bethel, VT	est. 1781	LAMB LUMBER CO., INC. Lake Placid, NY	est. 1919
BIG C LUMBER Granger, IN	est. 1921	LEACHMAN LUMBER COMPANY Des Moines, IA	est. 1921
BROWNSTOWN LUMBER CO. Brownstown, IL	est. 1909	LELAND L. FISHER, INC. Rockville, MD	est. 1894
CARHART LUMBER CO. Wayne, NE	est. 1921	MCDOWELLS BUILDING MATERIALS Vinton, IA	est. 1864
EJ STEPHENS COMPANY, INC. (NOW UNION LUMBER) Albany, MS	est. 1902	NATIONAL LUMBER CO. Baltimore, MD	est. 1919
ELLIOTT LUMBER, INC. Oxford, MS	est. 1917	OLDHAM LUMBER COMPANY, INC. Dallas, TX	est. 1921
FOSTER LUMBER YARDS, PART OF THE CENTRAL VALLEY FAMILY Vallejo, CA	est. 1920	PRESTON FEATHER BUILDING CENTERS Petoskey, MI	est. 1915
HOLMAN SUPPLY COMPANY Moultrie, GA	est. 1920	RUCKER LUMBER INC. Boston, NY	est. 1921
HPM BUILDING SUPPLY Hilo, HI	est. 1921	STEWART BUILDER SUPPLY Brentwood, TN	est. 1921
KEIM HOME CENTER Charm, OH	est. 1911	For a complete listing of LBM Century Club members, visit LBMJournal.com/century .	

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Finding qualified managers may be your next big challenge

BY BILL LEE

THE CLASSIC PROFESSIONAL MANAGER is less and less willing to relocate when an owner or an industry recruiter comes calling. There are all kinds of reasons this phenomenon is occurring: One of them seems to be exacerbated by the rapid spread of COVID-19. As the virus spread and continues to progress, it has motivated many management candidates to resist leaving family and friends to advance their careers. Others still, are finding industries in which to advance their careers without moving at all.

Anytime there is a shortage of just about anything, you can bet the cost will escalate, and this is certainly true of management candidates. Like a lot of things that become scarce, it's smart to put a plan into place to develop your own; and that time may have arrived.

By making a list of your current management team members that includes each manager's age, it will become clear which management positions are your top priorities to be prepared to replace once others retire. Your goal, that is if you have given yourself enough time, is to identify your top priorities and the characteristics a management candidate must possess to meet the standards you have established for the job. The last thing you want to do is to put yourself in a position of having to make a snap decision.

I believe the process begins by putting together a Position Specification. In my management book, *30 Ways Managers Shoot Themselves in the Foot*, in Appendix I on page 166, you'll find an example of a Position Spec for a General Management position. The Position Spec is approximately three pages long and explains why the position is open, who the position will report to, the salary range and the accountability of the job; that is, how the successful candidate will be measured.

Regardless of the exact title of the position you are hiring for, this sample Position Spec will show you how to prepare a clear description of the talent the successful candidate must possess to qualify for the job by the specified date. By modifying the talent and experience required, you can use this outline to describe candidates for future sales managers, operations managers, general managers, etc.

The Position Spec allows top management the opportunity to specify what the company is looking for the successful candidate to accomplish in measurable terms. It can also double as a marketing tool. You might send the Position Spec to industry friends you believe could be able to recommend a candidate who meets the specifications you have outlined.

TEC is the acronym that I use to specify what I am looking for in a candidate: **T** stands for Talent, **E** for Experience, and **C** for Chemistry.

For my money, talent is my number one priority. I am looking for raw talent! Football coaches sometimes call it athleticism.

My number two in importance is chemistry. Does the candidate fit into our company culture? Are the candidate's values close enough to our company's values that our organization won't reject the person?

And for me, last in importance is experience. I list experience last because experience is the only one of these three that can be learned. Talent and chemistry are inborn. I'm looking for all three, but if I must compromise, experience is the only ingredient I am willing to bend on.

The best way to avoid putting yourself in reaction mode is to engage in this kind of long-range planning; that is, identifying your management needs well in advance of time running out. ■

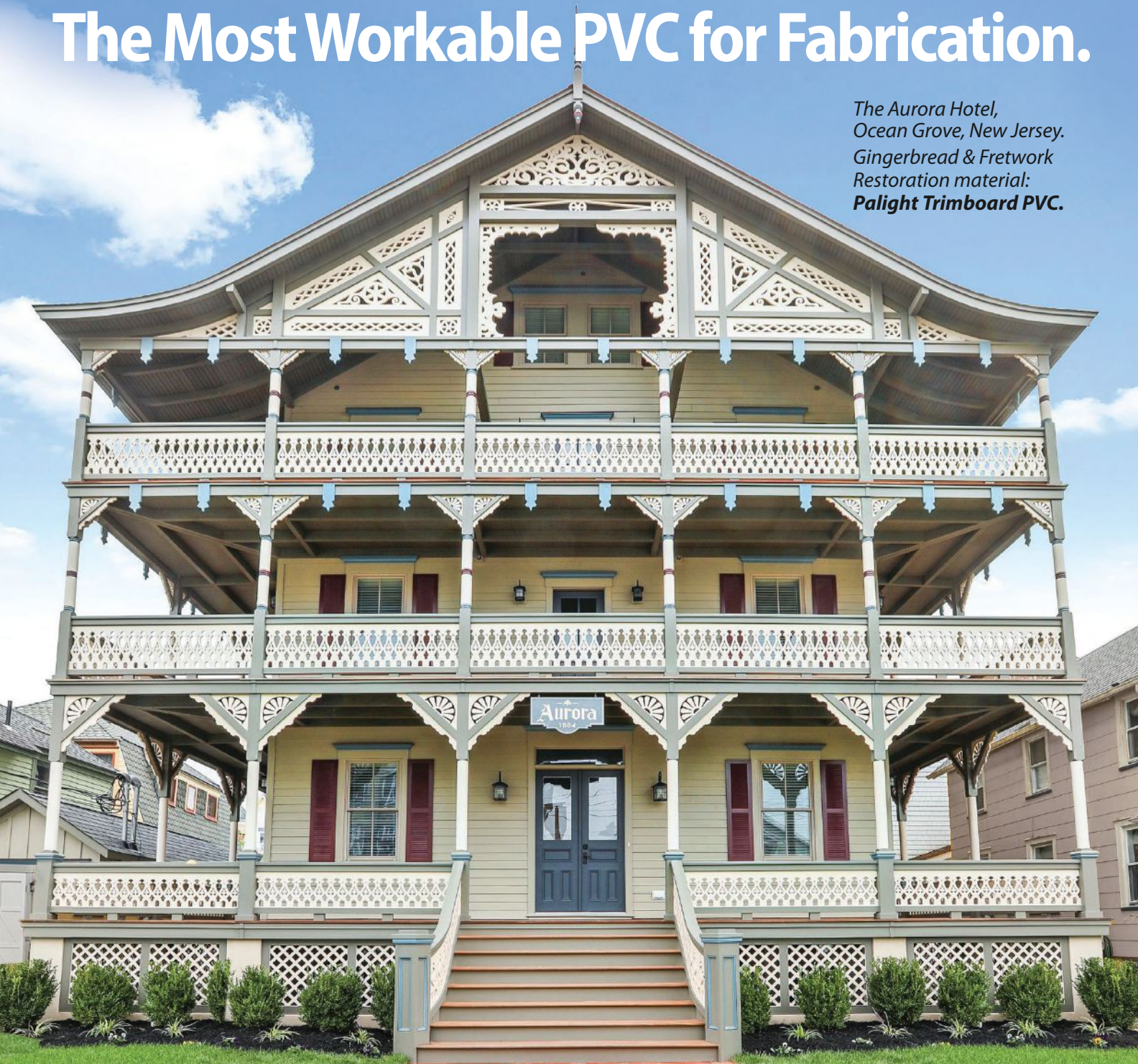


Bill Lee is a respected sales and business consultant in the LBM industry. For more information, contact Bill at leeresourcesinc@gmail.com

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What really makes a good business relationship?

BY RICK DAVIS

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP. Every salesperson says it, but probably disagrees about what constitutes a good relationship. Have we really defined, in sales, what makes up a good relationship? Is it friendship? Is it business? Is it both? Does the buyer define a relationship in the same way as the salesperson?

Many salespeople say the moment they can call a customer their friend it is the pinnacle of success. I assert that the moment you call a customer a friend, you'd better be careful. We've all seen friendships and families destroyed by bad business relationships, proving that friendships can be a byproduct of a good business relationship, but not the foundation for it.

Friends expect favors and invite you over for social interaction while asking you to bring your tool kit to fix a problem. Friends expect discounts and preferential treatment. A friend can be a customer, but the two relationships should be treated differently. If your customer is really a friend, they pay you for your services fairly, although I often recommend charging friends more. The inevitable, casual request to fix a problem is really a \$300 repair call they want discounted to the price of a cold beer.

If it isn't friendship, then what is a good "relationship?" Many salespeople argue that business comes first and that the best price for service and value is the differentiator. However, hardly anyone would agree that the lowest price is the key to a good relationship.

Many salespeople rationalize that a good price will get your foot in the door and set the stage for a good relationship down the road while leaving unanswered the definition of a good relationship. Ultimately, the definition of a good business relationship must be tangible or else there is no use bragging about it, and everyone can continue to claim it. (I've yet to see a salesperson say the key to their success is a bad relationship!)

Author and presenter Robert Cialdini, in his landmark book, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, was onto something directly related to influence and tangentially to relationships. In his studies, he provided a clinical analysis for six factors of influence, including "liking," "authority," and "social proof." Importantly, these are not instinctive factors of sway but, instead, intentional actions necessary to create it.

Liking, he notes, is accomplished with sincere praise and intentional discovery of commonality, preferably in a professional realm such as a referral, a networking group, or shared project success. The same can be said about authority, which he cites requires credibility based on trust and knowledge. In other words, you can't assume others believe in your competence and authority, you must promote or demonstrate your credentials to them.

This leads to the importance of another factor for influence, social proof, such as the testimonials of other people. Cialdini conducted his research decades ago, before the internet boom. Thus, I find social proof to be one of the most important factors of sway towards a successful relationship. The things you say about yourself in the age of Yelp and Google reviews are not nearly as important as the things other people say about you.

The conclusion I draw about the subject of relationships is very simple. The business relationship is established when the seller intentionally discovers commonality and can compliment as well as complement the buyer's goals. The relationship is successful when the seller helps the buyer succeed, the buyer knows it, and happily tells others. Okay, so you might not get the testimonial from everyone, but you get the idea. It's not enough to say you can't define a good relationship, but you know it when you see it. It's essential to define it so you can pursue it with intention. ■



Rick Davis, president of Building Leaders, is a premier sales trainer in the building materials industry. His latest book, *Sales Economics: The Science of Selling*, is now available at buildingleaders.com. Rick can be reached at rickdavis@buildingleaders.com

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Keep things moving.

Post-pandemic hiring: Remember the fundamentals

BY RIKKA BRANDON

IT'S AN INTERESTING TIME to be hiring new employees. With a large number of laid-off workers, it might appear that the labor crunch is ending. But take a deep breath before jumping into the process. Just because your company has more options to choose from doesn't mean it's time to let your guard down. Hiring too quickly, as always, can lead to costly mistakes.

Why is hiring amid high unemployment a challenge? The first concern is the quality of the applicant pool. Consider what your company would do if you were conducting layoffs: Most likely, your underperformers would be the first to be let go while you hold as tightly as you can to your top performers for as long as possible.

Still, that's not to say that quality applicants aren't still out there. Many companies in tough financial straits likely had to let go of some highly valued employees. Your job is to find them. And that brings up the second concern: volume. More unemployed workers means more resumes and applications to sift through. Here are a few of the most important tools to consider:

Write a strong job description: Strong hires start with a strong job description—upfront work on your part to truly define what you want the position to be and what type of person is best to fill it. Determine what your business needs; figure out what goals you have in mind for the new hire; decide the skills, experience, and education you require; and determine the type of person you want around. Use these answers to write a thorough job description that's clear on goals and objectives, and let that description guide your decision-making process

Write a strong job ad: Your job ad is not the same as your job description. The ad needs to tell and sell your company as much as explain the job—it's a marketing tool to entice qualified people to apply, especially those who may still be employed but looking for something better.

Create a sorting system: To manage the steady flow of applicants, implement the RYG system to quickly sort which resumes need to be

reviewed more closely: Red (stop), Yellow (caution), Green (heck yes!). As you're reviewing responses to your ad, change the email subject line to include the color ranking next to the candidate's name. After your initial review, you can then sort your responses and focus on the "green" candidates first.

Leverage your interview questions: As always, use a blend of interview question types: For first/phone interviews "functional questions" will focus on what the individual has done in the past to see if they possess the basic skills to do the job you're hiring for. (e.g., "Have you used Quickbooks?" "Have you ever managed people?") "Behavioral questions," in which you ask about specific examples or situations, will provide a glimpse into the candidate's work ethic, their approach to challenges, and their ability to work as a team. (e.g., "Tell me about a time that you went above and beyond for a customer.") "Situational questions," which require job seekers to respond to a specific hypothetical situation they may face on the job, will help you determine what the person will really be like on the job, how they'll problem solve, and how they will get along with the team. (e.g., "A customer is walking in, the phone is ringing, and a co-worker needs help making a copy. Walk me through how you'd handle these competing needs for your attention.")

Consider the position: You're likely going to receive applications from people outside the building materials industry—and that's not a bad thing. While positions like sales managers may require industry knowledge and experience, warehouse staff and entry-level customer service positions require skills that can be learned on the job or replicated from other industries; an eager personality and diligent work ethic are more important considerations than direct building product experience.

No matter how large the pool of applicants, it's important to keep hiring fundamentals in mind to ensure you find the right fit the first time. ■



Rikka Brandon is a leading recruiter for the LBM industry. She's the CEO of BuildingGurus.com and founder of RecruitRetainRock.com where she helps business leaders solve their recruiting and retention challenges.

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Will your people tell you when you're naked?

BY RUSS KATHREIN

AS A LEADER, you are often asked to make decisions that not everyone will agree with. It's hoped that your key people will weigh in with their opinions and input in private while the subject is being debated. But then when the decision is finalized, everyone will "stack hands" and publicly agree with the decision. This is how it's supposed to work in a well-functioning team.

Yet leaders with a forceful personality can often feel that they are inviting input when, in fact, they are stifling it. They may create this situation over time by listening to input, but not really hearing it. Or they may overwhelm any dissenting opinions until their people just feel it's not worth offering their opinion anymore. Then, when the leaders are met with silence, they interpret this as agreement.

Hans Christen Andersen wrote a folktale called *The Emperor's New Clothes*. It's about a vain emperor who spent lavishly on his wardrobe. Some opportunistic salespeople came to him and claimed they could make him clothes that only smart people would see. To anyone stupid, the clothes would be invisible. The result was that the emperor was parading around naked in his "new clothes," while his people did not want to say anything for fear of being thought foolish or branded incompetent. The whole plot was not exposed until a child, who did not know he would be thought foolish, cried out that the emperor was naked.

The reason this story resonates with me is because I had something similar happen with a team I had previously led. We had a program that I was passionate about. I thought it was different and set our company apart. We had a team that ran the program and reviewed it on an annual basis, but I was deeply involved and always looking for ways to improve and change it. When a career opportunity came that would require me to leave the team, we were in the middle of our annual review of the program. We were contemplating some tweaks, but I really thought we were at the point where we were going to be seeing some real dividends.

Not long after I departed, I was surprised to learn that my former team had chosen to

change the program, and not just a little. They basically did a 180-degree turn and went in a different direction. At first, I was somewhat mad that they had changed a program I had been so passionate about. But then I realized that it was out of my hands and well within their discretion and responsibilities. Once I got past that emotion, the really troubling question that came to me was how this team could have come to such a quick agreement on changing the program if they had agreed with my prior decisions about the program.

The answer was obvious. They didn't agree with me about the program. They had just kept their mouths shut. So now I had to take a hard look at what actions or behaviors I may have taken that kept the people on my team from speaking up. Was my invitation for feedback viewed as insincere? Did I talk down any dissenting opinions or alternative proposals? Did my actions make someone feel foolish if they expressed their point of view? In what other decisions that we made as a team did I interpret their silence as agreement?

Could the same thing be happening to you with your team? Are you truly soliciting feedback from your team or is this merely viewed as a perfunctory action on your part? Is your personality so strong that people keep quiet out of fear or intimidation? Do you ask for input in a style that matches the personality of your team members? These are all things that you should periodically check about your leadership style.

The flipside is to look at your team members. Are they truly supporting your decisions once out in public? Do they give support to you at decision time, but then verbalize dissent in private to others? Are your team members strong enough to be willing to speak their opinion, or have you put in place people who have learned to just go along?

It's a balancing act between your behavior and that of your team members. What is important is that you decisively take action using the best information available with the constructive input from your team, and that you don't one day find out that all along you were standing around naked and nobody spoke up. ■



Russ Kathrein is with the LBM Division of Do it Best Corp. based in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

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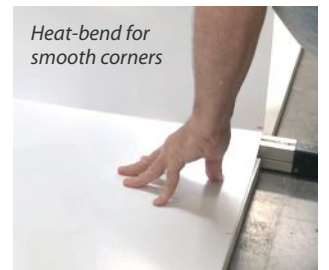
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Another example of credit bringing value to sales

BY THEA DUDLEY

Dear Thea,
I always have those “shoulda, coulda, woulda” moments after meetings but thought I had it covered. I had made a list of notes to myself of items to bring up during the webinar we did, *Credit Goes to the Dark Side*. I had a point I really wanted to share about credit augmenting sales. I blew it! I passed over it.

You have probably forgotten this incident, but not too long after I started at the company, you and I went to Atlanta to visit a customer about a large credit line. We were going to review their financials. During that meeting you discovered they had another business that used products we also sold. Our sales rep didn’t know about the other business or the sales potential, but in the financial review, you uncovered it. Usually, sales reps concentrate on a single item or materials line: roofing, insulation, drywall, etc. You built on those items and got the customer to commit to buying additional lines for the other business from us and gave them a bigger credit line than they initially wanted.

After the customer meeting, we went back to the branch and you told the branch manager about the outcome of our visit. He was tickled pink! Credit gave the customer a higher credit line just by seeing they had other assists in their financials. That was eye-opening for me, and even though it was few and far between that I was able to do that, it showed credit managers *do* work for the betterment of the company as a team (with sales) and not just risk management (or collecting money or saying NO).

Fast forward to my life as an owner: I was at a supplier’s branch picking up an order, and while I was waiting for it to be pulled, I walked around and saw they had stacks of product I purchase from another vendor. I mentioned it to my rep, who responded, “Ryan, I didn’t know you used that.” Our vendor sales rep thought we only did deck-related projects (we do additions, porches, etc.) and had been missing a major opportunity.

In credit, we deal with all kinds of companies that do a variety of things, so we end up almost being more diverse in knowledge about our product lines than some of the sales reps, or a rep who specializes in one specific line or section of the business.

We never got credit for those additional sales, but we did gain street cred from the rep and branch manager. They knew we were all on the same team and shared the experience with others. Just goes to show, growth comes from unexpected places and working as a team pays off.

— Ryan Spencer with Exterior Escapes, LLC

**Dear Former Credit Manager,
How does that saying go? It’s never too late to include a great “credit brings value” story. Ok, maybe it isn’t really an actual saying but it should be. This is a great real-life example of what can happen when everyone is on the same team, communicates, and asks for help. Thanks for the reminder and feel free to share credit wisdom anytime, my friend. ■**



With more than 30 years of credit management experience in the LBM industry, Thea Dudley consults with companies on a wide range of credit and financial management issues. Contact Thea at theadudley@charter.net

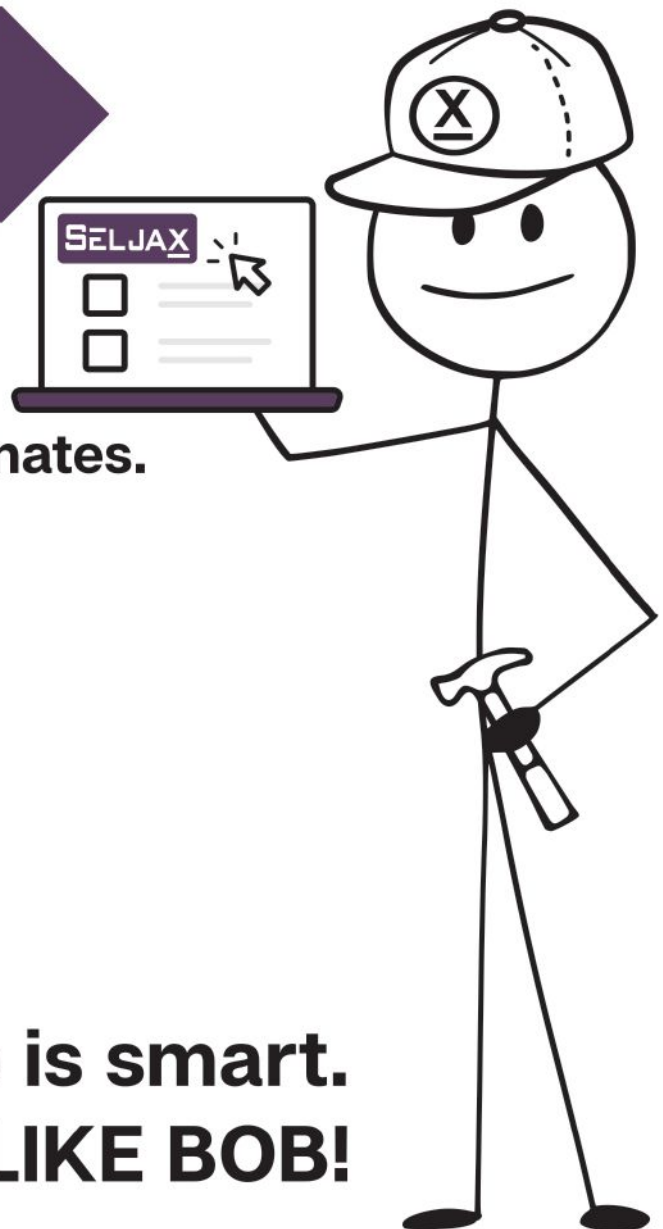
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What is a pre-empt?

BY JOHN WAGNER

USUALLY, when our firm puts out a “teaser” for a company that we are taking to market, it takes a few days or even a week before we start to see signed confidentiality agreements (CAs) from potential acquirers. With signed CAs in hand we can then release the confidential informational memorandum, or CIM, which reveals our client’s name, presents summary financials, and contains a full description of our client’s operations.

Knowing this typical cadence of 1) teaser, 2) CA, and 3) CIM, we once put a deal “on the street,” and I made the risky decision to take a short vacation. We put out the teaser, and I was off that evening, in this case to Portugal. So, I was stunned to see my phone ringing at 10 a.m. local time the next morning (5 a.m. on the East Coast!) with a New York area code. And it was a Saturday.

The caller didn’t even introduce himself. He just said the three words that every sell-side investment banker usually hears only in fever dreams of a quick sale: “We’re the buyer.”

“Wait, who is this?” I asked.

Again, he just said: “We’re the buyer.”

He finally introduced himself, and I quickly confirmed that this fellow was from a private equity firm that had the wherewithal to make the acquisition.

The man said he was already prepared to offer a “pre-empt” on the deal. He was sending the pre-empt over that day.

A pre-empt is a solid offer in the form of an LOI (letter of intent) or an IOI (indication of interest), with a solid price, which tends toward paying a premium for the target company. The objective of the pre-empt offer is three-fold: 1) To sweep the deal off the market before a competitor can get in the action; 2) To avoid a potential bidding war with another acquirer that could drive the price to irrational levels, and 3) to tamp down the “stray voltage” created when a deal teaser is taken wide, where tongues start wagging as to who the company for sale might be. (Our firm’s outreach list is more than 1,100 buyer names. For this deal, turns out we

didn’t even send the teaser to the entire list of buyers. The pre-empt was so strong, it stopped the outreach effort entirely.)

In this case the price offered for our client was very strong, but not in the stratosphere; they were going to pay a slight premium without overpaying.

Our client accepted the pre-empt immediately, for four reasons: 1) They knew the buyer, and its management; they wanted to work with them and knew their employees would be treated fairly; 2) The sellers didn’t want an unwieldy, drawn-out offering process; they were happy to take a fair price, knowing the deal would close quickly; 3) The reason you keep hearing the cliché “a bird in hand is worth two in the bush,” is because it’s true. In this case, the pre-empt was that bird in the hand, and 4) The sellers didn’t get greedy by saying, “Well if they offered \$12 million, they must be able to pay \$14. Let’s get another potential buyer in here and leverage them both in an auction.”

Fair enough, as a sell-side bank, we welcome controlled auctions, but if acquirers (especially those offering well-priced pre-empts in good faith) get even a whiff of the sense that their offer is getting “shopped,” they rightfully feel used and sometimes—we’ve seen it happen—they walk away, often along with the other parties too.

After accepting a nice offer to take the deal off the market, the risk of a pre-empt is that the seller will have that sinking feeling that they could have gotten more; that they should not have accepted the offer and gone wider with the teaser.

I sympathize with that “sinking feeling,” but the longer I am in the M&A business, the more I realize how fragile deals can be, and how easily acquirers can walk away. Or how often an acquirer’s financing can fall through. Or—as the deal drags out in time between LOI and closing—how often the acquirer asks for repricing if the seller’s performance slips even a little bit. So, my vote: Taking the bird in hand will often outweigh the sinking feeling that you may have left a little on the table. ■



John Wagner is a managing director at 1stWest Mergers & Acquisitions, which offers a specialty practice in the LBM sector. Reach John at j.wagner@1stwestma.com

Glow in the dark profits

BY SHANE SOULE

WOULD YOU BELIEVE ME if I told you that you could substantially and easily improve your profit, and you probably already have all the tools you need in place? Get ready. I am going to do just that, by helping you identify the least profitable 15% of your business and by shedding some light on your profit goals.

Historically the distribution side of our industry is antiquated in many ways. Our two main tools for guidance over the years have been simply *guesstimates and gut feel*. We have relied mostly on our prior month's financials as a North Star to guide decisions to improve profitability.

For example, *cost* is defined as the amount we pay for the raw materials that we sell. *Margin* is the percentage we use to markup *cost* to get to *break even*, and *profit* is what we hope is left over as we cross our fingers and jump to the last page of the month-end reports once our accountant finally finishes them. We use *guesstimates and gut feel* to decide how to price, to estimate if a customer or job is profitable, and to gauge whether we are heading our profitability in the right direction. The good news is you are probably closer than you think to identifying the least profitable 15% of your business and implementing a plan to improve it.

Technology has significantly improved our ability to understand our true costs at the transaction level, but we haven't consistently built these insights into our decision making. GPS software, ERP integration, dashboards, and SmartViews (online, real-time analytical tools) now allow us to extract a dollar amount relative to actual operational costs. With a little setup, it can even be automated so it's available at your fingertips.

When analyzing cost structure, I've identified the three most variable operational costs that, when tracked, narrow gross margin down to a more defined and accurate net margin that clearly shines a light on profitability. On top of "the price you paid on the PO," the cost of delivery, material handling, and all-in sales costs give you a micro and macro view reflecting more complete, as well as highly accurate, profitability measures.

1. Delivery: Calculate your fleet's historical average "dollars per hour costing" by adding trucks, trailers, driver and dispatch burdened compensation, insurance, fuel, and maintenance. Then divide by actual driving hours in a measured period using your GPS software. This should net you around \$75-\$150/hour. Use your dispatching software to track the time it takes to deliver each order and credit. Build a SmartView with a table that takes those hours and multiplies your trucking cost to get a true delivery cost per transaction that can then be sliced and diced by transaction, job account, customer, etc.

2. Material Handling: Follow a similar path by adding up material handler burdened labor, forklifts, propane, MH materials costs, and maintenance. Calculate the sales dollars of only sales that required material handling (don't include direct or retail sales) to come up with a material handler cost per handled sales dollar. Add this metric to the SmartView.

3. Sales Cost: In the SmartView, add in commission paid per transaction to the OSR if applicable. You can go a step further and add in additional costs unique to specific sales reps (i.e., with coordinators and estimators), since each sales rep uses a different level of additional resources that could equate to another 2-3% in cost. Then add in applicable credit card fees and discount terms as well.

Adding those three variable cost buckets will allow you to see that one customer with the same gross margin as another may track a loss of 5% while the other one records 5% profit after all these costs are accounted for. Now you can analyze your job accounts and customers to identify the least profitable 15% of your business and come up with a targeted game plan to increase the profitability in the right areas. Tracking and utilizing this data provides a consistently bright light on profitability as you analyze performance, and it drives better decision making—creating your easiest and highest ROI action plan for a glowing future. ■



Shane Soule consults with LBM and component companies to increase productivity and profits, and improve the experience for both customers and team members. Reach Shane at shane@shanesoule.com

2022

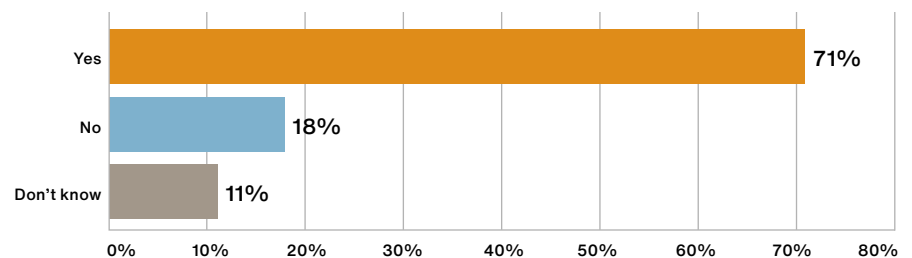
With so many LBM dealers finishing up a very strong year, and with pent-up demand for new homes and remodeling projects, it's only natural that companies see tremendous potential. This month's Real Issues. Real Answers question, from a dealer in Rhode Island, acknowledges the opportunity for growth and asks, "where to start?" Thank you to all who responded to this very brief, three-question survey on...

GROWING FORWARD

BY LBM JOURNAL READERS

First, we asked our readers who took the survey, how many actually had a plan for growth. As you can see in the chart below, an overwhelming percentage of readers indeed have a plan for future growth, whether that is growing in place, or expanding through new opportunities.

DOES YOUR COMPANY HAVE A PLAN FOR GROWING ITS BUSINESS?



Secondly, we relayed the question posed to *LBM Journal* readers directly from a dealer in Rhode Island:

“We have such an opportunity to grow our business at this point but without help we are uncertain where we should start. We will need to bring on more salespeople and trucks, and we believe our business can support this—except for the labor. We’d love to learn from other dealers...where do you start?”

RESPONSES FROM LUMBERYARDS, BUILDING MATERIALS DEALERS, AND SPECIALTY DEALERS/DISTRIBUTORS:

“Start by putting together a plan. It’s easy to look at next year, but what does it look like further down the road? What is your business going to look like in 2026, and what will your customer base look like? Planning for future growth now will help with problems down the road. One of our biggest hurdles in 2021 for expansion was supply chain constraints. We had a facility that we had planned to open in early spring of this year, but fast-forward to October and we are just now getting wood on the ground to start shipping. Make sure with the possibility for new hires and growth that your supply chain and vendor programs are such that you can actually supply the new business.”

“Talk it through and don’t be afraid to poach talent from other businesses!”

“Find people who will invest their time and their talents in your business and when you do, give them a proper share of your treasure. It just seems to me that everyone wants the treasure, but only want to use their time and talents if it doesn’t interrupt their personal life.”

“If you’ve decided to continue operating independently, look to the association of which you’re a member. Many members with experience are happy to share their experience with you.”

“Labor is the major issue we all are dealing with, and it will not get better in the near future. We are looking at all the ways we can be more efficient with our current workforce. We are working on reload times, drive times, and offload times. How do we do better with each of these? We’re trying to gain enough time for one more load each day off each delivery truck.”

“We are a small company but have grown our labor by targeting the young adults aged 18 to mid 20s. We offer a nice benefits package with company-provided single healthcare insurance allowance (most will stay on their parents’ policy until 26), uniforms, and boot allowance. We keep our trucks looking good and desirable to drive, we offer random gift cards, random company provided breakfasts or lunches, discretionary profit-sharing bonuses as profits allow, and a 40-hour week. Most of this generation doesn’t want to work any more than that and are more apt to leave early than stay late. Obviously, we’re committed to hiring for attitude and training for skill and often originate from our internal networking for new candidates. Older candidates are more experienced, more difficult to find and hire of course, being more expensive and too often need to break less-than-desirable habits. We set up for our growth pre-COVID with committing to the labor and equipment infrastructure first, then hired outside sales reps. We were blessed that our timing coincided with the economic explosion of our industry due to COVID, but our market has been primed for growth also due to the local housing shortage prior to 2020.”

“Consider paying above the prevailing wage for drivers, etc. Borrow money to buy trucks and equipment while rates are low. Find a bright young salesperson with a great personality. You can train that person to lumber trade, but you can’t train that person to have a great personality. Pay well.”

“You start with people and then build around them. Fixed assets are easy once you have the right team.”

“We started with the basics first. We implemented better processes and procedures throughout our entire operation. This streamlined how we were doing things and allowed us to do much more with what we already had in place. This allows your existing staff to do much more with what they already have. That process took almost two years as it was a complete overhaul. Don’t move too many things at once as it causes chaos. If you make changes at an easy pace and people see the benefits, it opens them up for more change. Culture is also a big part of this. If you can create and foster a good work environment, you will win. We have now started adding positions and equipment. Bottom line: Build your business backbone and treat people with respect and you will win.”

“We are carefully and cautiously getting into installed window sales. We see a lack of skilled labor to do this work, and our builder customers at this point are showing signs of interest in this service. This has grown out of our window service department, and we also see this as an opportunity to get windows installed properly this first time. We are also changing some of our delivery vehicles to be more flexible and get away from the need for CDL drivers. We also see this an opportunity in our market to up our service proposition versus of local competitors.”

“Recruiting employees is extremely difficult at this time. I would only expand as I was able to hire and add on the equipment needed after that. Some would say to move forward with your plans and the employees will come, but since I have such a small lumberyard, I tend to be much more cautious.” ➤

“Find the most knowledgeable salesperson at the big box stores and feel him or her out. Secondly go to a recruiting company that specializes in building material personnel. As far as deliveries, if you can’t find drivers for your new trucks, call a delivery company and lease some drivers for the time being. If they are good, buy out their contract.”

“Banks are awash in cash and have great rates as well. If you are confident about your business plan, put company money into a new facility, inventory, equipment, etc., and make sure you have a line of credit at the bank to help you fund receivables, payables, etc. Hire great people. Go for it!”

“Take the low hanging fruit. Become efficient through better systems, grow better management, grow benefits for current employees.”

“There is no simple answer to this question. It will be different for each of us. You may have an opportunity to purchase a competitor in a nearby town while I might have the opportunity to buy some adjoining land to allow me to add a manufacturing division. The common denominator is always people. My motto is this: Hire good people and get (the hell) out of their way!”

“Do not proceed until you have the right people in the right positions in your company. Without the right people you’ll be setting yourself up to destroy your customer service, your reputation, and your ability to grow in the future. This is a relationship business; never forget that.”

“The growth plan today must include an aggressive recruiting, hiring, and retention strategy. A good business coach and staffing company may be of help also.”

“Taking your time to find the right candidates is vital. You can’t move forward successfully if you aren’t staffed right. Too much of your time is spent trying to talk the wrong people into your way of thinking.”

“First, is it a part of the business or opportunity that you have a level of expertise in? Second, engage the right people in the decision-making. Not the financial piece, but the practicality. Not just management, but the group that this growth is going to impact. Listen and consider what you need to support, especially with the labor shortage and longer time to acquire trucks. Third, do your due diligence. Segregate your current business in this new venture into a set of financials. Nothing too detailed, but track revenue, cost of goods (if applicable), expenses, labor, insurance (contact your broker/agent and find out the impact on liability rates as well as workers comp), truck expenses, and any others you feel are significant to this venture. How does this impact your bottom line? What are your additional cash needs and where is the cash coming from? Depending on significance, you should get your creditors involved. Fourth, how distracting will this new/expanded venture be for management? Does this support for your strategic plans? How does it fit in?”

“Our market is restricted by an acute labor shortage. As material costs correct to realistic levels, we believe our business will come back. To offset the labor shortage, we plan to make the shopping experience easy, and maintain strong in-stock position so customers don’t need to go elsewhere.”

“We are certainly in a market with higher demand now more than ever, with the proposals for new greenfields and other innovative approaches being applied at this time, we are growing the business by utilizing the proximity of our branches. This has helped to maintain a steady flow for the current areas we service, and even grow into areas where we have not had a presence in the past.”

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“Start with account management and work it from the basics. Who is going to call on new accounts? How much revenue do you expect? How about deliveries? Use historical guidelines for margins, set a budget and then go after it and follow your steps along the way, making sure you are hitting your marks. Benchmarking is the way to go.”

“I would try looking for people four to five months before my peak season. Hire the people, go through the training process, and be ready. I would also bump my inventory levels on several things in preparation for new accounts. The last thing you want is to blow it on your first chance with a new account. Good luck.”

“Talk to your employees. They know your business also! I am sure that they could help you find new people and may even help you refine your growth plan.”

“Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible for an independent dealer to compete with the large companies when it comes to compensation for employees. We have increased our salaries and benefits, but so has everyone else. So, the opportunity to grow is on the back burner, for now. We have to take care of the customers we have.”

“Focus on service opportunities and product quality enhancements to differentiate from competitors. You cannot grow profitably by throwing more of the same at the market. What will you bring to the table that makes growth desirable in the marketplace to the customer base you are focused on?”

“Make sure you have an inventory built up to avoid out-of-stocks. Hire sales staff with experience and an existing customer base. Advertise what you do better than the competition.”

“First you need an action plan of how you will grow the business, and what customers and market sectors you feel have growth potential. Do a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) so you know which areas will give you the ability to succeed and which might be an impediment and address those items. If labor is a concern, determine if your structure attracts good people or if you can develop talent that is already part of your team. Map out a path to growth so you know where you want to go, then set measurable goals and understand how you can accomplish them.”

“Good question and good luck! Everybody in every industry seems to be operating with 2/3 of the required staff.”

“Look outside the box. How can you leverage tech to do more with the same manpower?” ➤



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“Start with a strategic planning retreat to plan your growth. Brainstorm every possible source of more employees. For example, we do college recruiting and community college recruiting. We use online sites like Indeed.com and Zip Recruiter. We have a very active social media presence where we announce openings, as well as on LinkedIn. We also pay a \$2,000 referral fee when one of our associates refers us to someone we hire. We pay that out at the rate of \$500 per quarter after the new person is hired. If they quit or get fired, we stop the payments.”

“Start by assessing the growth opportunities. Not all are equal. Focus on the opportunities that give you the greatest value in the long term. Create a plan and get input from your existing staff as they may have ideas that will help during the transition.”

“Take care of the drivers and warehouse personnel that you have.”

“Start with core staff—sales, support, yard help, drivers, and installers. Add to these as you need. Keep the level of product and service at a high level.”

RESPONSES FROM WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTORS, MANUFACTURERS, AND SERVICE PROVIDERS:

“Start by adding products and services that your company can handle with little to no additional people required. Add back-office technology that will link you and your customers closer and make you easier to do business with. Add remanufacturing capacity that will earn you greater respect by your customers as you will become more than just a truck for moving bulk building materials, but also a value-added manufacturer. Add branded specialty products with exclusive or semi-exclusive distribution that can be sold by your existing sales force while at the same time purging your system of the ‘me-too’ products that don’t provide your company with a meaningful return. Use this time to ‘clean-house’ and get ready for the next downturn, which we all know is coming. We are nearing the end of a long building cycle. My advice would be to avoid adding a lot of new capital expenditures at this stage in the cycle unless it’s technology or services that you can get paid for.”

“If your business model is such that you have a choice on when to grow the revenues, then take a pause and make sure the people are in place to support the growth. Labor shortages for us have caused a lot of stress on existing personnel keeping up with the growth to the point where turnover has dramatically increased, and quality has declined.”

“The building industry needs to work on attracting younger employees. We need to market the excitement about our ever-changing and growing industry that shows this potential. We need to work on shining the light on how building sciences are changing and expanding. In the meantime, as the above process will take many years, we have tried to recruit through our employees. If they know a good quality person, we offer our employee a cash incentive to recommend that person. If the person stays for three months our employee receives a bonus. If the person stays for another three months our employee receives another cash bonus. If the new recruit stays for a year, our employee receives a final payout, and the new recruit receives a sign-on bonus. Also make sure your benefits are strong and attractive.”

“We have had a lot of luck tapping our local community college and university for those students taking night courses. I love the millennials that are enrolled in vocational programs. Those kids are hardworking go-getters. We also offer a good starting wage even with no experience, paid holidays, and affordable insurance coverage.”

“Try job fairs and social media. It is very hard to compete with larger and more glamorous jobs, but we focus on the small family business that treats people more than a number.”

“Sales is the place to start! We are a sales company that happens to be in the wholesale lumber business, so ‘nothing happens until there is a sale.’ While it is also prudent to keep a close eye on labor availability, improving sales first and then tackling the operational challenges...that is the place to begin.”

“Growth issues will be ongoing in New England for the foreseeable future. Raw material and supply chain problems need to be addressed by every dealer that wants to create and manage business opportunities going forward. One of the key ways that this can happen is to partner with manufacturers/distributors that have strong capability to service the market and also work as an unpaid employee to help dealers work through manpower issues by pulling business to them from downstream. The better the channel is understood, the better the management of future growth.”

“I would first start with asking if you need help to grow it, can you support it after the help is given? If you find yourself in needing an undefined help you may want to first address why you don’t have the ability to grow with your current resources.”

“I usually start by asking our current employees if they have anyone who they may know that needs a job or is looking for a new start. This could be family or friends.”

“Do as the hospitals do: get your employees to help and pay them a thousand dollars if their efforts result in a hire, payable after six months.”

“Offer competitive wages and benefits, but overall create a culture that organically grows your labor pool. Places where people love working means they will bring their friends and family in to apply for opportunities. Talk to your employees, run anonymous surveys, find out what makes them enjoy working for you and build upon that.”

“Start with your current customers and feed their growth before looking for additional customers. Take care of your own right now!”

“We have found that with the right solution expert, your team can work through a plan that everyone can agree to and implement.”

“Start with this list: 1) Potential—What potential of wallet share can I get? 2) Profitability—Is this an opportunity that if we sell the right blend, we can earn a profit from? 3) Availability—Do I have the extra resources to spare and all the product that we can sell? Know your operational cost per customer, then by using this on each prospect, you should be able to put down the extra resources you will need. Once you determine this, you have a solid list of ‘buy, hire, and deploy.’ Chances are over the next couple of years it won’t be a mistake!”

“We continue to make long term investments consistent with our plan. We are not adding to short term payroll.”

“Start with your staff and look for acquisition opportunities. Also, interview some turnaround/acquisition specialists!” ■

Hundreds of readers share their insights for this every-issue feature. Have a Real Issue? Contact Rick@LBMJournal.com.

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BY JOE DYSART

DOUBLING-DOWN ON RANSOMWARE PROTECTION

AS THE THREAT OF RANSOMWARE has reached new heights in 2021, many lumber and building materials businesses are doubling-down on their defense against the scourge—making sure they’ve done everything they can to avoid becoming a victim.

“This year, we’ve already received 13 cyber claims—all of which were either the result of ransomware or spoof mail,” says John Smith, president and CEO of Pennsylvania Lumbermens Mutual Insurance Company.

Many owners of even the smallest lumber and building materials business realize they are prime targets for these hackers, who see small businesses as generally easy to penetrate, plunder and fool.

“Ransomware is most commonly known to spread through a malicious link via phishing email. And that’s probably where most perceive the risk,” Smith says. “But the web is the next most common way to spread ransomware. We Google everything and point-and-click away, not thinking much about the validity of the content until after we’ve already clicked.”

Indeed, successful ransomware attacks across the U.S. have proven so visceral this year, they’ve triggered an executive order from President Joe Biden—urging all U.S. businesses to get serious about ransomware protection. Biden’s order “calls for federal agencies to work more closely with the private sector to share information, strengthen cybersecurity practices, and deploy technologies that increase reliance against cyberattacks. It outlines innovative ways the government will drive to deliver security and software—using federal buying power to jumpstart the market and improve the products that all Americans use.”

During 2021 alone, businesses across the U.S. have been reeling from successful ransomware attacks, including attacks against SolarWinds, a commonly used IT management software program; the ransomware disruption of service on the Colonial Pipeline, the largest conduit of refined oil products in the U.S. and the ransomware seizure of computer files of the Washington DC Metropolitan Police Department.

Still other ransomware takedowns include a takeover of computer files at goliath meatpacking concern JBS Foods as well as at the National Basketball Association.

Granted, authorities have occasionally gotten lucky against ransomware hackers during 2021. Excellent cyber forensic work by the U.S. Department of Justice, for example, clawed back \$2.3 in Bitcoin that the Colonial Pipeline paid to ransomware hackers to help get its computer network up-and-running again.

“Following the money remains one of the most basic, yet powerful tools we have. We will continue to target the entire ransomware ecosystem to disrupt and deter these attacks. Today’s announcements also demonstrate the value of early notification to law enforcement. We thank Colonial Pipeline for quickly notifying the FBI when they learned that they were targeted by Dark Side,” said Lisa O. Monaco, U.S. deputy attorney general.

Even so, hackers more often than not get away with their exploits, extorting hundreds of thousands of businesses across the globe each year—and disrupting the day-to-day operations of each. Overall, 37% of organizations across the world have experienced some sort of ransomware attack between May 2020 to April 2021, according to a study from cybersecurity firm Sophos.

Based on that survey of 5,400 IT managers at mid-sized organizations across 30 countries, the study also found that the average ransom paid to recover data from a ransomware attack was \$170,404.00. Not surprisingly, many of the criminals behind those successful ransomware attacks ignored promises to restore computer files once ransoms were paid, according to the study.

Specifically, on average, victimized organizations in the study that paid ransoms only received 65% of their data. And only 8% of organizations forking over money to hackers were able to retrieve all of their files, according to the Sophos study. Equally vexing for the victim organizations was the cost to day-to-day business. On average, the cost to restore the impact of a successful ransomware attack on

a mid-size business—taking into account downtime, lost wages, device cost, network cost, lost sales, and ransomware paid was \$185 million.

Plus, hackers have increasingly exploited a new wrinkle in their ransomware schemes during the past year—threatening and often making good on threats—to publish sensitive data found in business files on the Dark Web if a victim business refuses to pay a ransom.

While news stories tend to focus on ransomware attacks on large corporations, LBM businesses are just as likely to be targeted by hackers. Plus, even at the smallest lumber and building materials business, a ransomware shutdown hurts, grinding its revenue stream to a halt and running the owner ragged trying to find a way to get computers up-and-running again.

That's why it's imperative to start putting together a plan to handle and mitigate ransomware and similar cybersecurity threats, which many believe should include comprehensive cybersecurity insurance.

Without such a plan, you'll most likely be caught flat-footed, struggling to deal with a swirl of chaos that might force you to make quick decisions you'll later regret.

"For example, our cyber security incident response plan empowers the head of IT and our cyber partner to shut down

systems immediately if it is deemed necessary to contain or research a serious event such as a ransomware attack," Smith said. "You often can't think about those kinds of things in the moment."

But perhaps most important in safeguarding your lumber and materials business against a hacker breach is ensuring your employees are brought up-to-speed on all the ways hackers are trying to trick them into clicking on links, revealing IDs and or passwords or otherwise providing access to the company network that can, and often does, result in devastation.

"The human factor is the most concerning to us when it comes to ransomware. Be sure you engage your entire company and build a cyber-aware culture. Have a plan in place to educate your staff on what to look for and how to report suspicious emails or links," Smith said.

In the end, it appears the scourge of ransomware and similar cybersecurity threats is doomed to relentlessly play-out as a never-ending game of cat-and-mouse. The idea is to be the cat—not the mouse. ■

Joe Dysart is an internet speaker and business consultant based in Manhattan.

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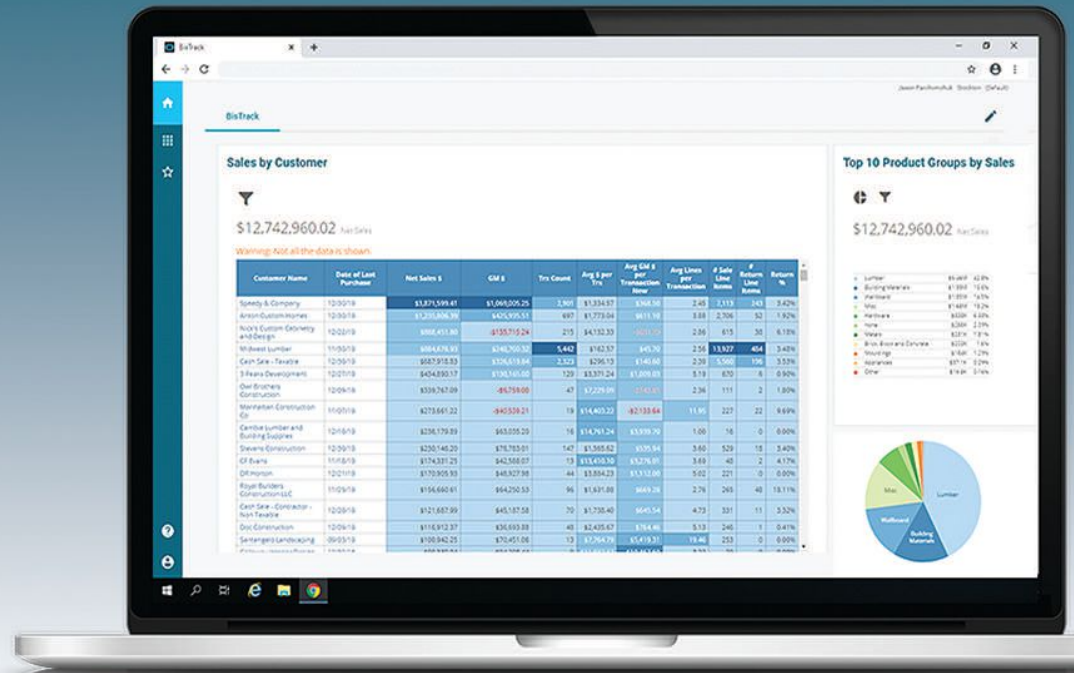
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Epicor's BisTrack Kinetic features a UX that the company says enables employees to work remotely while simplifying common business practices. Users can schedule, dispatch, and deliver product, optimize truck and driver usage, and minimize errors. With new extended support with WMS to support tagged packs, users can track by pack rather than by individual units, and rate shopping. Epicor Quick Ship allows users to preview shipping rates with FedEx or UPS.



TECH TOOLS

TO PLAN FOR THE FUTURE, SKIP CRYSTAL BALLS OR PALM READING AND LOOK TO TECHNOLOGY.

BY MIKE BERGER

FOR MILLENNIA, us humans have looked for ways to predict the future, and we've tried some pretty bizarre methods. Gelomancy, for example, involves carefully listening to hysterical laughter for hints about the future. Those who practiced felidomancy professed to know the future by observing cats. And those who adhered to phrenology believed that bumps on people's skulls could accurately predict not only a person's personality but indeed their future.

Turns out, we're not that different from those who came before us. Like them, we look for methods, tools, and practices that can help guide us through tumultuous times. And if ever times were tumultuous, the past year has certainly left its mark in the history books. Market volatility brought on by the global pandemic along with radically increased demand for product has created an environment for the LBM distributor that is, in short, hard to predict.

“Overall, we’re seeing a lot of the same trends as in years past, but at a much more accelerated rate,” says Jason Parchomchuk, product manager at Epicor Software. “Both customers and dealers have come to expect e-commerce solutions. In the past 12 months—and even before—the industry is experiencing the Amazon effect, where customers are expecting a seamless, more self-service experience. And with labor shortages, dealers need to find ways to do more with less.”

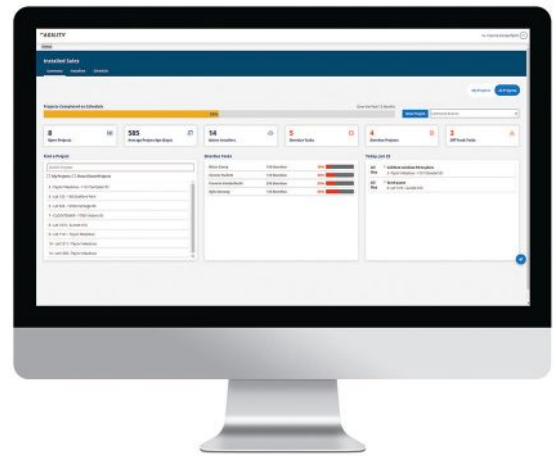
That’s where technology comes in. Far better than a crystal ball or a deck of arcane cards, the right tech tools can provide solutions that help the savvy LBM dealer see what’s down the road and plan strategically for it. “With supply chain constraints over the past year, advanced business reporting has been critical for LBM professionals to keep a pulse on their operations and the broader industry’s health,” points out John Maiuri, president of the LBMH Division at ECI Software Solutions. “Solutions that offer real-time data dashboards and reports can help business owners make more strategic decisions based on sales, inventory on hand, scheduled shipments and special orders.”

CHANGE IS THE NEW NORMAL

Historically speaking, the LBM industry has not been the quickest to adapt to new technologies, nor have they been ones to set aside “paper and pencil” methods of managing their businesses in favor of new technology-driven methodologies. The days of doing things as they’ve always been done, however, are fading away as tech advisors look at the challenges of the past twelve months.

“Maintaining consistent communication with customers and sustaining an efficient, cost-effective operation became even more critical for hardware retailers and LBM businesses over that last twelve months,” explains Maiuri. “Additionally, with forced closures and social distancing guidelines limiting store foot traffic, it has become essential for those businesses to create more convenient online retailing experiences to support sales. Omni-channel

According to DMSi Software, its Installed Sales module (part of its Agility ERP software) enables LBM users to deliver additional value to their customers by providing end-to-end visibility into their installed sales jobs. From any location, project managers can view everything from sales orders and job details to contractor schedules and payment histories all in one place.

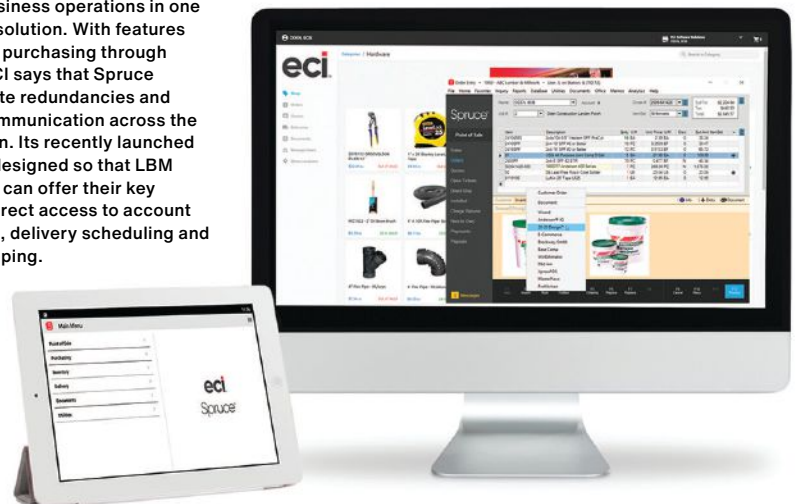


retailing solutions became very popular over the last 12 months to allow LBM professionals to remain connected to their customers through e-commerce tools and customer portal capabilities.”

LBM retailers are realizing their technology infrastructure is outdated when it comes to maintaining both customer connection and data management. “We are seeing a lot of dealers who want to upgrade their software solution to support a work model where data is at their fingertips, wherever they happen to be working,” says Jordan Lynch, sales representative for DMSi Software. “We’re also seeing an increased demand in technology that helps to alleviate the supply chain challenges dealers are facing. Amidst so much global disruption, dealers are struggling to track and fulfill orders, lead times are being pushed out, and parts and products are less readily available. Having the ability to project orders and accurately track inventory and lead time allocations has become top priority.

Beyond communication and data reporting, the past year saw LBM dealers desperately striving to implement solutions that allowed for an on-site materials handling environment that was more in line with what was being provided by the big box stores, especially considering the increased demand for materials. “LBM dealers were caught flat footed as they were underinvested in technology that allowed them to transact with customers digitally,” says Steve Yates, president, North America, of Buildxact. “On the other hand, home centers such as Home Depot and Lowes were better prepared with existing e-commerce solutions, curbside pick-up and greater buying power on the supply side. LBM dealers lost market share to home centers who accumulated a disproportionate share of the additional sales from COVID-19.”

ECI’s Spruce suite of software is designed to give customers a way to manage business operations in one integrated solution. With features that handle purchasing through delivery, ECI says that Spruce can eliminate redundancies and improve communication across the organization. Its recently launched ProLink is designed so that LBM businesses can offer their key accounts direct access to account information, delivery scheduling and online shopping.



Buildxact is releasing Merchant Pro subscriptions that are designed to allow LBM dealers to connect their ERP systems with custom home builders and remodelers so those customers can produce more accurate estimates, win more work, and order more materials from the integrated LBM dealer.



Caleb Gieseke, manager of operations, estimating/drafting for Paradigm, agrees. “Maximizing efficiencies around building materials has become more important than ever,” he stresses. “With high demand for materials, combined with the industry’s supply chain challenges, technology that helps LBM dealers dial in and optimize material estimates and material usage is seeing greater acceptance. That includes solutions for material takeoffs and estimates, as well as material usage on jobsites. We’re also seeing more technology that’s giving the building industry more control over what’s being

delivered to the site and how delivery is timed. In the end, builders want their LBM partners to ship the least amount of material to get the job done without waste.”

E-COMMERCE IS HERE TO STAY

As DMSi Software’s Lynch points out, the prevalence of apps and the ability to access information and instantly make decisions from anywhere is vital. “Everybody is now using their phone for everything,” he says. “The Amazon effect is also finally reaching LBM dealers with e-commerce emerging in the market. Being able to track and view open orders, quotes, inventory levels, and deliveries is becoming business as usual. People used to pick up the phone and call their rep. Nowadays it’s more of a self-serve model.”

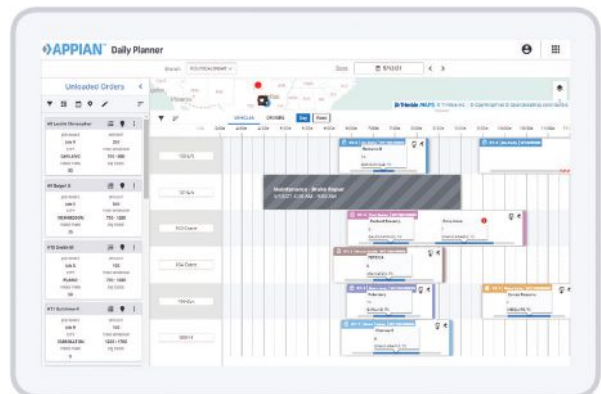
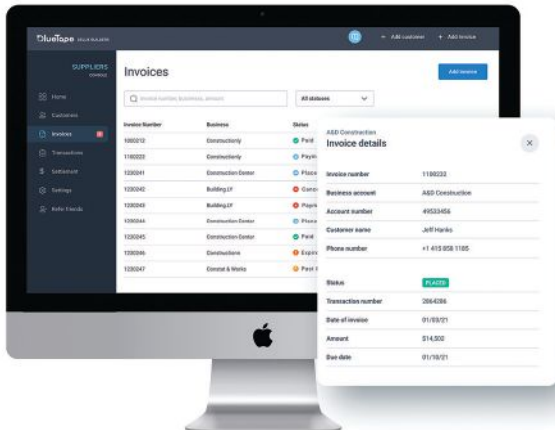
Lynch goes on to explain how, with an e-commerce platform, contractors can expect to be able to service their customers and allow them 24/7 access to their business. “This industry continues to struggle with labor shortages and in response, dealers have had to offer more services in-house,” he explains. “When it comes to tech tools, an installed sales platform has become

a priority because managing in-house installed sales or third-party relationships with contractors adds complication to a business. Simplifying complication is a key component to great customer service and technology can help with that.”

ECI Software Solutions’ Maiuri agrees with the importance of seamless shopping experiences. “It has become even more critical that LBM businesses offer optimal convenience online and in-store,” he explains. “Integrated omnichannel systems allow any employee to instantly obtain information to help a customer, including account information, inventory data, sales history or even delivery status. This can all be done without the need to search through filing cabinets or waiting for another department to provide the information needed. A professional web presence is now expected from businesses of all sizes, and without it, independent dealers could risk attrition. Online shopping and in-store pickup options have become the norm across industries, and the right technology can help independents build loyalty and capture greater wallet share from their customer base.”

BELOW RIGHT: Trimble MAPS’ new Appian Daily Planner is designed to give planners more route plan visibility and flexibility in how those routes are created. Its POI management tool allows users to assign geocoordinates to job sites where USPS addresses don’t yet exist while providing intelligent suggestions to help dispatchers decide new order routes with potential cost, mileage, and obstacle data.

BELOW: BlueTape is designed to allow building materials manufacturers, dealers, and suppliers to streamline their payment systems, lower their credit card processing fees, and offer net 30, 60 and 90 financing options to their trade customers.





According to Paradigm, the integration of Paradigm Estimate and Paradigm Omni platforms allows users to take advantage of quoting and configuration capabilities that work seamlessly together, giving users the option to evaluate project data and information needed to make recommendations based on demographics, square footage, zip code, and more.

It's slow progress, however, as Matt Meyers, founder and CEO of Yesler points out. While logic would dictate that an LBM dealer would move more towards connectivity, some head in the opposite direction, and it's a trend that needs to be worked against. "There is an accelerating divergence among lumberyards in tech exploration and adoption," he says. "The divergence is often exposed by one key event: a buyer retiring. The choices an owner/president makes when replacing a retiring buyer sets the tone for the future. Do they fill the role as is, or do they choose to modernize both the buying process and the technology? At Yesler, we have seen progressive buyers retire to be replaced by a traditional buyer, which halts the lumberyard's progress in modernizing processes and tools. It's an endorsement of status quo—note-pads, phone calls, lagging operational and market data, and opacity within the organization to the inner workings of buying. Conversely, we have lumberyard presidents who hire people specifically for a modernized buying process. They endorse speed, transparency, and data-driven analysis to make the best buying decisions."

EFFICIENCY DRIVES ALL

Whether it's with e-commerce, managing pricing, scheduling labor, or dealing with inventory, what's at the core for the LBM distributor is improving efficiency so that they can focus on day-to-day operations. "A big driver should be efficiency—in managing pricing, labor, overhead costs, and inventory management," says Epicor's Parchomchuk. "As labor shortages continue, dealers should be focused on what is going to save them time and money in the day to day."

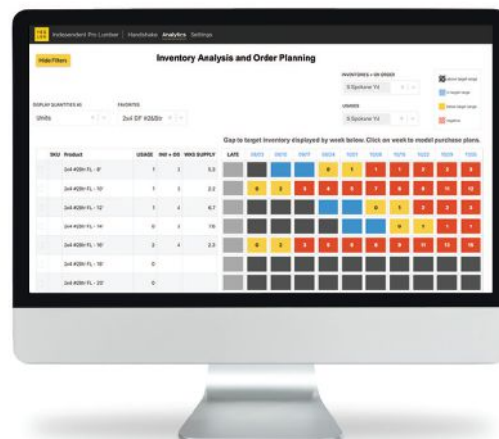
Braven Blackwell, president of Seljax, agrees. "LBM dealers should be investing in an estimating software that's simple to use, precise, and profitable. An estimating software increases sales while saving time and reducing expenses. It also provides a unique experience for the customer to be part of the design and receive a full detailed estimate presentation."

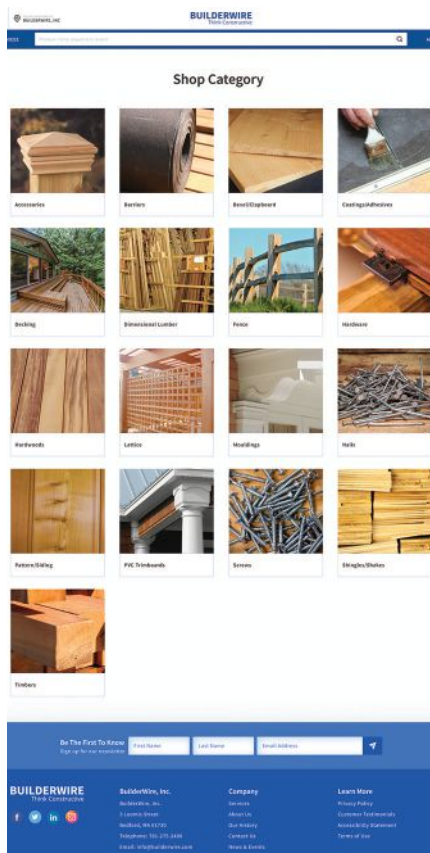
It's not just efficiency for the distributor; providing efficiency for the customer is just as important. "Any technology that allows LBM dealers to offer a more efficient, value-added experience to their customers will enable them to compete better in the market," points out Steven Kalnitzky, product lead at Trimble MAPS. "This includes fleet routing and scheduling software that can provide optimized route plans and driver schedules based on customer constraints such as delivery time windows and specialized vehicle or equipment needs. These tools can reduce manual planning efforts and should also help fix organizational inefficiencies that often result from a lack of internal visibility on the status of orders, assets, and people." ➤



Seljax software is designed to make estimating flexible so users can customize formulas to calculate to their standards. For example, Seljax allows users to enter waste factors for individual products, adjust the number of extra studs they calculate per corner or opening, and many more preferences.

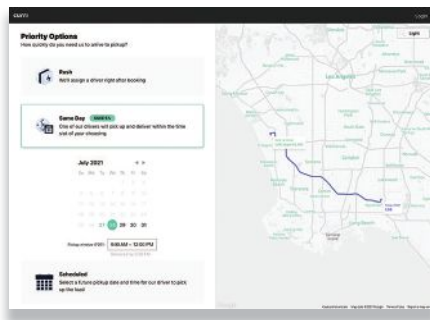
Yesler's Product Management Analytics have been expanded across more products, including lumber and OSB. According to the company, key features include the ability to combine data across all locations, even if those locations have separate ERPs or SKU descriptions in the ERP. Buyers can create, model, save, and share purchase plans within the organization.





BuilderWire's product catalogs can be represented on a dealer's integrated website 24/7, and connected directly to the company's ERP system. Customers browse inventory, place orders, and pay their bills through the website utilizing today's shopping cart technology.

Curri is a professional construction supply delivery service available nationwide. With flatbeds, trucks, and cars available for hotshot, scheduled, daily route, and LTL/FTL deliveries, Curri says it offers solutions for lumberyards. While the primary use cases for Curri are hotshot deliveries to customers, Curri can also be used to add flexibility to a current fleet.



And let's not forget efficiency of use. LBM dealers don't want to be mired down in lengthy software installations, upgrades, or anything that is disruptive to their day-to-day operations. "Key benefits of tech solutions should be to save time and save money," says Yesler's Meyers. "The paradigm of massive, disruptive software installations and deployments is counter to these benefits, especially in a busy, rapidly changing market environment. The new paradigm we see is 'login and go' technology, whereby LBM users can immediately begin using a new technology solution, very quickly saving time and money."

By increasing efficiencies, LBM dealers can experience other benefits that may not be immediately evident. For example, by freeing up time from the day-to-day operations, distributors can invest more resources into relationship development that prevents market share erosion. "New customers are looking for technology that reduces transaction friction and will go to those suppliers who are most 'easy' to buy from," says Buildxact's Yates. "LBM dealers will need to invest in customer facing technology to grow market share."

FINDING THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

While it's tempting to think that there's a simple technology solution to all this, that by investing in "X" you'll automatically get "Y," nothing could be further from the truth. There's no single right answer that fits every LBM dealer. "It's a tough question to answer from an industry level perspective, as it really depends on where the dealer is at this moment in time," explains Epicor's Parchomchuk. "If a company does not have an e-commerce presence, the most important thing is focusing on getting a functional and effective website customers can view inventory and purchase through. If a company has an e-commerce platform, but is struggling to effectively fulfill, warehouse management solutions are the place to focus. A great place to start is by looking at what you expect as a customer; assess where

your business has gaps compared to your own customer expectations and do your best to solve for those gaps in their business."

So, if it's not a "one size fits all" answer, what solutions are out there? The answer, in short, is a lot. Epicor Software, for example, provides customized solutions for LBM distributors and continues to optimize its BisTrack platform, provide tools for responsive business intelligence, and support the ability accept payments both online and in stores.

Likewise, Buildxact provides take offs, estimating, and project management in an all-in-one interface. "Other construction management software providers provide one or two of the three features, and you can get to the same functionality as Buildxact by purchasing additional modules or by using a linked 'ecosystem partner'," explains Yates, "but this comes with greater cost and complexity."

In the case of Paradigm, it delivers estimating tools that integrate with quoting and configuration software. "Integrating Paradigm Estimate and Paradigm Omni allows users to take advantage of the industry's most powerful quoting and configuration software and seamlessly go from takeoff to final quote," says Gieseke. "The integration gives users the option to evaluate project data and information needed to make recommendations based on demographics, square footage, zip code, and more."

Trimble MAPS' tools are designed to solve the problems of dispatchers and drivers. "Our route calendar planning application is a digital version of the white boards we've seen in most dispatch offices," says Kalnitzky. "Every stakeholder—including dispatchers, salespeople, and customer service representatives—can see which assets are available. Sales can reserve a truck for a priority customer; dispatchers can reduce call time with drivers; and customer service can monitor route and order status. Additionally, dealers can lasso select a number of stops on a map or drag and drop calendar entries to simplify and streamline the planning process."

According to Yesler's founder, Matt Meyers, its offerings organize the chaotic buying process to save time, reduce risk, and maximize profit for the operation. "We do that by first compiling critical operational data from any ERP into intuitive, intelligent views focusing buyers on the most important priorities. Second, we provide the tools needed to organize buying by engaging all existing and new suppliers in one communications platform for the buyer to negotiate and confirm orders. Third, all orders can be viewed in one calendar with POs, confirmations, and the conversation history with suppliers visible with a single click."

And DMSi Software offers point-of-sale systems in Agility along with inventory and accounting software, giving LBM dealers the ability to service customers both online and in the retail environments. "Customers can get in and out of the store," says

Lynch, "and we pair that up with an e-commerce online portal to allow off-hour availability in quotes, inventory, and pricing."

While technology can leave the LBM dealer feeling overwhelmed, take solace. Many industries are facing similar challenges, and technology developers stand ready to assist in any way possible. But it's the successful distributor who doesn't allow the fear of change to paralyze them. As ECI Software Solutions' John Maiuri puts it, "LBM dealers MUST have integrated technology in order to thrive. Disparate systems or working out of spreadsheets will not allow for growth nor provide the customer experience required today. Independent dealers have the industry expertise to better serve their key accounts, but they must leverage technology to run the business based on facts vs. gut instinct." ■

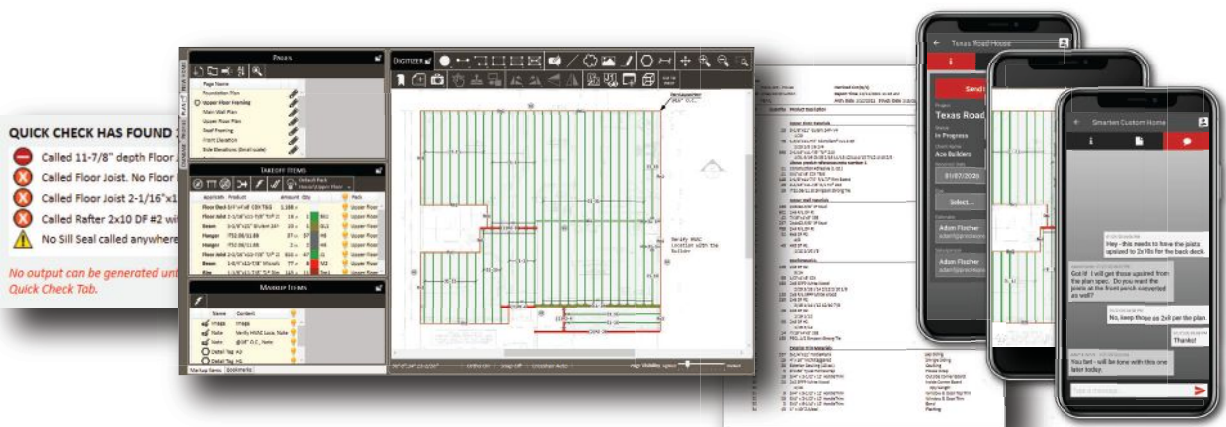


Chameleon Power's DeckVision 3D platform was developed for designing decks. From creating deck shapes to building out the entire outcome and bill of materials, DeckVision enables LBM users to create the outcome for their clients. LBM owners use visualization tools to shorten the selection and sales process across many building categories including deck and outdoor design.

Michael Berger is the former managing editor for HANDY Magazine and has been writing about home improvement and construction for the past 20 years.

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EACH MONTH, HUNDREDS OF PRODUCTS AND SERVICES VIE FOR INDUSTRY ATTENTION. HERE ARE SOME THAT OUR EDITORS THINK WILL INTEREST LBM JOURNAL READERS.



Simpson Strong-Tie's new bottle opener

Simpson Strong-Tie has introduced a new three-piece bottle opener kit to its line of Outdoor Accents decorative hardware. Designed to provide contractors, homebuilders, and DIYers with essential hardware, the Outdoor Accents line of code-listed decorative wood connectors and fasteners accommodates both nominal and rough lumber. The bottle opener comes as a three-piece kit that installs on any wood post and complements both the Mission Collection and Avant Collection product styles. The kit features a sturdy, black, metal bottle opener, a UV-protected composite plastic backplate, and removable catch cup to collect bottle caps. The catch cup even has drain holes in the bottom, so it won't overflow with suds and sodas. strongtie.com/outdooraccents

LP SkillBuilder

LP Building Solutions offers online training courses available in both English and Spanish versions, that include a free builder training series entitled SkillBuilder, aimed at training builders to properly install LP products for enhanced efficiency. With a series of how-to videos, the content is developed to operate as an ongoing training resource to install brand new LP products. From distribution and installation to maintenance, the training materials have been created to quickly help builders and dealers alike become LP SmartSide professionals. lpcorp.com



Qora Cut LedgeStone TightStack panels

Qora Cladding has introduced Qora Cut LedgeStone TightStack exterior cladding solution in three colors. Qora Cut LedgeStone TightStack is designed to answer residential and commercial demand for a stacked stone aesthetic, which the company says adds old-world quality to a modern, textured surface for exterior accents, including knee wall and wainscoting applications. The panelized system is available in 48" wide x 18" tall and 48" wide x 36" tall panels to maximize available square footage and increase installation speed. Qora Cut LedgeStone TightStack is available in three color patterns—Lexington, Gunstock, and Charcoal—and designed to complement any vinyl, wood, or fiber cement siding exteriors. According to the manufacturer, Qora Cut LedgeStone TightStack does not burn and it will not rot, buckle or delaminate. The product is available with a 20-year warranty. qoracladding.com



PrebuiltML

PrebuiltML is a construction takeoff software that specializes in framing. With an extensive database included, as well as a built-in digitizer, the software is designed to be quick to learn and yet offer continued growth. From 500 square feet to 500,000 square feet, from floor framing to roof, home, or commercial, PrebuiltML is built for running takeoffs, reports, layouts, pricing, and a material list that is ready to ship with your products and your stocked product lengths. The management capabilities of PrebuiltML HUB and a built-in Quick Check tool are designed to ensure that users have the right material, and they have a tool that will increase productivity and communication with sales, management, and estimating staff. prebuiltml.com

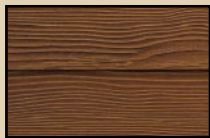




Nichiha Sierra Shake - Barnboard



Natural Cedar



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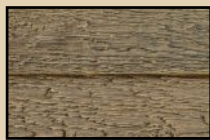
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Elemental Hardwoods adds Black Mesquite

Elemental Hardwoods has expanded its exotic hardwood flooring line with the addition of Black Mesquite, a wood species known for its stability, durability, distinctive character, and chocolate and gray-brown grain patterns. Sourced sustainably from the high desert Chaco region of Northern Argentina and Paraguay, Black Mesquite is said to add a warm, rustic flavor to homes and offices. Elemental Hardwood's Black Mesquite flooring is available in unfinished square edge TG4S in 1/2" and 3/4" thicknesses, widths that span from 3" to 8" and 1' to 7' lengths. elementalhardwoods.com



GP's ForceField approved for slope roof use

Georgia-Pacific has announced that ForceField Weather Barrier System is now approved for sloped roof application uses. ForceField Weather Barrier System is an integrated WRB (weather-resistant barrier) sheathing system for sloped roofs and walls developed to help reduce weather-related challenges and delays, simplify construction, and help to dry in multifamily and residential structures faster than traditional systems. Comprised of the integrated WRB sheathing panels and compatible wall and roof tape accessories, the products are designed to work together to deliver a seamless build. The ForceField Weather Barrier System meets the water-resistant barrier, air-barrier, and roof covering requirements of the International Building Code (IBC), International Residential Code (IRC), and the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC). ForceField Weather Barrier System comes with a 10-year limited transferrable warranty. buildgp.com/forcefield

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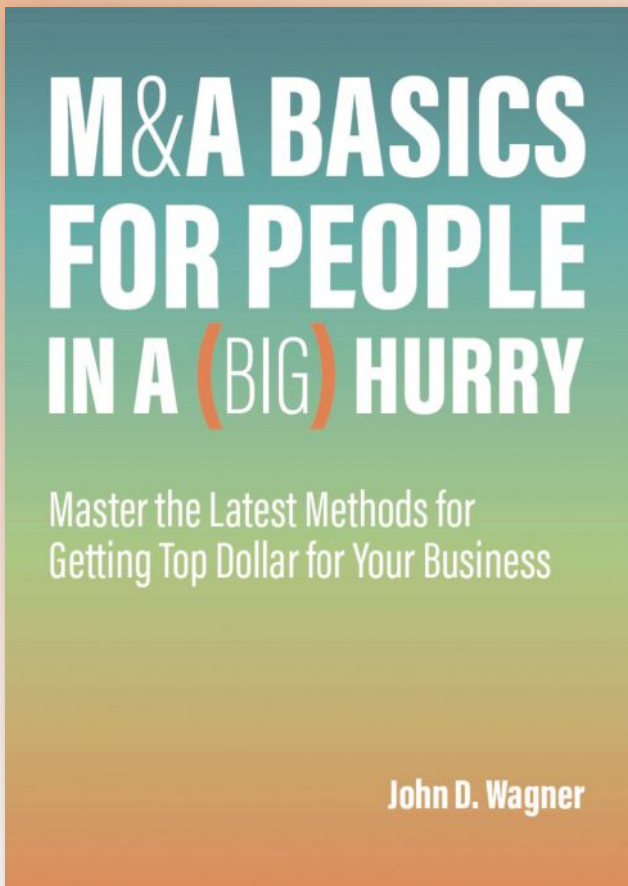
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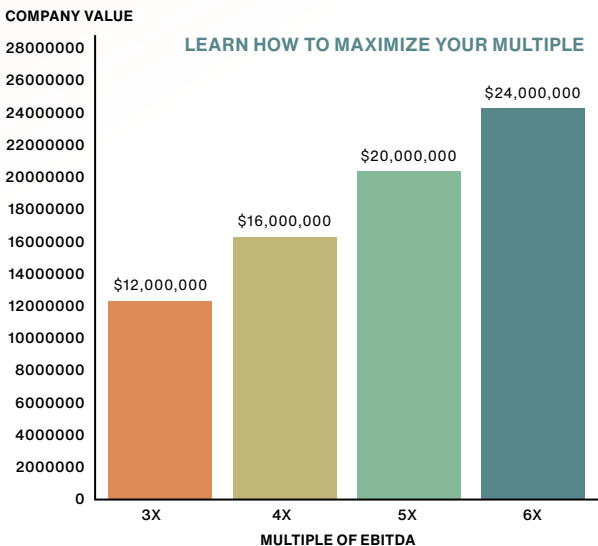
Through dozens of chapters that use plain-spoken language (free of financial jargon), John maintains his reputation as an entertaining storyteller, as he lays out the strategies for heightening deal values, and structuring deals to the seller's distinct advantage.

John is the long-time M&A columnist for *LBM Journal* and a speaker at the annual LBM Strategies Conference.



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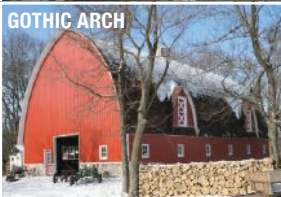
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PRODUCTS



DAP Advanced Modified Polymer Sealants

DAP's new advanced hybrid sealants are said to outperform silicone and provide maximum performance for every project. Developed for both exterior applications—such as windows, doors, siding, trim, gutter, flashing, and concrete—and interior applications like kitchen and bath projects, the new AMP line is said to deliver a 100% weatherproof and waterproof seal. It can be applied on wet surfaces, offers extreme temperature use of 0°F to 140°F, features 30-minute paint and rain/water ready times, and is backed by a lifetime mold and mildew resistance guarantee. dap.com



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Weather Shield's multi-slide door systems

Weather Shield's redesigned multi-slide door systems for its Contemporary Collection and Premium Series is developed to provide narrow profiles and ensure expansive, unobstructed views. With options up to 57' 6" wide, Weather Shield's new multi-slide doors are available with designer hardware and two panel variations designed to ensure balanced and clean viewing experiences. The Contemporary Collection comes with narrow stiles and rails that are 3-1/4" wide, while the Premium Series offers a wider 5-1/8" stile and rail with a height range that can be expanded up 12' tall. The panels for both are 2-1/4" thick. weathershield.com

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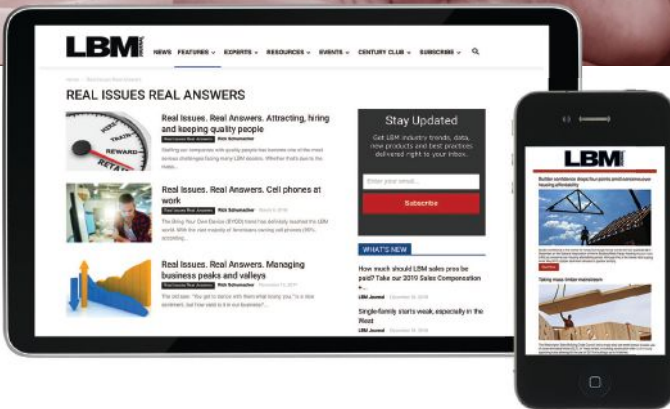
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Total Requested Copy Distribution (Line 15f) + Requested/Paid Electronic Copies (16a). Average: 40,463. Single Issue: 39,956. 16d. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Both Print & Electronic Copies) (16b divided by 16c x 100). Average: 86.95%. Single Issue: 87.69%. I certify that 50% of all my distributed copies (electronic and print) are legitimate requests or paid copies. 17. Publication of statement of ownership for a requester publication is required and will be printed in the 11/01/2021 issue of this publication. 18. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager or Owner: Rick Schumacher, Executive Editor & Publisher, 9/28/2021. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. 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THE EXPENSIVE INVENTORY BLUES

YOUR DECISION TO STOCK UP ON COMMODITY LUMBER AND PANELS JUST BEFORE PRICES PLUNGED HAS YOU STUCK WITH A LOT OF EXPENSIVE INVENTORY. WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

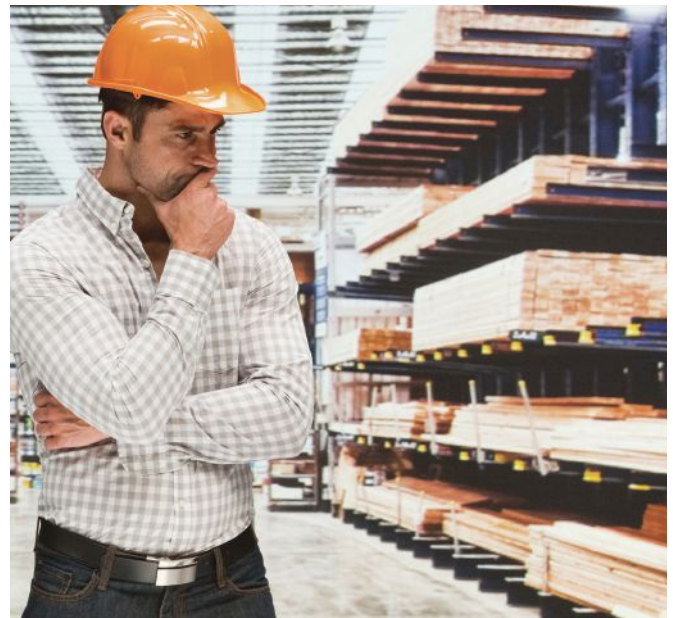
Having grown up in the LBM business, including owning your own company for the past 20 years, you're no stranger to price spikes. When you deal with commodity products, prices are going to be fluid. But nothing you'd experienced—including the incredibly disruptive Great Recession—can compare to the insane price fluctuations of the past year. While you and your management team have successfully navigated most of the pandemic-related chaos, including hiring several next gen pros, the big challenge you're facing now is a yard filled with wildly expensive inventory.

Your salespeople, who were frustrated at months-long backorders of many products, urged you to maintain an inventory position in fundamental materials, but now they're painfully aware of what happens when you roll the dice and the risk outplays the reward. "We've always sold on margin, but if we try to do that now, with the material we have on hand, our builder customers will likely shop elsewhere." So, to keep the inventory moving and the trucks rolling, you've dropped the price to market levels.

Not only do you find yourself selling some material for less than it cost, which is painful enough. When you combine those losses with the commissions your salespeople earn on those sales, and each loaded truck that leaves your yard takes a bite out of your bottom line. Thanks to your recently updated computer system, your CFO can monitor sales and margins in real time, and she's concerned. "As long as our salespeople keep selling higher margin millwork items along with the framing packages, we're okay. Even then, by the time we sell through the high-priced products, our margins are going to be in the very low single digits."

You've made the tough decision to sell the expensive inventory at a loss, which you truly considered to be the only real option. Having been burned once by deciding to take an inventory position with a price-spiking commodity, this wild ride is far from over. The supply chain is less predictable than ever before, with container ships backlogged, labor shortages, and many of your key product categories difficult/impossible to source.

For you and your team, the Tough Call is deciding how to navigate market realities while managing to keep your builders supplied with the materials they need, when they need them, and at a price that they can earn a profit. What would you do?



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- **MINIMIZE INVENTORY.** Looking back, stocking up on high-priced lumber was a mistake. Instead of taking the risk of overpaying, maintain minimal inventories of key goods. Better out of stock than to lose money on a sale.
- **STAY THE COURSE.** As hard as it is to sell products at a loss, that's better than not having what your customers need, when they need it. Maintaining healthy inventories is the smart long-term play.
- **SHARE THE SITUATION.** Let your builder customers know about the pricing whiplash you're experiencing and ask them to work with you as far in advance as possible when planning their material needs.
- **GET BUY-IN.** Next time you're faced with a high-stakes inventory decision, get commitments from your builders. That way, you're sharing the risk.

SOMETHING ELSE?

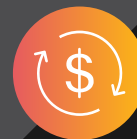
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