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DEALER OF THE YEAR 2022

ANNUAL SALES: UNDER $10 MILLION

TK BUILDING SUPPLY

THE DECK ISSUE

THE LATEST PRODUCTS AND TRENDS IN DECKING, RAILING, ACCESSORIES, AND DECK FASTENERS

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With Roderick Kabe, marketing director at DeckWise

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TK Building Supply was born when Travis Rupe, along with his childhood friend, Kevin Jester, purchased the business in 2010, the year the two 23-year-olds graduated college. The company was called Thermokraft then, and primarily manufactured vinyl replacement windows. The owners' drive to manufacture what they might otherwise spend more to buy has rocketed TK Building Supply's revenues from $460,000 in the first year out, to $5.5 million in 2021.
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As the Best in Show and Most Innovative Building Material Product of IBS 2022, Evolve Stone is revolutionizing the building industry as a major stone siding product disrupter.

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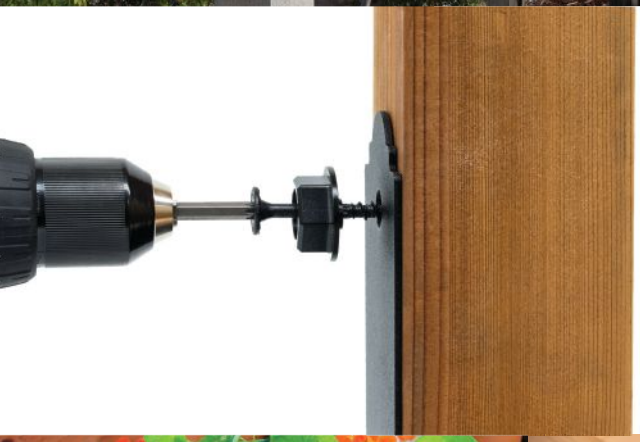

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Defy Shrinkflation

WITH PRICES RISING in everything from gasoline to mortgage interest, inflation is impacting virtually everything we buy and sell. It's bad enough when it's limited to commodity building material prices, whose spike-then-plummet pattern wreaks havoc on our businesses. When costs rise across the board, like they are now, it affects everyone and adds one more complicating factor to our world. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, "Strong consumer demand and pandemic-related supply constraints continued to push up prices," with the U.S. inflation rate hitting a 40-year high of 7.5% in February.

This latest round of inflation introduced an unfortunate new term, shrinkflation, where we're paying the same but getting less. It's most prevalent in packaged goods, where, for example, a package of cookies that was 17.2 ounces is now 14.6 ounces but costs the same. Likewise, you may have noticed that rolls of toilet paper are shrinking, and don't be surprised if your "half-gallon" of milk only contains 59 ounces.

What can we do about this latest challenge? Complaining and panicking don't do a lot of good, and blaming politicians has similar impact. Instead, we in the LBM industry will do what we always do: we'll control what we can control and focus on limiting the impact to our customers and our businesses.

We may not be able to control rising product prices, but we can control what our customers experience when working with us. When your customers are experiencing either inflation or shrinkflation, make sure they know you're right there with them, and you've got their back. "You're absolutely right that materials cost more than before—and we don't like it any more than you do. With prices rising, we're more committed than ever to having the products you need when you need them, and to making sure our deliveries to your jobsite are on-time and in-full."

One thing we can do to help control our costs is to make better use of the technologies we're already paying for. Or, if our current tech tools are holding us back, then invest in upgrades. At LBM Journal, we're in the final phases of implementing two new software systems to streamline our operations, and to help us deliver the information you demand, better, faster and more efficiently. It's about doing more with less—and making sure our teams have the tools they need to make that happen.

If you're looking to connect and learn proven-in-the-real-world tactics and strategies from other LBM leaders, I strongly encourage you to join the industry's biggest audience of dealers and distributors at LBM Strategies 2022, October 12-14 in Denver. Thanks to sponsorship support from our industry's leading suppliers, registration is exactly the same as last year. Plus, you'll save $300 if you register by April 30.

Here's to working together to control what we can control, and powering through whatever challenges arise.

— Rick Schumacher
Executive Editor & Publisher

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roof & wall products

Decked out, In Depth

LBM JOURNAL ran its first decking In Depth in April of 2004. In that issue, my predecessors shared news about the latest products in what was then a small category for many dealers. By 2012, the April decking In Depth article included mention of decking accessories as well. Railing was first emphasized in 2013. The following year, the annual deck issue included fasteners specific to deck production in a separate In Depth feature. In 2015, the deck issue was expanded to include three individual In Depth features: one each on decking, railing and accessories, and fasteners.

Clearly, there has been growth in what is now referred to as the outdoor living category. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped the way homes are used—and therefore built and remodeled—dealers were starting to carry everything from LED stair lights to grills and more, as decks and patios evolved into outdoor kitchens and entertainment hubs.

As you'll see in the pages of this issue, the pandemic surge that the outdoor living category experienced over the past two years isn't slowing down just yet. As our ace feature writer Mike Berger points out in the decking In Depth beginning on page 58, the Leading Indicator of Remodeling Activity, produced by the Remodeling Futures Program at the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, forecasts another 9% growth in spending by the end of this year. With housing starts still chugging upward, our readers in every market are busy ordering and stocking materials for what is shaping up to be a busy summer building season.

Our In Depth features are valuable to our readers only to the extent that we're able to include information and insights from manufacturers that participate. I think you'll find that this issue is especially strong on that front. By my count, representatives from 32 different companies answered questions and/or sent along product descriptions and photos so that Mike Berger could distill for our readers the latest trends in both style and manufacturing that are shaping the outdoor living category. I think you'll appreciate the many frank discussions that went beyond product attributes and addressed issues such as materials shortages and supply chain woes. Our In Depth articles are designed to connect lumber and building material dealers with the inside thought processes of the companies that supply the products they sell. I think the In Depths in this issue do that exceptionally well, and I hope you'll agree.

Our mission with these articles, and with everything we do, is to help you build your sales, your business, and your brand. If there is another topic or product category for which you'd like an In Depth view, please send me an email at james@lbmjournal.com and let me know.

— James Anderson
Editor

james@LBMJournal.com

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LBM INDUSTRY UPDATES, NEWS AND EVENTS. PLUS, NEWS FROM LUMBERYARDS ACROSS THE COUNTRY, AND RESPONSES TO OUR FEBRUARY TOUGH CALL SURVEY.

UPDATES

PEOPLE

Fortress Building Products has promoted **Bill Ross** to director of channel sales.

LP has named **Jimmy Mason** as EVP, general manager of OSB business.

Ernie Couillard has retired after more than 20 years with **Regal Ideas**. He was promoted to president of the company in January 2021.

Palram Americas has promoted **Jeramy Albert** to construction business unit manager.

Tracie McCormick has been elected treasurer of **Koppers Holdings Inc.** **Daniel Skrovanek, Ph.D.**, has been named vice president, Growth and Innovation. Also at Koppers, **Min Kuang** and **Amber Leech** have been being recognized by The Manufacturing Institute with 2022 STEP Ahead Awards.

Western Forest Products has appointed **Fiona Macfarlane** to Western's board of directors.

DISTRIBUTION

Lensing Building Specialties will distribute **Chelsea Building Products**' Everlast advanced composite siding.

Cameron Ashley has hired Jay Cole as regional sales VP.

Weyerhaeuser Distribution plans to officially open the new San Antonio, Texas distribution center in early 2023. Until then, a temporary site will open locally in Q2 this year.

CO-OPS & BUYING GROUPS

Orgill celebrated 175 years at its Spring Dealer Market, its first in-person buying event in two years. Sales from the Spring 2022 events were up 33% from the 2021 Spring Online Buying Event.

LBM Advantage says that its live 2022 Annual Buying Show had a record-breaking member and vendor attendance.

Craig Dunnum has joined **LBM Advantage** as Midwest member sales manager.

INDUSTRY

Coastal Forest Products received the 2021 Vendor of the Year award from **Ward Lumber**.

ECI has launched eCommonSense, its ecommerce platform.

BILL ROSS

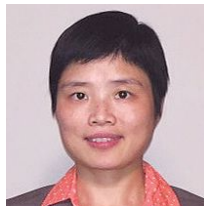
JIMMY MASON

ERNIE COUILLARD

JERAMY ALBERT

TRACIE McCORMICK

DANIEL SKROVANEK


MIN KUANG

AMBER LEECH

Weyerhaeuser will be the educational sponsor for "The House That She Built," the Girl Scouts at-home patch and charm program.

Accoya thermally-modified wood will open a production facility in Kingsport, Tennessee. The first Accoya made in the USA is expected to reach the market in 2024.

COSTS AND SUPPLY CONSTRAINTS LOWER BUILDER CONFIDENCE

Ongoing lumber and building material supply side constraints, rising construction costs and expectations of higher interest rates continue to negatively affect builder sentiment even as buyer demand remains relatively solid.

Builder confidence in the market for newly built single-family homes moved two points lower to 79 in March from a downwardly revised reading in February, according to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB)/ Wells Fargo Housing Market Index (HMI). This is the fourth straight month that builder sentiment has declined and the first time that the HMI has dipped below the 80-point mark since last September.

"While builders continue to report solid buyer traffic numbers, helped by historically low existing home inventory and a persistent housing deficit, increasing development and construction costs have taken a toll on builder confidence," said NAHB Chairman Jerry Konter. "We call upon policymakers to act now to ease supply-chain woes. "Improving access to lumber, OSB and other materials will help builders increase the supply of badly- needed housing and fight inflation."

"The March HMI recorded the lowest future sales expectations in the survey since June 2020, said NAHB Chief Economist Robert Dietz. "Builders are reporting growing concerns that increasing construction costs (up 20% over the last 12 months) and expected higher interest rates connected to tightening monetary policy will price prospective home buyers out of the market. While low existing inventory and favorable demographics are supporting demand, the impact of elevated inflation and expected higher interest rates suggests caution for the second half of 2022."

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UPCOMING EVENTS

JUL 28-31 BUILDING MATERIAL SUPPLIERS ASSOCIATION SUMMER CONFERENCE
Myrtle Beach, SC | mybmsa.org

SEP 9-12 DO IT BEST FALL MARKET
Indianapolis, IN | doitbestonline.com

OCT 12-14 LBM STRATEGIES CONFERENCE
Denver, CO | lbmstrategies.com

NOV 8-10 ECI CONNECT 2022
Aurora, CO | ecisolutions.com

NOV 14-15 EPICOR INSIGHTS
Scottsdale, AZ | epicor.com

REMODELING IN TOP METRO AREAS PREDICTED TO SURGE IN 2022

Expenditures for improvements to the owner-occupied housing stock are expected to increase at a faster pace in most of the nation's largest metropolitan areas this year, according to projections released by the Remodeling Futures Program at the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University.

Projections for 2022 show a robust average annual growth in home improvement spending of 13.8% across all 48 major metropolitan areas tracked, with owner expenditures expected to grow between 7.6% and 23%. Of these metros, 20 are expected to see above average growth of 14% or greater with six metros surpassing the projection for national remodeling spending of 17% growth this year. All but one of the metros tracked show higher growth projected for 2022 compared with 2021 estimates.

"Record-breaking home price appreciation, solid home sales, and high incomes are all contributing to stronger remodeling activity in our nation's major metros, especially in the South and West," says Sophia Wedeen, a research assistant in the Remodeling Futures Program at the Center. The largest gains in home improvement spending this year are projected to occur in Tucson (23%), Riverside (21.9%), Phoenix (20.3%), Austin (19.2%), San Antonio (19.1%, and Las Vegas (17.5%).

TOUGH CALL ANSWERS

ANSWERS TO OUR FEBRUARY TOUGH CALL SURVEY:

WHEN PARTNERSHIP IS A ONE-WAY STREET

AFTER BUYING EXCLUSIVELY FROM ONE SUPPLIER FOR YEARS, YOUR LOYALTY WAS REWARDED WITH A SHARP CUT IN SUPPLY SO THEY COULD BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER DEALERS. HERE'S HOW READERS WOULD HANDLE THIS TOUGH CALL.

SURVEY RESULTS FROM LBMJOURNAL.COM

27.9%
GET BUSY. As with any crisis, you need to do whatever's necessary to secure the products you need, from whatever vendor will sell to you.

11.6%
COMMUNICATE. Let your builders know that you are navigating an unexpected supply disruption, and work to get estimates of their material needs as far out as possible.

42.6%
LEVERAGE. By doing business the right way, you've got a strong business and a good reputation. Leverage those assets and your existing relationships to open new doors.

17.9%
PUSH. Use your history with this long-time supplier and push to get as much material as you possibly can. Then, once the crisis passes, move all of your business to other suppliers.

THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO VOTED ON THE FEBRUARY SURVEY. SEE PAGE 104 FOR THE APRIL TOUGH CALL: "LET'S (NOT) TALK POLITICS!"

PENDING HOME SALES SLUMP IN JANUARY

Pending home sales slumped in January, continuing what is now a three-month drop in transactions, the National Association of Realtors reported. Of the four major U.S. regions, only the West registered an increase in month-over-month contract activity. All four regions posted a decline in year-over-year activity.

The Pending Home Sales Index (PHSI), a forward-looking indicator of home sales based on contract signings, fell 5.7% to 109.5 in January. Year-over-year, transactions decreased 9.5%. An index of 100 is equal to the level of contract activity in 2001.

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CONSTRUCTION INPUT PRICES RISE 2.6% IN FEBRUARY

Construction input prices increased 2.6% in February compared to the previous month, according to an Associated Builders and Contractors analysis of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Producer Price Index data. Nonresidential construction input prices rose 2.5% for the month.

Construction input prices are up 24.4% from a year ago, while nonresidential construction input prices are up 25.1%. Input prices for natural gas and unprocessed energy materials increased for the month, rising 65.1% and 32.3%, respectively. Crude petroleum prices increased 13.7% in February. All three energy subcategories are up significantly on a year-over-year basis.

"It will get worse before it gets better," said ABC Chief Economist Anirban Basu. "Not only has Russia's assault on democratic Ukraine created supply challenges in a number of categories, including oil and natural gas, but the reemergence of COVID-19 in parts of Asia and Europe is also poised to produce additional impacts. While many still expect commodity prices to decline later this year, the wait has been meaningfully extended by geopolitical conflicts and ongoing COVID-19 lockdowns.

EXISTING-HOME SALES FALL 7.2% IN FEBRUARY

Existing-home sales dipped in February, continuing a seesawing pattern of gains and declines over the last few months, according to the National Association of Realtors. Each of the four major U.S. regions saw sales fall on a month-over-month basis in February. Sales activity year-over-year was also down overall, though the South experienced an increase while the remaining three regions reported drops in transactions.

Total existing-home sales, completed transactions that include single-family homes, townhomes, condominiums and co-ops, sank 7.2% from January to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 6.02 million in February. Year-over-year, sales decreased 2.4% (6.17 million in February 2021).

Total housing inventory at the end of February totaled 870,000 units, up 2.4% from January and down 15.5% from one year ago (1.03 million). Unsold inventory sits at a 1.7-month supply at the current sales pace, up from the record-low supply in January of 1.6 months and down from 2.0 months in February 2021.

MULTIFAMILY PRODUCTION AT A TWO-YEAR HIGH AS SINGLE-FAMILY STARTS REMAIN FIRM

Despite production bottlenecks and rising construction costs, total housing starts led by a strong multifamily reading posted a solid gain in February as demand stays strong and existing inventory remains at low levels.

Overall housing starts increased 6.8% to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.77 million units, according to a report from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Census Bureau. This is 22.3% above the rate posted a year earlier.

The February reading of 1.77 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 starts increased 5.7% to a 1.22 million seasonally adjusted annual rate. The multifamily sector, which includes apartment buildings and condos, increased 9.3% to an annualized 554,000 pace.

On a regional basis compared to the previous month, combined single-family and multifamily starts are 28.7% higher in the Northeast, 15.3 % higher in the Midwest, 11.4% higher in the South and 11.4 % lower in the West. Overall permits decreased 1.9% to a 1.86 million unit annualized rate in February. Single-family permits remained essentially flat, falling 0.5% to a 1.21 million unit rate. Multifamily permits decreased 4.4% to an annualized 652,000 pace.

Looking at regional permit data compared to the previous month, permits are 22.7% higher in the Northeast, 8.4% lower in the Midwest, 5.5 % lower in the South and 2.1% higher in the West. There are now 799,000 single-family homes under construction, a 28.3% year-over-year gain.

BY THE YARD NEWS FROM LUMBERYARDS AROUND THE COUNTRY

MERGER PROPELS BUILDERS FIRSTSOURCE TO RECORD YEAR

Builders FirstSource, Inc. has reported record results for the fourth quarter and full year ended December 31, 2021. The company ranked at the top of the inaugural LBM Journal 100 list. Highlights from fourth quarter 2021 earnings reports include net sales of $4.6 billion for the quarter increased 83.1% driven by the merger with BMC, double-digit organic growth, and commodity inflation.

BUILDERS FIRSTSOURCE HIRES AMY BASS MESSERSMITH AS CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER

In this role, Messersmith will be a member of the Builders FirstSource executive leadership team, overseeing all aspects of human resources.

TAL HOLDINGS ACQUIRES OROFINO BUILDERS SUPPLY

TAL Holdings, one of the fastest growing family-owned building material centers in the Pacific Northwest has reached an agreement in principle to acquire the five-store chain, Orofino Builders Supply (Orofino), located in Grangeville, Kamiah, Lewiston, and Orofino, Idaho.

MCCOY'S BUILDING SUPPLY NAMES MANAGER FOR NEW SPICEWOOD LOCATION

McCoy's Building Supply has announced the appointment of Drew Van Winkle as store manager of its Spicewood, Texas, location. The new store will open early summer 2022 with a grand opening celebration to follow.

NEW OWNERSHIP AT THRIFTY BUILDING SUPPLY

Richard Cooper, who served as vice president of Thrifty Building Supply for nearly seven years, has taken over the ownership of the company after Mark Evans, president and CEO, retired at the end of 2021.

BRITTON LUMBER TO EXPAND SAWMILL OPERATIONS

Britton Lumber Company has announced the planned expansion of their Eastern White Pine sawmill in August 2022. Located in Bath, New Hampshire, Britton Lumber manufactures Eastern White Pine and operates a 30,000 square foot facility which produces approximately 9 million board feet annually.

NATION'S BEST ACQUIRES ARKANSAS DEALER

Nation's Best has announced the acquisition of Weiss Do it Best Lumber in Perryville, Arkansas. Founded over 50 years ago, Weiss Lumber offers a full-service lumberyard, with a strong focus on power tools, electrical equipment, and hand tools.

TAYLOR'S DO IT CENTER OPENS GLOUCESTER POINT LOCATION

Family-owned Taylor's Do it Center recently celebrated the grand opening of its newest location in Gloucester Point, Virginia. This is the company's 12th location in the Hampton Roads region.

GULFEAGLE SUPPLY ANNOUNCES PROMOTIONS

Gulfeagle Supply has announced the promotion of Billy Quinley to Gulf Coast regional manager. Additionally, Joe Knippel will be taking on operational responsibilities in addition to his current sales role, as Southeast regional manager.

TALBERT BUILDING SUPPLY EXPANDS IN VIRGINIA

Talbert Building Supply has opened its sixth branch by purchasing the Danville, Virginia location of Plyler Supply Company. The location specializes in vinyl siding and accessories, vinyl windows, and cabinets.

84 LUMBER CELEBRATES TOP ASSOCIATES

On the heels of what 84 Lumber says was the most successful year in company history, the home improvement retailer honored its top performing associates during its annual awards banquet. Notable awards of the night were presented to Matt Born, Manager of the Year, and Nick Boyd, Area Manager of the Year. This year's Rookie of the Year went to Chris Moudy, and the Team Headquarters MVP was presented to Dave Rumbaugh.

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.

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Hancock Lumber Co.

BRADLEY HARTMANN
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DENA CORDOVA-JACK
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Kodiak Building Partners

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Pro dealers increase collaboration with Builders to confront today's turbulent market

As dealers and builders wrestle with building material price fluctuations, they're realizing there is no better time for some old-fashioned teamwork.

The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) reports that framing lumber prices are contributing to an average $18,600 rise in the cost of building a single-family home.

A second NAHB study, done with Wells Fargo, found that builder confidence continues to fall in 2022, as measured by the Housing Market Index. The study reports that higher material costs and labor shortages are the main contributing variables to the decline in builder confidence, all of which has led to a record low supply of homes for sale.

To combat the uncertainty, dealers and custom builders are using software to improve communication and consultation.

Integrated price lists provide more accurate quoting

Customers appreciate transparency when builders offer more information on price. The NAHB recommends that builders break out all material pricing to help the homeowner value the overall project. However, providing this detail requires builders to accurately and clearly estimate material and labor in a customer's quote.

The right software allows builders to perform takeoffs and generate estimates and quotes more quickly. Online digital tools eliminate human error that can occur with traditional takeoff methods, and recent innovations now make it possible for pro dealers to offer builders the most up-to-date pricing whenever the builder needs it.

For example, Buildxact and Epicor BisTrack have extended the relationship between the dealer and the builder. Dealers using this software platform can offer builders the latest pricing any time of the day, even late at night or on a weekend. Builders can then submit orders directly into their dealer's ERP.

"By digitizing this pricing relationship between the builder and dealer, manual pricing is removed, and this cuts wasted time", John Peros, Managing Director of Peros Built said.

"The benefits of the dealer price list being provided to us through Buildxact, is that it stops all those phone calls in between and waiting for pricing and quotes," he said.

Plus, dealers and builders are finding other benefits from using software. Dealer account managers who spend less time on pricing find they have more time to consult with customers. Once in a more collaborative environment with their dealer, builders tend to quote more work, win those jobs, and in turn, return to the dealer for more transactions.

Those transactions can be made easier when the dealer uses integrated price lists to create recipes, by grouping together SKUs to create packaged components. For example, door jams, hinges, and locksets can make up a door installation recipe. With one click, the builder can estimate all these items and be confident nothing is missed.

Because Buildxact offers multiple features, it is an ideal software solution for both dealers and builders. It allows for transparent communication and a higher level of collaboration.

As a result, construction projects can keep moving and stay on-track amid quickly changing market conditions.

BUILDXACT

BUILDXACT

Technology isn't just a pro dealer's friend, it's your lifeline.

Buildxact integrates your sales team with your builders throughout the estimating, ordering, and job management process.

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Enhance visibility:
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Build loyalty:
Turn transactional relationships into meaningful connections with customers.

EACH YEAR, one of the most anticipated events among deck builders, dealers and manufacturers is the North American Deck and Railing Association's (NADRA) recognition of outstanding deck, porch and outdoor projects. This year, NADRA celebrated the winners of the National Deck Competition on March 24 in Clearwater Beach, Fla. Deck building pros from across North America (and beyond) entered this 12th annual competition. Projects were judged by a panel of experts based on use of space, functionality, creativity, use of materials, and overall visual appeal. Of the many notable projects, pictured here are an assortment of first place winners. To see the complete gallery of winners, visit NADRA.org

1
COMPANY
New York Decks | Brooklyn, New York
CATEGORY
Alternative Deck Over $250k

2
COMPANY
Decks by Kiefer LLC | Martinsville, New Jersey
CATEGORY
Wood Deck Over $100k

3
COMPANY
DOCK & DECK | Lenoir City, Tennessee
CATEGORY
Dock

4
COMPANY
LS Underground | Longmont, Colorado
CATEGORY
Unique Feature

5
COMPANY
Dr. Decks LLC | Tacoma, Washington
OVERALL 2021 BEST DECK
CATEGORY
Alternative Deck $100k - $250k

6
COMPANY
Deck and Basement Co | Richfield, Minnesota
CATEGORY
Inlay on a Deck

7
COMPANY
Barrett Outdoors | Millstone Township, New Jersey
CATEGORY
Alternative Deck $50k - $100k

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RODERICK KABEL | DECKWISE

Roderick Kabel is the marketing director at DeckWise. His LBM sales and marketing career has focused on developing and managing businesses growth to be prosperous, effective, and efficient. His professional motivations show an extensive history in B2B & B2C markets.

Q: Concerns over supply chain issues and product shortages have dominated headlines for the past couple of years. How is DeckWise working to keep products on retailers' shelves?

A: Over the last few years, we (just like everyone) have felt the pains of raw material shortages and shipping holdups. We foresaw that we needed to revamp our purchasing processes and began placing multiple and long-lasting POs for materials. That didn't eliminate headaches and small shortages, but it did allow us time to be proactive and keep our deck building products moving to our dealers and distributors.

Q: As labor issues spread deck builders thin, many turn to their dealers for product recommendations that can get more work done with fewer employees. How can DeckWise products help increase productivity?

A: What DeckWise offers for faster installations is our Hardwood Wrench board straightening tool. This is an American made hardcore wrench that bends warped hardwood boards and composite boards into place with one hand. Because it uses a rotating cam, it can lock in place. This feature allows the builder to install Ipe Clips hands free—with no need for a chisel burrowing into the joist prying the board straight. Most notably, this frees up laborers to work elsewhere on a deck project making the entire job more efficient and profitable.

Q: The WiseRail cable railing system is yet another addition to the DeckWise portfolio that enhances outdoor living areas. What are some other deck accessories that retailers can carry?

A: Yes, WiseRail is a 1/8" stainless steel cable railing kit system utilizing pre-swaged fittings. It's very clean and sleek when installed on decks. It really is beautiful! As for other deck accessories, our patented deck board spacers are a must have for every deck builder. These spacers provide the perfect board spacing for any deck build with any decking material. No matter the preferred gap size, we have you covered with five gap sizes to choose from making any deck, perfectly spaced.

Q: Many homeowners believe that composite decking products greatly outlive their wood competitors. How can retailers help convey the longevity of hardwood decking?

A: Hardwoods are in a decking niche that is only about 15% of the decking market, and hardwoods are not always in a deck builder's vocabulary, or wheelhouse. Composites boast of a low maintenance and easy installation, making them the go-to for builders looking to bang out as many decks as possible each year.

Besides, composite decking companies strive to mimic the look and durability of hardwood decking. In considering the timeline of the two materials, composite decking has had some major shortcomings to its longevity and colorfastness. Whereas hardwoods have been used in decking for decades and have proven to be the optimum choice for long-lasting decking material. The fact is that hardwoods can easily last 25 or more years and often outlive composite decking.

Q: From clips to sealers and even epoxy, DeckWise has continually developed new products for the decking and outdoor living space. What products can dealers expect to see in the future from DeckWise?

A: This year we launched our Ipe Oil Plus Hardwood Finish formula which adds more protective features for those with harsh weather in their area. Our WiseBond Epoxy has exploded on the market after only being out there a short time. We continue to formulate and advance our epoxy technologies with new and innovative ways for woodworkers and artisans to make unique furniture. DeckWise hopes to bring a few other new and improved products to market soon in 2022. Stay tuned! ■

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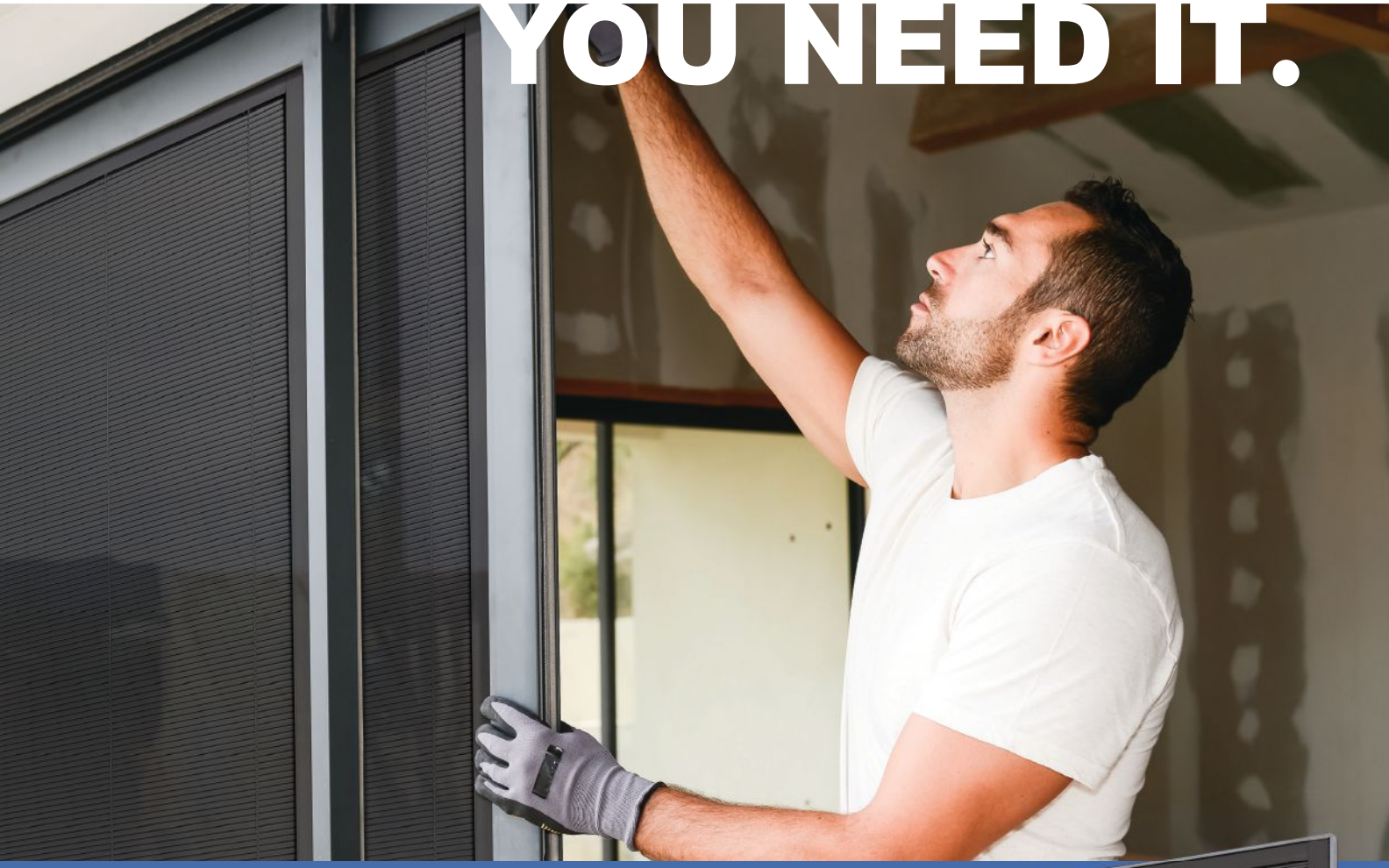

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ECONOMIC CHALLENGES: MAKING SURE YOUR BUSINESS IS PROPERLY VALUED AND COVERED FOR WHAT'S NEXT

Preparing for uncertainty has become a necessity across lumber and building material supply dealers as it has many other industries. Challenges from the pandemic, supply chain and labor shortage have continued to create operational hurdles. Lumber prices have fluctuated throughout the past two years, bottoming out in August of 2021 and now skyrocketing again, with prices rising 120% as of December. Further complicating things, labor shortages are driving increased construction labor costs and inflation for building materials has far outpaced the economic average. All of these factors combined should serve as a reminder for lumber and building material dealers to pay close attention to what keeps their businesses protected: their insurance policies.

Companies need to be prepared for delays, potential shutdowns, loss of income and more. Ensuring they have comprehensive insurance coverage and appropriate limits will be critical to any business looking to protect its future.

INSURANCE TO VALUE — PROPERTY

With building reconstruction costs rising dramatically due to inflation and increasing construction labor prices related to the labor shortage, lumber and building material dealers should consider their properties underinsured if they haven't assessed their values recently with their insurer.

Given the challenging environment, lumber and building material dealers should talk to their insurers about coverage limits on their property in the event of any sudden challenge or loss. Property owners should consider discussing new inventory, new equipment purchases, building expansions, among other things with their insurer to ensure the right coverage limits are in place if a claim needs to be filed.

Too often claims adjusters come to the scene to learn what they see onsite is different than what was described in the business owner's policy. Then, they have to explain the coverage the policyholder is looking for is not there. Sadly, this is a trend insurers are seeing more often across all industries in recent months and the wood niche is no exception.

A good insurer, who specializes in the wood niche like Pennsylvania Lumbermens Mutual Insurance Company, will know the best way to keep a business owner's insurance in line with their risk exposure in today's marketplace. They will check in on the policyholder regularly, talk to the business owner about building valuation to ensure the values have been adjusted with inflation and the changing costs associated with building materials and labor.

INVENTORY COVERAGE

With inflation at record highs and lumber prices now higher than normal, the cost of maintaining and replacing inventory at lumber and building material dealers may be greater than expected. Lumber and building material dealers are seeing prices rise for everything from raw wood products to finished molding. Business owners will want to ensure they have property coverage for that inventory at an accurate value should it be destroyed before it is purchased.

Reviewing coverage limits to confirm they are in line with today's values and ensuring they are properly aligned with the needs of your operation can save your company in times of uncertainty.

At PLM, we understand the recent volatility in stock values and availability. One way to address stock value volatility is to use a stock reporting form. These forms are an easy way to set an adequate limit and keep insurers in the loop on value changes for your lumber and stock inventory. In case of any sudden damages, such as an onsite fire, reporting forms will assist in protecting lumberyards and building material dealers.

BUSINESS INCOME COVERAGE

With soaring demand for home improvements launched by the pandemic, lumber and building material dealers might be enjoying an increase in sales. While margins will continue to be squeezed, the outlook remains positive for lumber and building material dealers as housing starts continue to climb in order to meet demand for homes.

Business interruption coverage, also known as business income coverage, can be a life-saver for companies facing a loss of income related to a covered loss, such as a fire or evacuations related to storms or wildfires. This coverage offers protection against potential loss of income and extra expenses incurred when operations are halted by a covered cause of loss. If a lumber and building material dealer hasn't checked in with their insurer in recent months while their sales have gone through the roof, it's likely their current coverage won't match up with the dollars they are currently bringing in. That said, business owners should not only ensure they have a business interruption policy, but also take the time to examine its coverage limits.

Business owners will want to understand what their costs would be if they were to suffer a loss of income due to a shutdown. The best way to do so would be to review net income and total expenses and share this information with your insurer. Further they should consider the following: If they have to wait for a part to make equipment operational again, do they have enough business interruption coverage to get them through the delay? Can they continue to pay staff members in case of a business shutdown and maintain operations if supplies take longer to ship? With today's economic challenges, lumber and building material dealers should talk to their agents and/or insurers to make sure they have adequate business interruption coverage for to make up for lost income related to a covered loss.

WRAPPING IT UP

As lumber businesses navigate ongoing economic and logistical challenges, working with an insurer who knows your business and how to best protect it is key. An insurance company dedicated to serving lumber businesses will know your risk profile best and will be able to address your needs more efficiently.

As the oldest and largest mutual insurance company serving the lumber and building material industry, PLM can provide essential support to your business. For more information regarding our services, including business interruption coverage and more, please visit www.plmins.com / or contact us at CustServ@plmins.com or 1-800-752-1895.

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Do you have more customers than you can effectively manage?

BY BILL LEE

THE NUMBER of customers you can effectively manage has a lot to do with the level of service your customers require. If you are selling wrist watches by running clever ads in a magazine, you can probably service substantially more customers than if you're selling building materials to homebuilders. Agree?

Selling mail order watches requires a quality watch that is attractive, reliable at keeping time, and shipped promptly. Now compare what is required to sell building materials to homebuilders. You might make a list just to remind yourself how many service factors there are in our business vs. a single product mail order business.

It is difficult to predict how long our industry is going to be selling into a "blowout" housing economy, but as long as salespeople are required to be as hands-on as they are today, it is critical to have the discipline to limit their customer base to builders who have effective systems and procedures in place.

Building material salespeople cannot service homebuilders whose skill sets are limited to construction; in other words, they know how to build a house, but are dependent upon their salesperson to keep their systems and procedures organized.

If salespeople expect to optimize their sales and gross profit, they have no choice but to discriminate against builders who take advantage of their knowledge of construction, but for whatever reason don't give them the volume they need to justify the amount of time these types of builders require.

A lot of the salespeople I have worked with over the years resist the level of discrimination required to balance the amount of time these builders demand with the gross profit the salesperson can expect from the sales they generate. It's an old saying, but it's also a true old saying: "Your raise becomes effective when you do."

There are several ways to deal with this challenge without offending the customer. One of them I mentioned in a recent *LBM Journal* article is to analyze the grand total dollar volume each of your customers purchases from all sources, the percentage of that volume you are selling each customer, and the percentage your sales represent of each customers' grand total purchases.

The next piece of research, that is a bit more difficult to nail down, is to estimate the amount of time you are spending servicing each current customer and the percentage of your sales each current customer represents. Where are the distortions? Which customers are receiving a much larger percentage of your time than you are receiving of their grand total purchases?

I realize that, at first glance, this approach may appear to be arrogant on the salesperson's part; but there are just so many hours in a day and you are a businessperson who must make sure you are earning enough gross profit on each current customer to justify the time you are committing to each customer.

It's also a good idea to ask your sales manager to look over these numbers with you and help you analyze them. He or she may see something you have overlooked. Keep in mind that you are not eliminating your relationship with some of your customers because you don't get along with them, you are doing so to give you and your company a greater return on your investment.

It's human nature to like some customers better than others, or to get along with some customers better than you do others. The mistake that costs you and your company money is allowing yourself to spend a larger percentage of your time with customers who are not willing to give you the dollar volume you need to justify the time you are investing in servicing their account. ■

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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Persuasion is overrated

BY RICK DAVIS

PERSUASION IS OVERRATED. What's more important in sales than persuasion? Influence. Credibility. Support. Accuracy.

Over 30 years ago I listened to my first sales training podcast, although we called it a cassette tape in those days. My heroes were (and remain) people like Tom Hopkins, Zig Ziglar, Earl Nightingale, and other legends in the sales training field. It took me a few years, however, to figure out that something was flawed in their messages.

I realized that they were teaching salespeople how to close the deal. Their methods worked well if you were selling steak knives, vacuum cleaners, or cars to a consumer. The challenge we face is that we are not selling to consumers who will buy a product from us only once or twice in a lifetime. We're pursuing relationships with buyers who will continue to buy from us *throughout* our lifetime.

That's when it hit me. Closing is not an all-or-nothing, pinnacle moment of confrontation. Closing is incremental. Closing is a series of little victories. Closing is timing. In my second book, "The Sales Secret," I explored this concept in detail after considering what really happened when I successfully closed sales, which is to say more properly "opened new relationships."

Business-to-consumer sales usually involves a high degree of uncertainty, which is to say that the salesperson has a short window of time and few interactions with the buyer before a decision is made. Conversely, in business-to-business selling the salesperson discovers that a short window is actually a warning sign.

A sale that comes after only one or two interactions is a sign that the buyer might be a bad credit risk, disloyal to vendors or, at worst, that you have made a mistake in your pricing. Good selling is not a matter of persuading a buyer to buy when you want them to buy as a result of your tricks and gimmicks. True sales leadership requires deep awareness of the factors that create sustainable business relationships such as influence, credibility, support, and accuracy.

Influence, as I am referring to it here, is different than persuasion. Persuasion is a push for results that creates personal gain with little consideration, or perhaps feigned benefit for the buyer. Influence is a more comfortable and confident level of sales leadership; the salesperson doesn't need or expect a sale but is sincerely interested in the buyer's best interests.

Credibility results a sincere interest to help, an understanding of the business landscape, and the competence to take on a role as a business advisor. The credible salesperson possesses knowledge of the market, best business practices, and advisory business skills on which the buyer can rely.

Support means delivering tangible resources and support prior to the launch of the business relationship. Resources come in the form of marketing advice, a sales lead, operational insights, a professional referral, and other assets that provide little monetary return for the salesperson up front while creating the credibility and influence that produce enduring relationships.

Accuracy includes all the little details that produce customer fulfillment. Too often in our industry we presume the final step in the sales process is something called "follow-up." The problem is that follow-up often means putting out a fire that could have been prevented. Instead, fulfillment means figuring out what needs to happen at the moment an order is being placed. Take the time early in the process to sweat the details and avoid disruptions down the road. In construction we measure twice and cut once; in sales we proofread twice and order once.

The key to a lasting relationship is not about persuading a buyer to place an order. The better approach is to plan a successful journey with each client that produces influence and relationships of unbreakable loyalty. ■

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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Understanding job seeker psychology

BY RIKKA BRANDON

WE ALL KNOW that hiring is complex. But one challenge that's hard to overcome is having a one-sided view of the process. I've come to learn that understanding how the hiring process "feels" to job seekers is critical to improving your approach so you can secure your most desirable candidates more often.

Here are a few things to help you get into the mind of the job seeker and improve your chances of hiring top-choice candidates.

Passive candidates don't stay passive. As a recruiter, I frequently work with passive candidates—those who aren't actively looking to make a change until I reach out with a compelling opportunity that requires them to make a conscious decision to be open to leaving their current employer for the right opportunity. This decision often becomes a catalyst: Even though they weren't actively looking, making the decision that they were open to other opportunities sparks their curiosity for what else might be out there.

One of the most common mistakes companies make is that they think passive or semi-passive candidates are only considering *their* opportunity.

Time kills deals. Taking too long can cost you great candidates because delays lead to insecurity. If you get busy and take too long to communicate, the job seeker may start to believe that maybe the interview didn't go as well as they thought. As their doubts mount, self-preservation kicks in: When we fear rejection, we immediately start to shift the focus to why we didn't really want the job that badly anyway. So, as days go by, the candidate's mind shifts from being excited about the opportunity into doubt and then into identifying all the reasons they didn't really want the job.

Expect competition and play to win. Job seekers have options, and often several. This means that even when they start interviewing with you, they are applying to other openings, interviewing with other companies, and considering how to negotiate in their current position. You need to be ready to compete. This means having a strong and truly competitive compensation offer, having a solid benefits package, and showcasing some perks they'll receive. By being ready to sell all the aspects of the job offer, you'll put yourself ahead of companies that are still pulling together a basic offer letter and benefits overview. Learn what your competition is offering and figure out how you can compete against it, then use the interview process to showcase and sell why your company and this role are an excellent opportunity.

Remember you're being judged too. It's easy to get complacent and believe that you're making the hiring decision and the candidate will be excited to get an offer; however, there has rarely been a time in history when job seekers have been more selective and intentional about what they say yes to. People aren't willing to leave one stressful job with an inconsiderate boss for another with the same challenges. So, if you show up flustered and ill-prepared for the interview, you run the risk of alienating a candidate you'd love to hire. Likewise, if they come in for an interview and the tension is palpable, most people are going to notice.

The "WIIFM" factor. Above all, remember that most candidates are looking at everything through the lens of "What's In It For Me." This means they're looking at the environment, culture, compensation, benefits, perks, and co-workers. Making a job or career change is a big decision. They have options, and they will be considering more than just salary. Look at your company and your offer with a "What's In It For Them" filter, and you'll position yourself to better sell your organization and opportunities.

Now more than ever, it's critical that dealers do everything they can to see their companies and job opportunities through the eyes of potential candidates. Putting yourself into that mindset can help you be better prepared before the interview process, properly market the opportunity during the process, and stay top-of-mind with candidates. ■

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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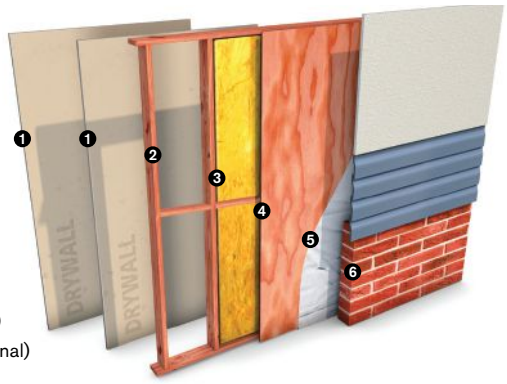

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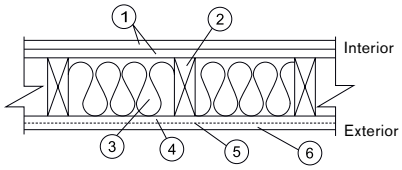

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Seeing the invisible people

BY RUSS KATHREIN

IT IS NATURAL TO BE DRAWN to confident people, as well as those who are commanding attention or who we view as powerful. As leaders, we give our attention to the people we take notice of. The successful ones, we praise. The underperformers, we encourage. The disruptive ones, we admonish, or worse. Yet there is a whole group of people who toil under us, with us, and around us whom we often fail to acknowledge or take notice. These are the invisible people, and I would maintain that they are probably the largest untapped resource you have in your organization.

These people aren't necessarily invisible because they chose to be. They may be the kind of person who doesn't like attention, instead preferring to just come to work every day and do their job. Or maybe it's the person who just doesn't have the confidence to stand out, but always seems to be ready and willing to stand in. They may be different from the rest of us, and therefore keep to themselves. They may just be that dependable person who never seems to be a problem, but we really don't know what they want or what they are capable of. Or they just might be in a job that we consider…invisible.

I started my career as a financial analyst at a corporate headquarters. It sounded glamorous, but it was a boring and tedious job that only garnered me attention once a week when I walked around and hand delivered a sales report to various executives. Otherwise, for the most part, I was invisible. It was here that I got to know other people who had invisible jobs, and I came to realize what a valuable resource they were.

The mailroom person delivered mail, but he told me that most executives didn't acknowledge him when he came into their offices or when they encountered him in the halls. They just saw right through him and kept talking. It was from him that I learned more about our company, how it was run, what was working and what wasn't. The receptionist was the face of our company. She knew everyone by name and what they did, but sadly, most people didn't bother to know anything about her but her first name. Yet she was the greatest resource when you needed to find out who did what, how to get things done, or even where someone was. As I advanced in my career with other companies, I tried to always make sure I acknowledged and got to know these people with invisible jobs. They were truly a hidden asset, and they loved the fact that someone truly "saw" them.

Love the people who saw you when you were invisible to everyone else.

We all work with people who show up every day, grind out the work, then go home only to show up the next day and do it all again. We assume that they "work to live" rather than "live to work" and that they are content where they are in life, and at work—that they have no desire to move up the proverbial ladder. We assume that because they don't apply for any new positions, they don't want them or are incapable of succeeding in them, but maybe work, or life, has disappointed them and they no longer have the confidence to stand up and be noticed. Maybe no one has taken the time to get to know them and what they are capable of. Maybe they are so reliable at grinding out the work that we can't imagine losing their production so we don't consider them for other opportunities. Maybe no one ever looked at them and said, "I believe in you."

It would be too easy to say that I feel invisible. Instead, I feel painfully visible, and entirely ignored.

As leaders, it is our job to acknowledge these people and take the time to get to know them. Maybe some will be exactly what we thought they were; content, at their maximum capacity, or just not interested in doing anything more. Chances are they are capable and want to do a lot more. Or maybe they are a tremendous source of information no one has ever bothered to tap into. Given a little attention and encouragement, they might surprise you at how much they can help you in your job and the entire organization. They just need for someone to take the time to truly see them. ■

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

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The case of the elusive EIN

BY THEA DUDLEY

Dear Thea,
We recently batched up our bad debt write offs and our owner mentioned sending a 1099 to the companies that didn't pay us. His logic is that if they didn't pay us, then they might as well show the debt as income and have it reported. I like the idea but have hit a roadblock in sending them. I need the EIN to complete the form and send it. I don't have those in some of the files and have looked on the internet and can't find them. Where can I go to get EIN's for my bad debt customers?
— Trying to Pass on the Pain in Pittsburgh

Dear Pain Passer,
If misery loves company, and no good deed goes unpunished, then what goes around comes around completes your trifecta of cliches, my dear seeking-to-pass-the-pain-on. Someone's done you wrong and you are looking to repay the favor. This has all the makings of a country song.

The 1099. One beautiful little form that reminds your erstwhile deadbeat that, while he may be gone from paying the debt to you, he is not forgotten. Not by any stretch. Credit managers have notoriously long memories. I may not remember what I ate for breakfast, but I can remember a company and its officers that left me holding the very empty bag from back in 1991.

The 1099, for those of you less enlightened to this credit managers' weapon in the arsenal, is a form that is used to report income from a source that is not your employer. Let's keep it straight; there are a multitude of 1099 forms and we are talking about the 1099C. Used by creditors to report to the IRS that a debt has been forgiven, i.e., not paid to you (never mind this was a forced forgiveness), the IRS can then count the forgiven debt as income for federal tax purposes and increase the amount tax owed to the feds. While this doesn't result in payment to you, my pained creditor, it does allow you to let karma come around.

Before you get filing happy there are some rules. Disputed debts, remaining balance of a settlement, or bankruptcy debts are all off the table, along with debts that are so old the statute of limitations to collect has expired. The debt must be a legitimate uncollected debt that you are writing off. If you have placed it with a collection agency or attorney and are still actively working to collect, then step away from this form.

Now to the heart of your inquiry—where to get the elusive EIN. You get it from your customer, usually on your credit application as part of the process. The Employer Identification Number is to businesses what the social security number is to individuals. This makes it tough to locate involuntarily. There is no government website that lists a company name with its EIN.

Urban myth says you can locate an EIN on a company's commercial credit report. In actuality, it is hit or miss; mostly miss. It is inconsistent at best, and typically a waste of report dollars. Out of the eight I just looked up, only one was available. Not the best odds, but at least a way to hold out a little hope, however fleeting. Of course, you can always call said debtor and ask them for their EIN. They may give it to you; someone who answers the phone may not know the significance of the number and rattle it off. Stranger things have been known to happen.

So, no identification number and no way to get it? Don't despair; lets grab that silver lining. This is a golden opportunity for you to gently remind everyone of the importance of completed credit applications. Information is power and best collected before you go into need mode.

While you're reminding them, may I suggest a little tune to help that medicine go down? Come along and sing it with me—"Hey won't you play, another somebody-done-somebody-wrong song, and make me feel at home, while we eat this loss (that was probably your fault)..." Ok, that part was just in your head; no sense getting snarky. Let that tune roll around in their heads for a week or so. ■

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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Five types of EBITDA

BY JOHN WAGNER

EBITDA is a term with a time-worn, clinical definition. It stands for Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization. Why is it a term of such keen focus? Because the majority of acquirers look at EBITDA as a proxy for cash flow; it signals a company's success by expressing how efficiently it turns net sales into earnings, while eliminating the *non-operational* side of the business, like interest, depreciation, and taxes. The expression of a company's earnings efficiency—EBITDA as a percent of sales—is a key performance indicator, which is just as important as another KPI, which is OPEX as a percent of sales.

Although EBITDA uses information from financial statements produced using General Acceptable Accounting Principles (GAAP), it is not considered a GAAP measure, since the definition of what EBITDA includes or excludes can vary from company to company.

There are, however, five types of EBITDA.

The first of the five is standard EBITDA, described above. But it's an abstract concept until it is expressed for a defined period of time.

That leads to the second type of EBITDA, which is the EBITDA from your last fiscal year. This is most often used as a reference point to see how fast you are growing (or not) in the months after your most-recent fiscal year ended.

The third type of EBITDA is Trailing Twelve-Month EBITDA, also called TTM EBITDA or LTM (last twelve month) EBITDA. Ideally, your TTM EBITDA is rising month-over-month as you go into a close, and you and your investment banker can ask for the purchase price to climb accordingly. (Believe me, if TTM EBITDA is falling going into the close, the acquirer will push to have the purchase price reduced; that's called repricing after LOI.)

Some acquirers don't welcome dynamic deal pricing. They want to offer a set price in their LOI, based on a multiple of a recent EBITDA, rather than endure the unpredictability of a floating purchase price.

A fourth type of EBITDA is called adjusted EBITDA. It is very often used as the TTM EBITDA figure, if the acquirer and seller mutually accept the adjustments. Seller's adjustments almost invariably move the EBITDA higher. (Remember, in today's 5X EBITDA market, adding just $100,000 in adjustments can increase the purchase price $500,000.) Typically, acceptable adjustments to EBITDA are non-capitalized, non-recurring expenses that won't be incumbent on the new owner, or OPEX that won't reoccur. (A widely accepted adjustment to EBITDA is the compensation of employees who are deemed non-essential, who will retire when the company is sold, *and* whose positions will be eliminated.) Adjustments to EBITDA need to be proposed by the seller to the acquirer through the investment banker. Acceptance of the credits is not guaranteed; it's part of the deal that's actively negotiated.

The fifth type of EBITDA, sustainable EBITDA, is a very active topic of conversation today. That's because the EBITDA you are experiencing now is likely inflated due to supply chain constrictions, commodity price run-ups, "COVID bump," and now inflation. You may have the same gross profit margins that you did a year or two ago, but you are churning more net sales dollars, resulting in more EBITDA. The acquirer doesn't want to price on an inflated EBITDA. They will want an EBITDA that can be sustained after normalization of these "wild card" factors, e.g., after supply chain issues, price volatility, and COVID-19 are backed out. Some sellers (and even some acquirers) believe that supply chain, commodity issues, and COVID-19 aren't going away soon. Sellers especially hold that the purchase price of companies bought in this odd time—where we don't know if these influences will continue, nor for how long—should not be *overly* discounted to so-called sustainable levels. As a seller who holds that position, you can (with a good investment banker) largely defend your higher EBITDA. At our firm, we have a model that examines the EBITDA in light of these wild cards, careful to factoring in organic growth that would have occurred in any market. Using a model like this, you the seller may not get a multiple applied to 100% of your TTM EBITDA, but every dollar you argue for successfully is five dollars in your pocket with a higher purchase price. ■

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

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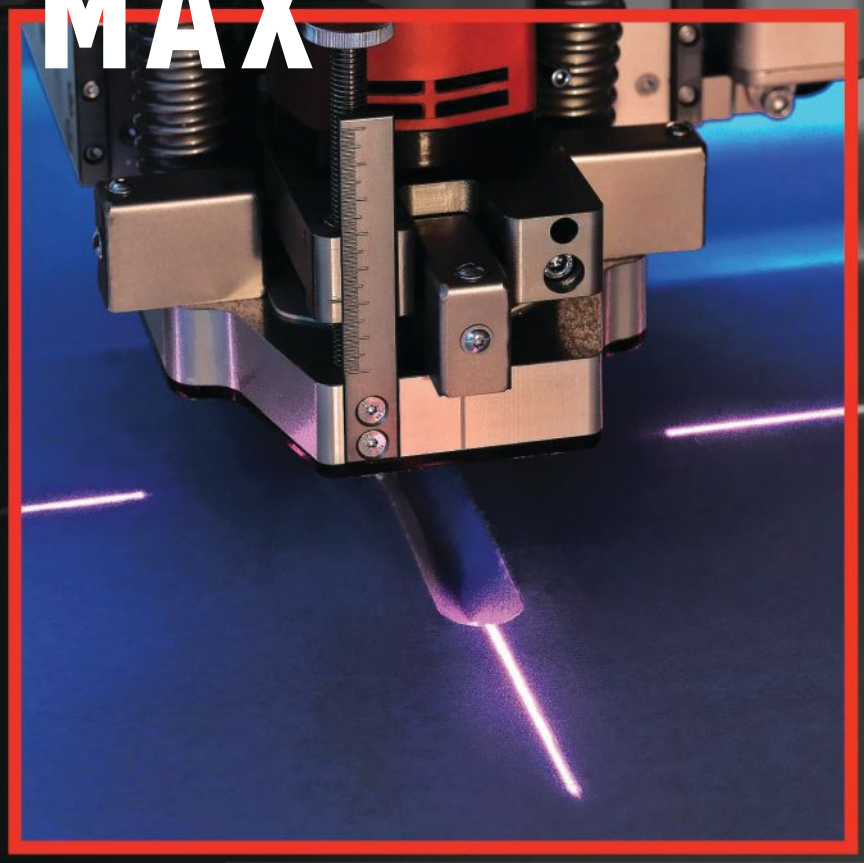

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The best defense is a good offense

BY SHANE SOULE

IN A VOLATILE MARKET like the one we are experiencing, it is more important than ever to protect your margin and stay out of the red. Here are three ways to help during these turbulent times.

1. CHOOSE THE RIGHT COSTING MODEL AT THE RIGHT TIME

Average Cost: *averaged price point of the material you have on hand.* This is most commonly used as the costing to invoice from, and many also use it to as the foundation from which to mark up the price.

Historically, this would not be as painful as it is now. In today's market, if you are using this costing model now, you are most likely suffering from major margin erosion on the way up. The average quote-to-invoice period is 45-60 days, and your Average Cost will be much higher at the time of invoice, consistently shrinking your intended margin in a rising market.

Replacement Cost: *current price to buy new materials on the cash market.* In a rising market, this number is always higher than the Average Cost in your yard. If you choose this as your costing model to set the price from which you add your mark up, you will be much closer to your true Average Cost at time of invoice, thereby protecting your intended margin.

Internal Cost: *Also known as blended cost, this is a mix of Replacement Cost and Average Cost used to protect intended margin, while also not appearing too much higher than competitors that are pricing off Average Cost.* The simplest and easiest way to maximize the costing model is to set your ERP to reflect replacement on the way up and average on the way down. This is an option that all ERP companies offer that can be switched at any time and provide an easy way to win more often on both sides of the market.

With a little more elbow grease, a calculation (based on the expected amount of inventory on ground by SKU and the current acceleration of the market) can be automated at an Internal Cost that projects costs (at the time of invoice in 45-60 days). If properly set up, this will have some SKUs that will calculate higher than the Replacement Cost which may be an eye opener for some of you.

2. SHORTEN THE QUOTE-TO-INVOICE WINDOW

Historically, standard quote terms require holding the price for 30 days from quote to order from the customer. In a rising market, that could end up costing you the entire margin if you are pricing off Average Cost, and the order doesn't ship for another 2-4 weeks after acceptance. A better practice is to hold prices for no more than 15 days and even as short as 5-7 days. This is becoming a more common practice due to the current market's roller coaster ride. An additional tool I've seen successful companies use includes adding a "must invoice by" date such as, "Quote is good for 15 days and must ship or be prepaid in 30 days." This protects the invoice window that ultimately affects your final margin. It also incentivizes your customers to take the material even if they aren't ready for it to preserve an invoice at a lower Average Cost. If they don't have room to accept shipment, then negotiate the prepay for 30 days to keep the price. This still greatly helps your cashflow model.

3. USE COST BATCHING

Lock inventory costing at PO or quote level—many ERP companies now offer this option. This tool is perfect for larger jobs or for customers that want to prepay to lock cost even when it's not ready to ship. With Cost Batching, you can pull material out of the Average Cost bucket and hold it. In this way the other material in your inventory calculates Average Cost as if that material is not there. This also gives you a better view of your real working Average Cost rather than including sold material that ultimately costs you margin in the long run.

If you utilize these three costing strategies, you will keep more margin in your pocket, and you may also set some surprising margin and profit records ■

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

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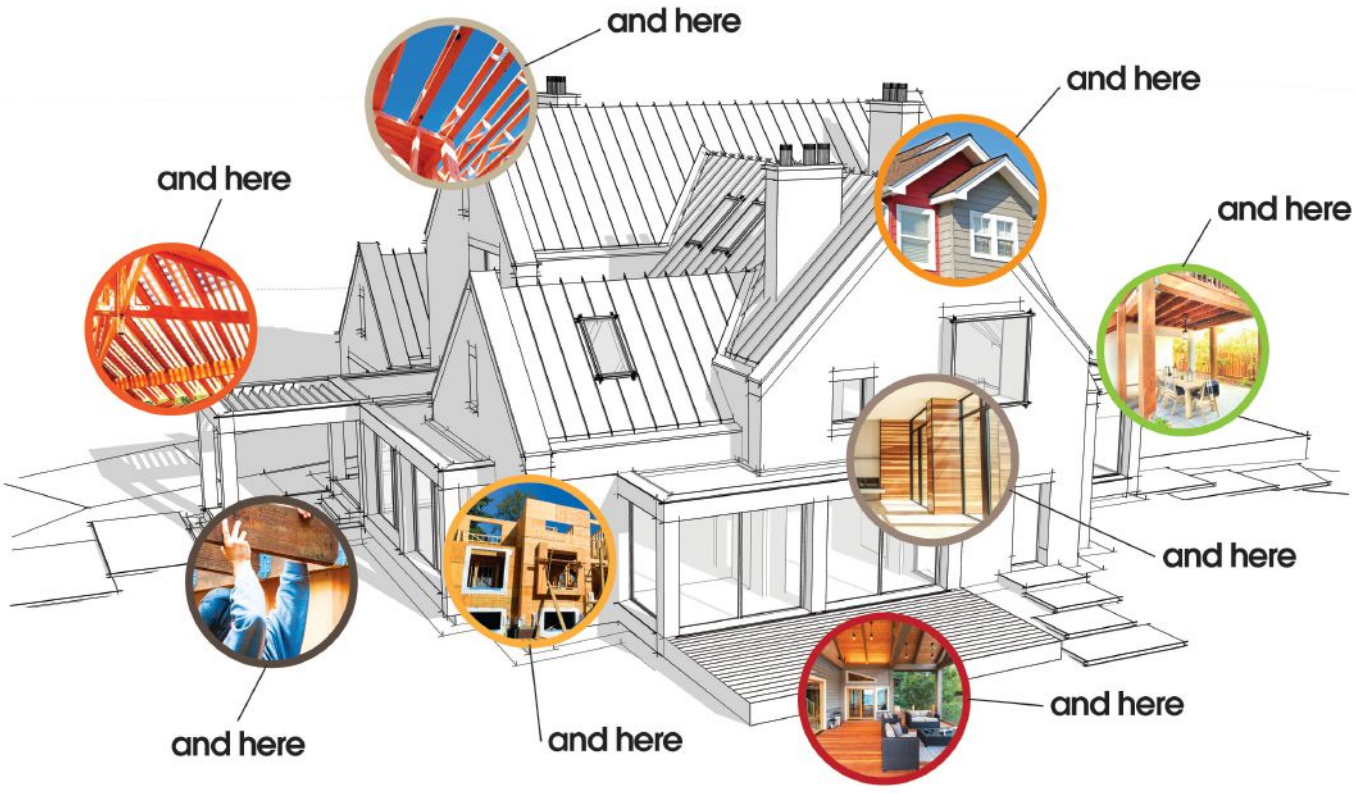

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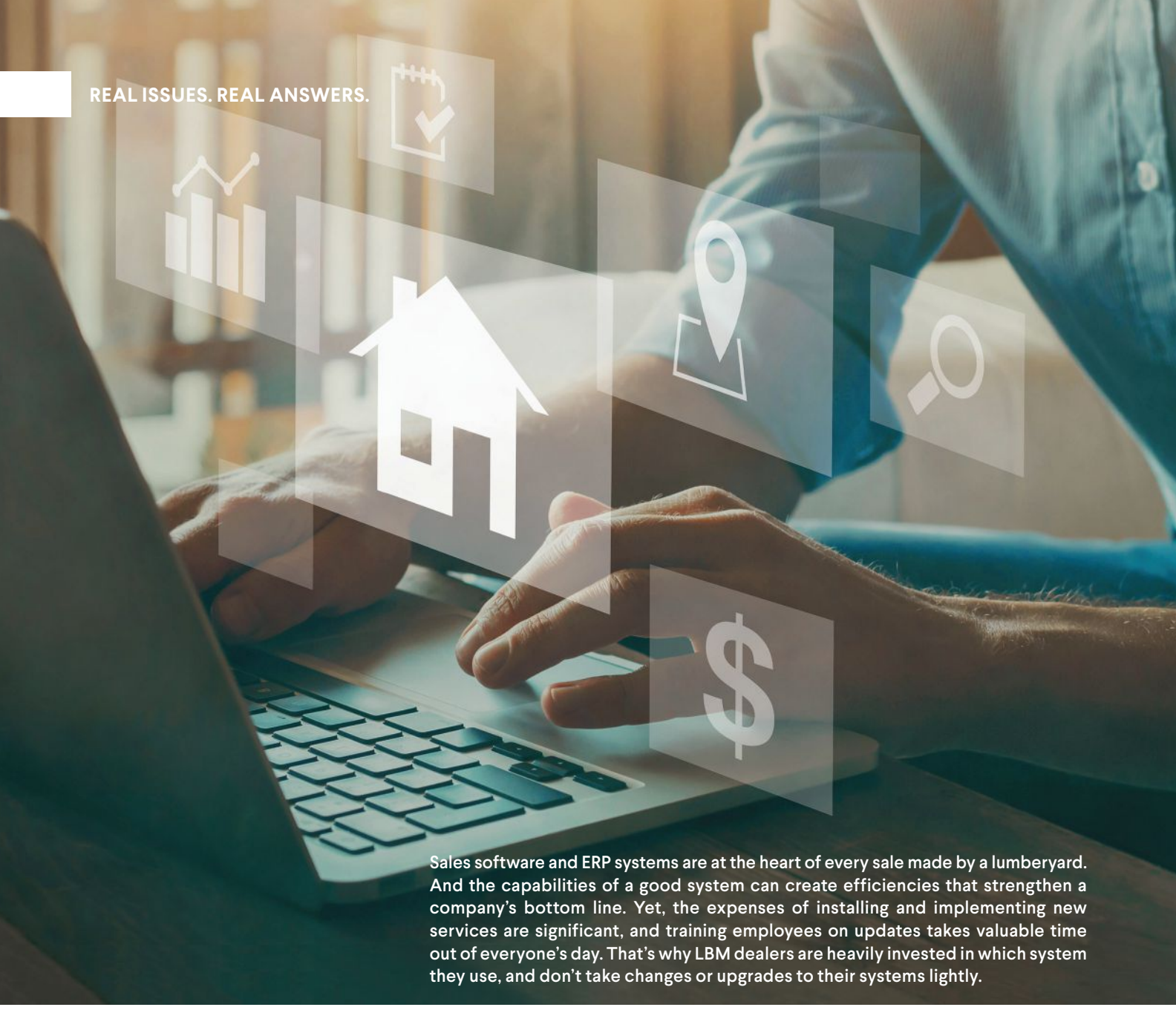

Sales software and ERP systems are at the heart of every sale made by a lumberyard. And the capabilities of a good system can create efficiencies that strengthen a company's bottom line. Yet, the expenses of installing and implementing new services are significant, and training employees on updates takes valuable time out of everyone's day. That's why LBM dealers are heavily invested in which system they use, and don't take changes or upgrades to their systems lightly.

INVESTING IN NEW TECHNOLOGY

BY LBM JOURNAL READERS

THIS MONTH'S Real Issues. Real Answers question comes from a dealer in Colorado who is wrestling with the question of when to invest in new technology. Their existing software and technology tools are okay, but they know from talking with other dealers that new ERP software could help them work better and smarter. Do they pull the trigger now, or wait until business slows?

Just over 150 LBM Journal readers responded to our questions on behalf of the Colorado dealer. Of those, 61.4% are from lumberyards and building materials dealers. Respondents from specialty dealers, wholesale distributors, and manufacturers or service providers made up nearly equal percentages of the remaining respondents.

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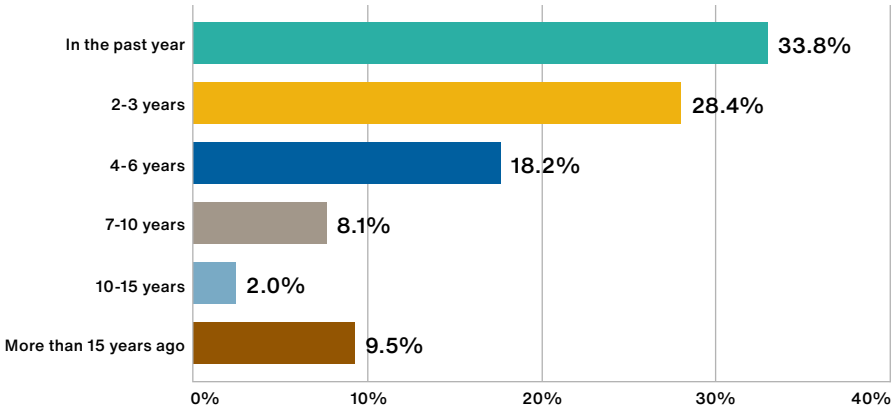
To get a fair idea of when is the right time to invest in new technology, we first asked respondents to indicate when they last made the investment themselves. Of the roughly 150 who answered the question, 34% said they had made the change in the past year. Another 28% have made their latest software investments within the past two to three years. Surprisingly, nearly 10% of respondents say it has been more than 15 years since they've made an investment in technology.

Finally, we asked readers to weigh in on the Colorado dealer's question about the right time to make the technology investment. Here's what they had to say:

HOW RECENTLY HAS YOUR COMPANY UPDATED OR UPGRADED ITS SOFTWARE AND TECHNOLOGY TOOLS?



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

"After our experience simply changing software versions to add some much-needed features, I'd recommend doing your research and quoting in advance. The learning curve could be steep, so being prepared ahead of time and doing the real transition during your slow season is what I'd choose."

"The new tools provided with a systems upgrade will streamline most aspects of your business and make your day-to-day tasks easier, not to mention building historical data on stock, sales, etc. You name it, it can be done!"

"Waiting for a more 'opportune' time is nothing more than procrastination. There is no more opportune time to do it than now."

"If there are productivity enhancing tools, properly vet them out in your environment, then undertake the project. There will never be a perfect time to do so."

"The time will never be perfect. If it's a go, just do it. Don't wait for the right time. I agree with the technology thought; there will be advanced technology as soon as you're done implementing the current solution. But I think that's the nature of the game at this point."

"If you pay monthly for your ERP system, there is a good chance you have already paid for your upgrade. Why not use what you already own?"

"I would pick your slowest part of the year and update."

"I think your key issue is being stretched thin with manpower. Changing software is without a doubt a stressful process that will involve most of your key management team's extra efforts. It takes a good six months to ready yourself for the change and then a good six months to work through the kinks once you go live with the new system. My opinion...wait until things slow down. A big disruption during busy times could cost you customers and employees."

"A wise saying: 'He who hesitates is lost!' Another wise saying: 'Look before you leap.' The hard part is knowing when which saying applies."

"Embrace new technology. It makes you better, offers higher service levels, and sets you apart from those like yourself who are waiting."

"There is not always an ideal time to do a software update. Ours was done over a long weekend, and was ready on Tuesday when we arrived back to work."

"If you're stretched thin, then wait until business slows."

"Make the investment. Go through the pain and move forward before you get left behind."

"It needs to be a priority and you need to find someone on your team who has passion for the project."

"Even though times are difficult, you have to invest in technology."

"It will never be easy to upgrade, and while the argument could be made that when you are busy you will feel disruption more acutely, I would argue that when you are making good money is the precise best time to upgrade; you can deal with the expense, and when business slows you will reap the benefit of better systems."

"If your team is already stretched thin, it may benefit your employees and business to upgrade now. The software and technology may help the employees service the customer better and more efficiently."

"Stay in touch with the industry. There are too many new things in the software that were not available three to four years ago."

"We've updated our software in the past three years as corporate rolled it out—when it was our turn, it was our turn. We went through the update during the summer months when business was cranking. We were also on the beginning of the trainer's travel schedule and they were still working out the best practices, some that we found were not our best practices as we are over a $100 million in sales at our location. Long story short, there is no good time to complete the upgrade and there is always the latest and greatest coming out. Whatever system you change to I recommend making sure it works with your dispatch and delivery system that you have currently. Change is most difficult on the more seasoned veterans and the sales team is always quick to point out how much easier a task was in the old system even though the new system has perks too."

"The longer the wait, the bigger your problems become. Staffing shortages show no sign of letting up. Think of investing in technology as way to make your employees more efficient, which will also make them happier. Not to mention the customer satisfaction that will bring. Our organization implemented proof of delivery during a record-breaking summer. It was a good amount of work, but the key was planning and listening to all the employees the changes it will impact. If you can sell the technology to your people, it is easy to implement."

"We implemented an ERP platform roughly two years ago. The platform is worth it, but we suffered from mainly self-inflicted wounds. The initial implementation and integration should not be under-resourced or poorly planned. As to timing, I would not impose this level of change on a team already stretched thin. It does not sound like a 12- to 18-month delay will negatively impact the business."

"If it's not broken, don't fix it. There are too many other pressing issues: supply chain, commodity inflation, transportation, etc. Why add another one?"

"There's never a good time, so get as much buy-in from the key employees so that others will come along for the transition. Find employees who see this as an opportunity to advance and it is a win-win."

"You buy ERP to leverage technology. With payroll for you and your customers getting increasingly difficult, technology is supposed to replace menial tasks and give you new processes you would never dream of throwing payroll dollars at before. If you can get more done and offer more value, then invest now with a supplier that can meet those requests consistently."

"There will always be a new shiny penny; sometimes you just have to move forward."

"Get it now. The benefits of the new software will help your staff and business. There will always be better upgrades, but if you never make the leap you will never see the benefits."

"Wait for business to slow, which will allow more research both into the current software provider as well as current and future platforms offered by competitors within your industry. Speak to other entities similar in size and scope to your business to obtain their set up experiences—both good and bad—prior to deciding."

"If the technology will help improve sales and make your team's jobs easier, I wouldn't wait. Do your research and talk with other companies that currently have the software. See if they had any challenges in upgrading. No upgrade is ever going to go completely smoothly, so find out what you can predict and what you can do to prepare your team for the unpredictable issues."

"The sooner the better. Inefficiencies will eventually catch up and bleed you to death."

"There will always be new products with all the bells and whistles, but do you really need them? Or is it a want/would like to have?"

"Changing ERPs is a big undertaking. Do your research now as to which you may want to switch to, and take your time. Make sure you find all the hidden fees. Then, start your switch just before the slow season to give yourself time to implement and learn it."

"Upgrades are always tough especially if you have older technology that you are working with. Having done upgrades at slow times of the year and busy times, I would do slower times if possible. This gives you time to train your salespeople, which means that the implementation has to start at the end of your busy season. This will put more pressure on your management team, but it can be done with planning."

"Just do it. I'm dealing with this question right now. There is never a good time. If you wait until it's slow, you perhaps will not be in a position financially to make the investment."

"There are several factors to keep in mind: How much training would the team be given prior to going live? How tech savvy is the team? How closely does the new software resemble the old? It could be a real challenge during these very busy times. Only you know if your team can handle it."

"Get the software. Your employees will be happier and more productive. It is an investment in future prosperity and organization."

"We updated our software in 2005 and for the most part think our software company has made improvements that have allowed us to get by with the software we are using. I still feel the pain of upgrading in 2005, so my recommendation is to upgrade at least when you are seasonally slow."

"We upgraded from paper tickets to a new ERP four years ago. We would not have made it through COVID-19 without that ERP. But, we chose an ERP that was too small for us. We are out looking again. We don't have time, but we have engaged a specialty firm to help us correctly choose this time." ▶▶

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"Two questions: Is there ever a good time? What makes you think your business will slow? You could be waiting forever and giving up all the profit dollars that come with it. I've also found that if employees are busy, they are more motivated to learn the new system and have ample opportunity to practice on live customers. They may be frustrated at first but ultimately will learn out of necessity. Just make sure you follow back up when things do slow down to make sure they are using the new software correctly and to the fullest potential."

"Do it. We've done the same thing and now we're in a situation where the updates are significant, and the unknowns create more work from our limited staff than the learning curve of a new software package. We're doing the research this year. There is no good time. If you've got a strong set of corporate departments that can handle the back-end changes, training the sales and operations staff should help ensure a smooth transition."

"Just do it. If you wait for all the stars to align, you will never do it."

"To me it depends on 'if' your present software information can be moved to the new software. If it can, this would save a lot of work. Also, with the new software can you do what needs to be done to operate and add more later as time allows? It will also make a difference on who you have/don't have on staff. Having the right people makes a big difference."

"I worked for an ERP software firm a few years ago before returning to the lumberyard setting. I've seen both sides of this and all I can say is train, and set a hard deadline. Don't keep making excuses and pushing things off. Make a plan and follow through. New advances come out every day, and a good software company will keep up with those changes."

"There is never a good time. If they start preparing now, the timing may wind up very good or at worst, the same as today. I would suggest moving forward."

"We started our ERP conversion late in 2019 by purchasing software and assembling an implementation team, thinking that we could possibly hit a mini recession at the end of 2020 as we were rolling out the new software. Instead, we hit COVID-19 and the significant uptick in demand. We'll complete our conversion about six months behind schedule, but we'll still get it done. My advice is to not wait. Start when you're making pretty good $$$s and that will make the sticker shock easier to stomach when your conversion goes way over budget."

"From experience, take the 'something much better will come out' out of the equation. There will always be something new and supposedly better. Look at your history of monthly sales and do it in the least busy month. We did it at the end of August and it was total chaos. Involve your main players in the decisions so when something goes haywire (and it will) there will be less griping and moaning because it was a group decision on what and when to do it. Good Luck."

"In my honest opinion, I would hold off until business slows. Based on my knowledge of upgrading and/or replacing the current ERP system there are always a few hiccups that your organization will have to iron out. In most instances the issues will be minor but there is also the possibility of a catastrophic issue as well. I have encountered both when transitioning ERP systems so my suggestion would be to hold off until business slows. There will be a learning curve for the team in general to train on the new software, not to mention if there was an integration issue with the data from the old to the new ERP system. Play it safe and wait until business slows."

"I personally would wait until it slows. While overall it will be worth the effort, trying to make that much of a change in these times would stretch resources even thinner and put more stress on an already stressed staff."

"I work on the premises of 'If it ain't broke don't mess with it.' As long as it works and I have good support, I'm happy."

"We just switched in the last couple of years, and it will not go as they tell you it will go. Just be prepared for it to take longer and it be more difficult than they tell you. Also, make sure whichever you choose to go with will guarantee you support after the sell. It will take a year or so to get comfortable with it, but in the end it is worth it."

"Do you need to upgrade for a specific reason, or do you have FOMO— Fear of Missing Out? Is your current software no longer supported or does it lack a specific feature you need to stay competitive? Be sure you decide to upgrade for the right reasons, or you will spend much time and resources to end up with shiny new software, a large bill, and the same functionality you already have now. If you determine you do need to upgrade, there is no advantage to waiting. The long-term efficiency gained will offset your short-term pain in implementing the new software. Above all, identify your internal project champion—someone within your business who owns the project, has the necessary skills, and wants the project to succeed. If you rely solely on your software supplier and consultants, you will likely be disappointed with the results."

"No time is ever going to be a 'good' time to make the change. Invest the time up front to understand what is required to cut over to new software. Build a transition plan and have a few key folks who are subject matter experts. It's going to be a challenge, so acknowledge that from the start and have open conversations with your team members."

"Make sure you have the right team to ensure your upgrade goes as smoothly as possible. It's never perfect, but ask around and know how to handle the things than could go wrong (What specific issues has the software vendor had on recent installs/upgrades and how did they resolve them?) Don't wait until business slows. Chances are, it won't!"

"Wait until business slows and have knowledgeable trainers on site to help with the conversion." ▶▶

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"Advice from experience: Please make sure that a software upgrade is not being driven by one part of your company with no real advantages to others. For instance, accounting may just love a new system, but it really won't help sales or purchasing. If you are going to buy, then buy now and upgrade only when you are dead slow. Customers won't be happy when they have to wait around for a computer."

"There is never a convenient time to upgrade. It depends on the advantages of the upgrade compared to the dollar and people costs."

"I think unless you feel the software is really putting you at a disadvantage, I would schedule and make the change in the fall. Also, if they have any training modules, you could start getting staff familiar with how it works over the summer."

RESPONSES FROM WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTORS, MANUFACTURERS, AND SERVICE PROVIDERS:

"New technology and third-party partnerships are designed to reduce workload and improve efficiency. The key is finding the right partner, budget, and timeline that works in your industry. The answer is always that efficiency and improvement is necessary and important."

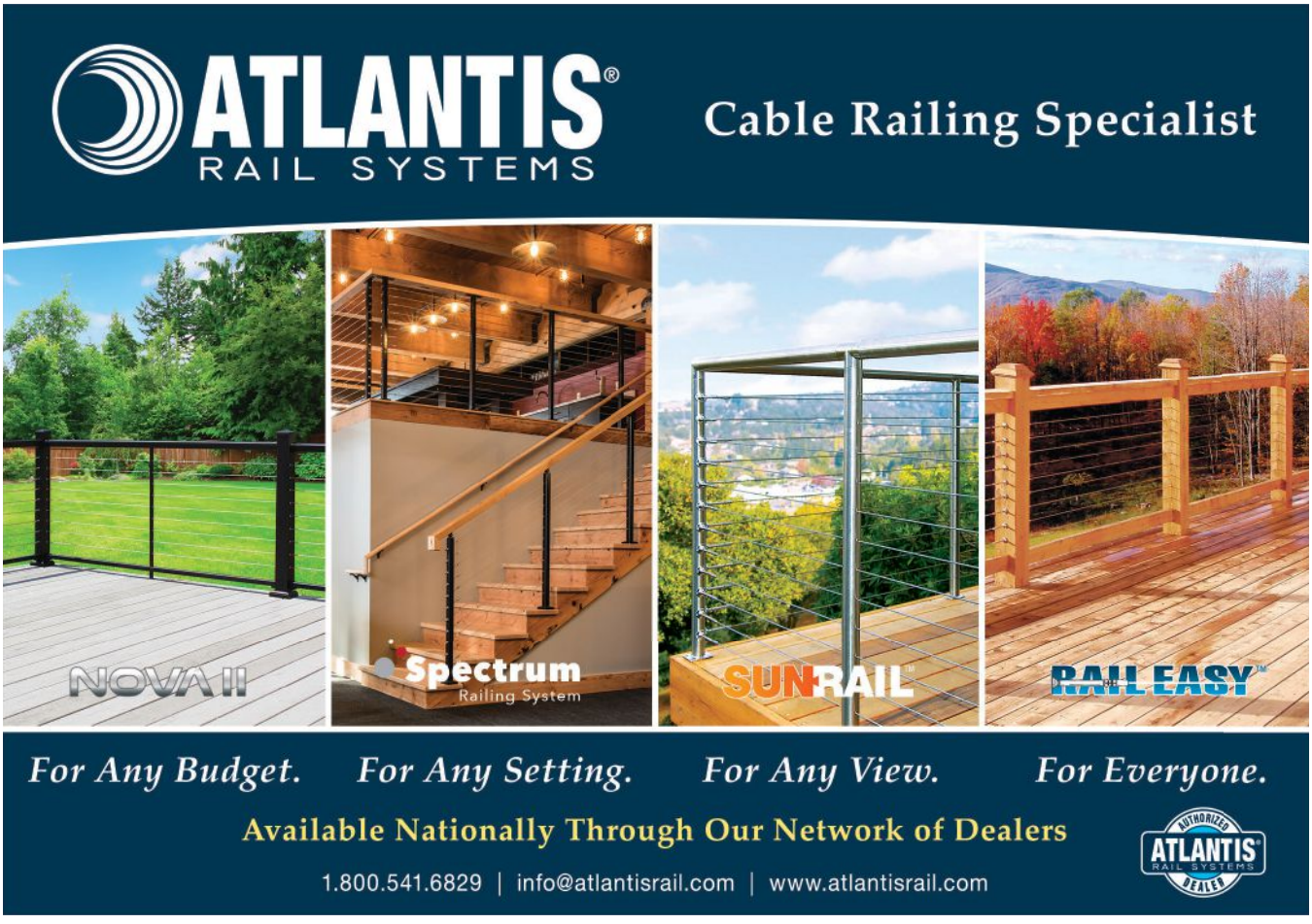
"There is never a good time to change. Rather, ask yourself this question: How much is it costing me to not change and how relevant is the company compared to the current market?"

"Set the money aside while you are making money. Don't interrupt your business and employees' lives implementing it when things are as crazy as they are now. If you can wait, muddle through."

"Hire a third party to assist integration and train employees. Up-to-date technology is very important and will keep employees sharp and improve long term results."

"I would not go through a systems migration for the next shiny feature. The reason to migrate is because you are not satisfied with your current system."

"We believe there is no better time to upgrade than now. Upgrades will provide efficiencies that should relieve pressures on personnel, allowing growth without more staff. Upgrades only work, however, if the system will handle the needs of our company. This is what has kept us from upgrading before now. We think we have found a system that will work." ▶▶



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"Rip off the bandage! The timing will never be right, and software is never perfect. There is always something better in technology two seconds after implementation."

"Do it, now. Run with what you have at your disposal."

"Being a believer of the tech approach to things makes me lean more toward upgrading every time someone offers me a newer, quicker solution. I can honestly say that it does not work. I found it is smarter to keep existing solutions and software that are in place and currently functional for the business I am in."

"Invest in new technology only when you are 100% confident that your company will derive clear and material benefits from doing so. Do not underestimate the amount of time required for user training and implementation. Set specific expectations for vendor support during go-live and build them into your contract (including the number of vendor personnel to be onsite for how long). Despite our best efforts, we are dealing with a train wreck."

"Research as much as possible. Reach out to others that have gone through the same transition. Understand that it will take longer, and cost more than you were quoted…but don't wait. Once you are too far behind in technology it's difficult to see what is possible."

"I'd re-check with the 'horror stories' to see what transpired. Whichever company helped the retailer might be worth a second look. Otherwise, look at the benefits/cost ratio; if you're close to retirement, this investment may not be worth it. If it will help with your 'turns times earns,' shrinkage, and make record-keeping easier, then go for it! New technology may also help with your company's value. Weigh all the options."

"If you're struggling with your current system then you must update. I wouldn't worry about future-proofing, just try to find a system that can be updated or improved every five or 10 years."

"Plan for a date in the immediate future and do the work needed in the meantime to prepare your staff and get your ducks in row. Then do it. You may want to invest in a tech savvy employee to head this transformation up as your current employees are already stretched thin, but let them also know that they will need to be a part of this and the cooperation is required."

"There's no rush! Selecting a new ERP system is a big task. Now, during the busiest time, is the time to figure out where you need the most help, and where new technology will actually be beneficial. This is the planning stage. Only once you have a solid plan for what software you're working towards, what goals you hope to achieve with it, and how to train your employees on this new software, will it be time to implement."

"There are several tried and working software firms out there. They are evolving, and the stories are those of initial and first-time attempts allowing those who follow to reap the rewards of past failures."

"It's time to do it. If business slows, you may put it off even longer due to financial constraints."

"Unfortunately for us, an ERP system was chosen four years ago, and a lot of people were involved. However, it was not a suitable choice as we could not integrate the right TMS and WMS systems, and TMS could not manually take the time to set-up every truck so a lot of time and money was spent, people were training and at the end of the day we are still using software from 20-plus years ago. My advice would be to ask a lot of questions because you do get what you pay for."

"If you are already stretched thin and your system is not broken, I would wait until you are truly ready to dedicate time to do it. While upgrades are necessary to keep you relevant and efficient, when you do not have the time and manpower to dedicate to these types of upgrades it can cause more headaches and be less helpful."

"First, you need to have a very clear idea of what you want the software to do for you. The horror stories most likely come from a company not knowing exactly what it wants, then when they implement the software, it doesn't do what they need or expected. You must ask a lot of questions to find the best solution for your business. I know very specifically what I want, but I am still having to work very closely with the software people because they are human and make mistakes. I spent about two years pursuing one software solution (during the pandemic so progress stopped for a while) just to have them drop us when they realized they couldn't provide what I wanted. The only upside was that I was much better prepared on the second go around. I found a solution that was a better fit for us, but it is still taking a lot of my time to make sure it is 'right.' Implementation can take months—you don't just select an option, install, and go. And just a caution: Beware of new products—they often do not have all the bugs worked out. I've been a programmer, and problems crop up in unexpected places, which is why the big companies put out so many updates."

"I don't think it is ever convenient for a system upgrade. We did a lot of things behind the scenes and set a hard start date. We kept to the start date knowing that there would be many challenges, and there were!"

"There will constantly be improvements in programs, but waiting for the perfect time puts you even further behind. Give your due diligence but move forward."

"Go with a system that is focused on your industry." ■

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

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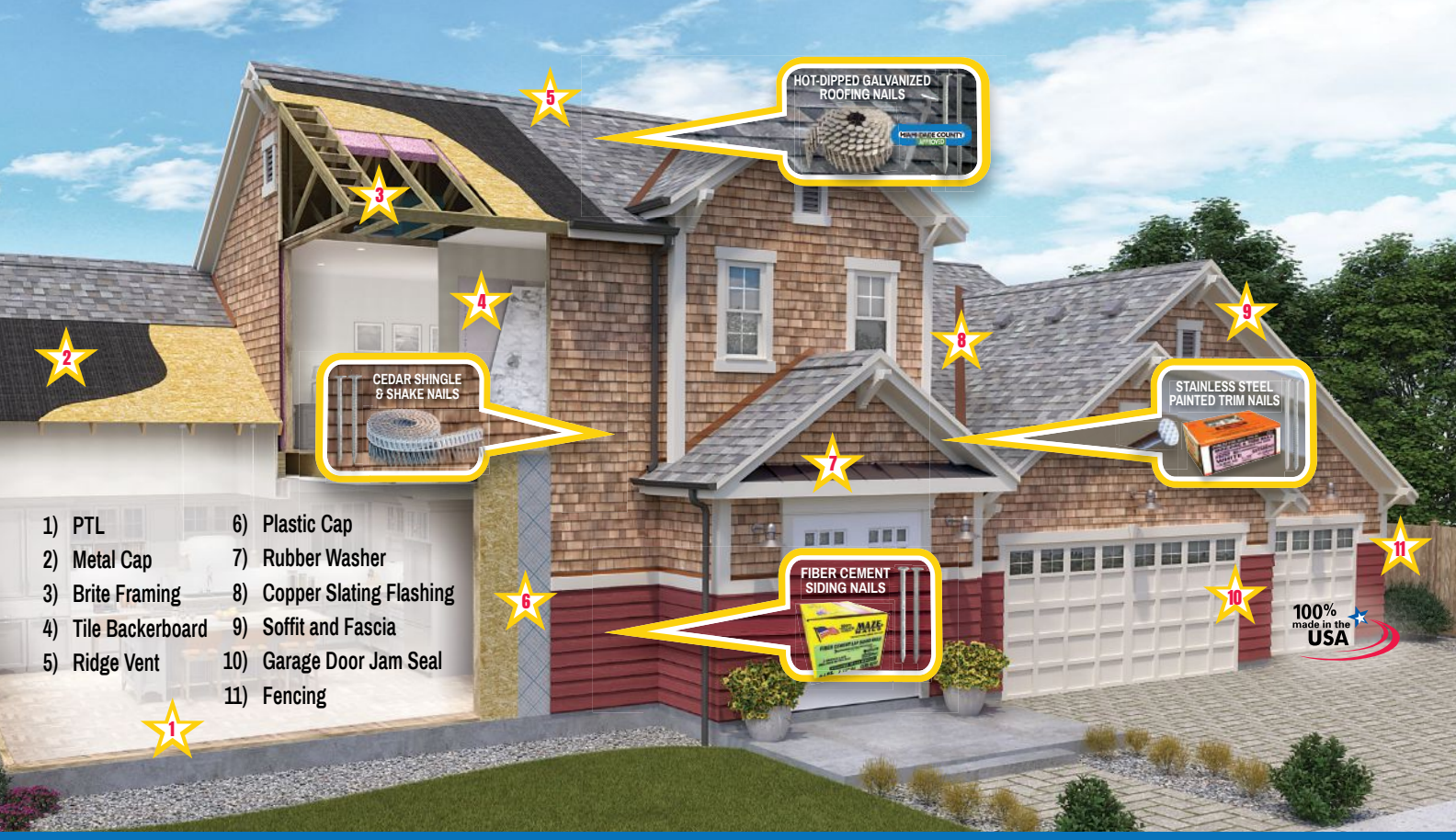

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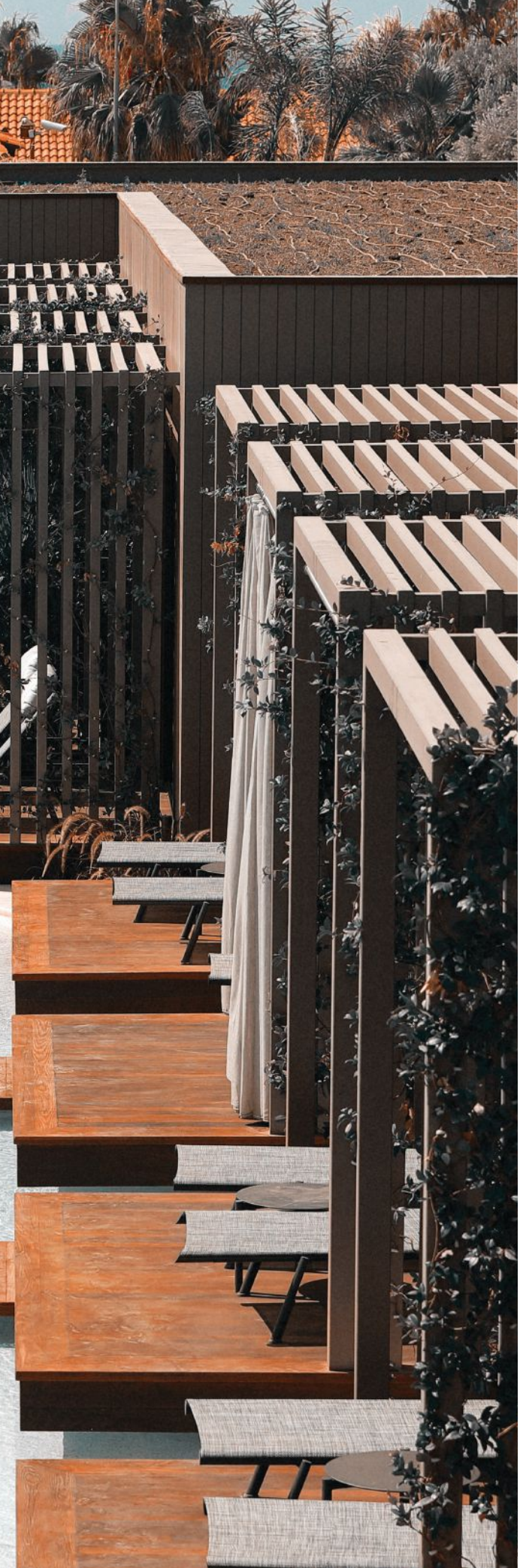

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BY JAMES ANDERSON

LBM JOURNAL DEALER OF THE YEAR 2022

ANNUAL SALES: UNDER $10 MILLION

LBM JOURNAL'S 2022 DEALER OF THE YEAR AWARDS, sponsored by Epicor, recognize four LBM companies of different sizes that epitomize the entrepreneurial spirit. By our definition, a Dealer of the Year describes a company in which leadership excels at identifying underserved—or emerging—markets, satisfying customers, and constantly working to grow and improve business. While these companies represent vastly different operations, the common thread is their fierce commitment to finding ever-better ways to serve their customers and their communities.

TK BUILDING SUPPLY

ASK NEARLY ANYONE in the LBM industry and they'll tell you one of the perks of working at a lumberyard is the simple fact that they can move around a bit during the day.

Travis Rupe learned that before he ever worked at a lumberyard. It was during an internship as an accounting major that Travis realized sitting behind a desk looking at a screen all day wasn't what he wanted to do long-term. A summer construction job convinced him that the building industry could keep him on his feet. When one of the suppliers in Windsor, Missouri suddenly had a for sale sign in front of the building, Travis found a way to make use of his accounting background as well.

TK Building Supply was born when Travis, along with his childhood friend, Kevin Jester, purchased the business in 2010, the year the two 23-year-olds graduated college. The company was called Thermokraft then, and primarily manufactured vinyl replacement windows.

"We quickly realized we could order vinyl replacement windows through bigger manufacturers. Our growth then was in metal roofing," Travis said.

To start, they sold vinyl siding, windows, gutter material, and metal roofing. Eventually, the two sold metal for pole barns, which inevitably led to them carrying lumber for pole barns as well. From there, shingles were their next expansion. "About five or six years ago we bought a roll-former and roll formed our own metal roofing and siding," Travis said.

TK Building Supply was born when Travis Rupe (right), along with his childhood friend, Kevin Jester (left), purchased the business in 2010, the year the two, at 23 years old, graduated college. The company was called Thermokraft then, and primarily manufactured vinyl replacement windows.

PHOTOS BY WILLYM BROWN PHOTOGRAPHY

BIG GROWTH IN A SMALL TOWN

Once the duo began to roll-form metal, they quickly realized they'd need more space. As luck would have it, there was an abandoned factory just across town that offered them 66,000 square feet.

"The building had been abandoned for eight years," Travis said. "It took us six months to clean it up. We'd work at our old location, close at 5:00, then clean the new location until 9:00 nearly every day for six months."

When the new facility was ready, the company moved to new location where they were able to keep manufacturing and showroom operations both under one roof. Once set up there, they moved from selling metal roofing and siding, to manufacturing it.

About four years ago, Travis and Kevin began manufacturing roof trusses. Last year, they started making their own floor trusses. Quickly, Kevin said, the big, abandoned factory building didn't feel so big anymore.

There are a number of advantages of housing the entire business in an abandoned factory, Kevin said.

"All of our lumber is indoors 100% of the time," he said. Of the 66,000 square feet of space, about 6,000 of that is devoted to a traditional showroom.

About 60% of the company's sales go to pro contractors, and 40% is homeowner or retail, including a lot of homeowners and farmers who will come in for a pole barn, garage, or shop package that then gets referred to a pro customer to build.

JUST MAKE IT

One thing that has served TK Building Supply well over the 11 years since Travis and Kevin started the company is their ability to ask the right questions and challenge each other to find more efficient ways to operate.

"Starting out at 23 years old, we didn't have a lot of experience," Travis said. "We just started doing it. We get our experience from listening to what customers say and what they like and adapting that as our model." As a result, they often found themselves asking each other, "why not manufacture it here?" It worked for processes like roll-formed shingles, metal roofing and siding, and building roof and floor trusses.

"We'll do whatever makes the most sense," Travis said. "We asked ourselves, 'We sell a lot of metal roofing, how nice would it be if we could manufacture it here?'" As a result, the turnaround for those products are sometimes hours rather than days or weeks.

That same attitude is what led them to truss manufacturing. When a manufacturer they purchased from was backed up, they looked around at the space and materials they had available to them and gave it a try.

"We had the space, we had the willingness to learn something new, and the confidence to know that we'd do whatever it took to make sure it worked," Travis said.

Once Travis and Kevin figure out how something works and if it makes business sense to keep going, they expand operations. The process has grown the company from its original two "owner-employees" to a 12-person staff today.

The owners' drive to manufacture what they might otherwise spend more to buy has rocketed TK Building Supply's revenues from $460,000 in the first year out, to $5.5 million in 2021, just 11 years later.

"Every new thing we've done is Kevin and I starting it. So, one advantage has been our youth. When we started building trusses, it was me and him. Our contractors really like that the two owners are here every day working. They like to know that when we say your trusses will be done Thursday and if it means we go out there and build them ourselves to make it happen, we will."

"We don't say 'let me call the manufacturer,'" Kevin said. "We *are* the manufacturer." Their drive to manufacture what they might otherwise spend more to buy has rocketed TK Building Supply's revenues from $460,000 in the first year out, to $5.5 million in 2021, just 11 years later.

CUSTOMER-DRIVEN

But making products cheaper and closer isn't the only way TK Building Supply has set themselves apart from the competition. Sometimes, it's as simple as jobsite presentation.

"If a customer complained about something a competitor did, we adopt the opposite of that," Travis said. "For instance, wrapping materials for delivery. We said we'll do that because a competitor didn't."

The same goes for processes like delivering shingles to the roof where a builder needs them. They had never done it before, and as such didn't have anyone at the company who would argue against doing it.

"We're able to just listen to contractors and do it their way from the beginning. That's a blessing in a world that's changing too quickly," Kevin said.

Kevin and Travis will both admit that not every piece of their DIY style of business operations has made perfect sense. For example, the company once served as a U-Haul rental facility. "That wasn't a great decision," Travis said. "It was more work for little money."

Early on the company also obtained an auto dealer's license and sold used cars. "It sounded like a good idea and then we tried it and realized it was a bad idea," Kevin joked. "We've never let 'we've never tried it' from stopping us," Travis added.

CLOSE-KNIT COMPANY

Serving the area surrounding Windsor, Missouri, means working with builder customers who have projects in several large communities that are about 30 miles away.

"The longer we do this, the more we're delivering," Kevin said, indicating how word has spread as TK Building Supply has successfully served more customers.

As the company has grown, both the retail and manufacturing sides have expanded while facing the same labor challenges in most other areas of the country. Travis said they have been fortunate to bring in friends and family members who have been looking for jobs.

"Kevin's brother works here that has been a very good fit. A good friend of ours since high school was a sales rep for a big box store and now is the manager for us. That has helped us out tremendously."

Overall, the company has added about one employee a year over its 11-year existence and they're still looking for a couple more. While there is definitely growth on the horizon for TK Building Supply, both owners say that growth will likely take place in its same location, without expansion or acquisition.

GET TO KNOW TK BUILDING SUPPLY

FOUNDED:	2010
LOCATIONS:	ONE
OWNERSHIP:	PARTNERSHIP
EMPLOYEES:	12
BUSINESS SOFTWARE:	QUICKBOOKS ENTERPRISE
BUYING GROUP/CO-OP:	NONE
TOP THREE BRANDS SOLD BASED ON REVENUE:	OWENS CORNING VIWINTECH WINDOWS MASONITE DOORS

"I anticipate our truss department to grow—it's doubled each year—I think we'll do that again this year," Travis said.

"Every contractor we sell trusses to is asking about other products we sell as well," Kevin added.

With unprecedented housing growth anticipated for the East Central Missouri region, Travis and Kevin feel they are well-suited to keep up with the demands of their growing stable of builder customers. However, at just 34 years old, they've studied enough history to know it may not all be upside forever.

Purchasing a building materials supply business in 2010, means the two have only yet seen increases in revenues. As Travis put it, "all we've known is good times."

"But that's one advantage we've got," Kevin added. "We haven't failed. We aren't terrified of a boom time like this because we fear a bad time will follow. We jumped feet first into this." ■

Fortress' Apex CBPVC decking (shown in Himalayan Cedar) is constructed with a foam core reinforced with bamboo that, according to the manufacturer, makes it 45% lighter than composite decking and 25% less prone to expansion and contraction. As well, each board is encapsulated in an acrylic polymer for UV protection.

DECKS

DESPITE MATERIAL AND LABOR WOES, THE DECKING MARKET REMAINS AN AGGRESSIVE GROWTH SEGMENT.

BY MIKE BERGER

AS A PLACE FOR FAMILY CONGREGATION, decks have a long and illustrious history. Beginning in the 19th century, boardwalks began popping up along America's eastern coastal region. Obviously made of boards, these structures gave hotel visitors a place to stroll without the fear of them tracking sand into the adjacent hotels. And by the 20th century, boardwalks became destinations unto themselves.

While certainly nowhere near as grand as the famous Atlantic City Boardwalk, today's residential decks serve as similar fashion, giving families a place to gather and enjoy the outdoors. And their popularity continues to experience significant and aggressive market expansion.

The Leading Indicator of Remodeling Activity, released by the Remodeling Futures Program at the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, forecasts strong growth in the remodeling market into 2022, projecting high-single digit gains in annual home renovation and repair spending, with 9% growth in spending by this year's fourth quarter. And according to the U.S. Census Bureau, housing starts in the US unexpectedly increased 1.4% month over month to a seasonally adjusted annualized rate of 1.702 million in December of 2021, the highest since March of 2021 and beating market forecast of 1.65 million.

It's not just the numbers that predict a strong market; manufacturers seem to agree with the optimistic forecast as well. "The past 12 months have taught us that consumers are emotionally and financially invested in their outdoor spaces and will continue to use them even as the world opens back up," says Daryl Evans, chief marketing officer for YellaWood. "The housing boom has not only introduced more first-time homeowners excited to create a space but it also established a renewed sense of enjoyment for long-time homeowners looking to reinvigorate their outdoor areas. With the chaos of the world increasing by the day, consumers are looking to create spaces outside the home where they can create memories and experiences."

Jase DeBoer, senior marketing manager of outdoor living for Deckorators, shares Evans' viewpoint when it comes to market strength. "It's undeniable that in recent years more homeowners than ever are reevaluating and taking inventory of how they use the spaces within their property lines," he explains. "In the same way that the insides of our homes have had to take on multiple purposes, people are looking to make the most out of their outdoor living spaces as well. Over the next 12 months we predict that there will be a continued demand for personalized outdoor living spaces."

Kim Boos, director of channel sales North America for Fortress Building Products, agrees. "The country's enthusiasm for outdoor home improvement shows no signs of slowing down, which means the decking segment will be hotter than ever. Many are commissioning beautiful outdoor spaces that extend the functions of everyday living beyond the walls of the home."

Bret Martz, vice president of North American professional sales at Trex, also sees a continuation of the explosive growth of the deck segment. "We anticipate the market will experience continuing levels of increased interest and demand throughout 2022 as consumers continue to invest in making their homes more comfortable and functional. Outdoor areas, in particular, are becoming larger and/or more elaborate. We are also seeing more consumers embracing and seeking out the benefits of low-maintenance materials, which is positively impacting demand for composite and moving the needle on our goals for driving wood conversion."

Matthew Bruce, vice president of sales for MoistureShield, agrees. "With historic demand for outdoor living products, industry experts like Principia report that this demand for outdoor living space will continue past the pandemic and expects all decking—both new and repaired/replaced decks—to grow 5.5% by volume through 2023." ▶▶

TOP LEFT: Now available in a 3-1/2" width, Deckorator's Dark Slate picture frame board can be used as a breaker board or to outline the perimeter of a deck to add a unique contrast to any outdoor space.

FAR LEFT: Westlake Royal's Zuri Premium Decking lineup is available in six colors, including Hickory, Chestnut, Walnut, Pecan, Brazilia, and Weathered Gray (shown here). According to the manufacturer, Zuri is engineered to be resistant to scratches and stains, while its topcoat provides exceptional resistance to UV light and color fade and is backed by a 25-year color fastness warranty.

LEFT: G Wood Products' Tantimber products are produced with the latest Thermowood Technology, which is said to refine and modify wood without harmful chemicals to transform its structure into its most stable and durable configuration. It is suitable for a wide range of both indoor and outdoor applications, especially around waterfront properties and pools.

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FAR LEFT: YellaWood Protector deck stain is formulated for use on YellaWood brand products and is available in Crystal Clear, American Classic Cedar, Rich Walnut and Smoky Gray. The premium stain (available in 1-gallon cans and 5-gallon buckets) can be used for decks, fences, siding, pergolas, gazebos and outdoor furniture.

LEFT: Fortress Building Products' Evolution Steel Deck Framing provides an alternative to wood deck framing. According to Fortress, it provides greater spans between supports, works with any type or brand of decking including composite, PVC, aluminum, tile, wood, and tropical hardwoods, and comes with a 25-year warranty.

PERSONALIZATION IS WHERE IT'S AT

Ever since the lockdowns that came with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, homeowners have embraced the concept of outdoor living like never before, opting for projects that result in an overall expansion of the home's usable outdoor square footage. "Homeowners continue to seek options to expand living space beyond their four walls and look to outdoor spaces as an extension of their home," says Chris Brown, director of business development for Culpeper Wood. "Their decks now serve many purposes. A deck is now their kitchen and dining room as they cook, eat, and even watch movies or sporting events while enjoying the backyard living space."

Dennis Hazenstab, vice president of customer experience and sales execution for the AZEK Company, agrees, pointing out that, with a decrease in available home inventory, people are making enhancements to their current spaces, particularly outdoors. "Nearly a third of millennials (32%) want to renovate their outdoor spaces to add value to their homes," he says. "The decking focus for homeowners used to be maintenance but has since shifted to lead with a priority on aesthetics followed by low-maintenance, durability, and sustainability. There's also an uptick in millennials buying new homes, and sustainable, low-maintenance features have never been more important."

But as the pandemic has continued, a mere expansion of outdoor space isn't enough. Rather, manufacturers point to a growing homeowner desire for more personalized designs that include bold use of colors, patterns and deck board widths. "Classic lumber-toned decks never go out of style, but adding some flair with an eye-catching color is a subtle way to elevate your deck's aesthetic appeal," says Steve Booz, vice president of marketing for Westlake Royal Building Products. "Some designs incorporate the same color throughout while another way to bring color to your deck is through distinctive inlay designs or other design features."

Mixing and matching of colors and widths is an easy way for homeowners to create a personal touch to their outdoor spaces, manufacturers suggest, along with the mixing of dark and light color palettes. "Homeowners are starting to think about the outdoor living space as an extension of their home, bringing trends from the indoors, like multi-width boards and lighter flooring, to the outdoor space," points out AZEK's Hazenstab.

"Creative flair is increasingly mainstream," adds Booz. "Some options for incorporating greater depth and style into your deck design include mixing and matching boards to create patterns, inlays and focal points or utilizing two-tone designs for more visually interesting aesthetics." ▶▶

FAR LEFT: The TimberTech EDGE Prime+ Collection in Dark Cocoa is made from up to 80% recycled materials and boasts a warm brown shade, flecked with varied hues that give natural color dimension.

LEFT: Barrette Outdoor Living's InstaDeck Outdoor Flooring System is assembled using minimal tools on any flat surface, including grass, concrete, pavers or gravel. InstaDeck's integrated, Step-Clip fastening system is designed to secure their composite deck boards into place with no special tools.

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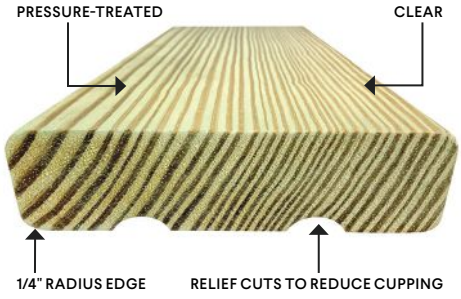
That personalization also goes beyond horizontal decking, with homeowners incorporating an increasing number of auxiliary structurers into their outdoor living plans, says Deckorators' DeBoer. "Increasing trends including additional, personalized features such as wet bars, pools, spas, and customized storage solutions reflect homeowners' desires to cultivate an outdoor space that reflects their lifestyle and personality."

Jessica Hewitt, director of marketing for Humboldt Sawmill Company, also sees auxiliary outdoor structures that add functionality to outdoor spaces as a growing trend. "We have been promoting redwood timbers for quite a few years now. They can be used for deck posts on higher-end, larger decks, but most typically for shade structures like pergolas and arbors," she explains. "We were early in that trend as other manufacturers are just starting to see the value of extending their product lines into shade structures. We feel the versatility, ease of use, and variety of dimensions and lengths of redwood timbers available, make them idea for dealers to carry in stock and contractors, builders, and homeowners to use for those types of projects. And as outdoor settings continue to be important to homeowners, upgrading not just decks, but shaded areas as well, is not a trend that is going to reverse anytime soon."



ABOVE: Large redwood beams from Humboldt Sawmill Company can easily be used in a number of ways, including for decking, timbers to hold shade sails as shown here, and for lattice work, picnic tables, and chairs.

ABOVE RIGHT: To make Culpeper Prodigy, the manufacturer starts by using its Culpeper Clear deck board and then adding relief cuts that run the entire length of the underside of the board to help reduce cupping, warping and splitting.

RIGHT: MoistureShield Meridian capped composite decking is available in three premium colors: Citadel (shown here), Shoreside, Mariner. Citadel and Shoreside offer proprietary CoolDeck technology that, according to MoistureShield, reduces heat absorption by up to 35% compared to traditional capped composite boards in a similar color.

SUPPLY SHORTAGES, LABOR WOES

While demand for decking has many seeing a bright future for 2022, global supply chain issues have manufacturers wary. Shortages of everything from resins to computer chips—all key components used in manufacturing line machinery—have resulted in significant line downtime for manufacturers due to lack of availability of parts. And anything coming from overseas, whether it's the materials for the products themselves or the materials used to make the machinery that makes the products, is subject to significant delivery delays while it waits to be unloaded from cargo containers.

For example, in January, top container shipping firm A.P. Moller-Maersk warned its customers in an advisory bulletin on its website that it was still struggling to move goods around the world. The pandemic has prompted shortages of container ships and log-jams at ports at a time of very high consumer spending, with the biggest waiting times for container vessels to discharge or pick up cargoes found on the U.S. West Coast, where the waiting time at Long Beach port in Los Angeles currently is between 38 and 45 days, the shipping firm said.

To add insult to injury, according to an estimate from the American Trucking Association, the U.S. is currently experiencing a shortage of more than 80,000 truck drivers, so even once materials are unloaded at the docks, there may not be anyone available to drive the goods anywhere—be it to the manufacturing facility or from the manufacturer to the LBM distributor. Nevertheless, decking manufacturers are doing everything they can to overcome these delays.

Says YellaWood's Evans, "YellaWood is committed to working with dealers and distributors to stay ahead of demand increases. We are in constant communication with partners on both ends of the supply chain to ensure that all parties are aware of timelines and any demand challenges." ▶▶

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It's a sentiment that's shared by all the manufacturers we interviewed, and while everyone acknowledges the materials and logistics challenges, they're all committed to doing everything they can to get materials to the distributor as quickly as possible.

"COVID-19 has posed, and will continue to pose, challenges with labor," says Trex's Martz. "Like other industries, we are faced with labor difficulties while also trying to meet the demands of the market and balance employee welfare. Growth has also challenged us to look further in our global sourcing of raw materials for our products, and we feel prepared to meet the emerging demands of the customer while maintaining our leadership position in recycling."

Matt Roughen, director of marketing, wood protection North America for Arxada (formerly Lonza Wood Protection), agrees. "We've seen the impact of raw material availability throughout the industry; however, at Arxada we've taken measures to ensure our customers have material when they need it. We are proud that through the pandemic our service to our customers remained strong."

And for some decking manufacturers, domestic product availability has eased some of those supply chain issues. "Our company has the unique benefit of owning our redwood and Douglas-fir timberlands, 440,000 acres total, our sawmills, treating plants, and distribution centers," Humboldt's Hewitt points out. "Overseas disruptions have exposed how long supply chains have gotten and how far away component and raw materials may be. The beauty of natural wood is…it's wood! There are no component materials. Furthermore, we have great relationships with our raw materials suppliers for our treating plants and have worked diligently to ensure we have the raw materials to feed those plants as demand remains at historically high levels.

KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOLUTIONS ARE VITAL

In the midst of supply chain and delivery woes, the building and remodeling industry continues to struggle with labor shortages, and contractors are having a difficult time keeping up with the growing demand for their services. "Like many other industries in the US right now, finding labor is a struggle," says Arxada's Roughen. "The same can be said for the construction industry. Contractors seem to have longer jobfiles and homeowners are seeing longer wait times to have projects started."

It's a shortage that's industry wide, points out Culpeper Wood's Chris Brown. "Labor shortages are being felt by all businesses, not just our industry. However, the mills, the manufacturers,

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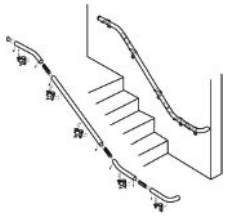

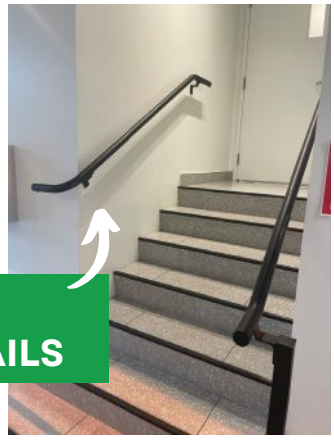
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the retail lumber yards and every other business in our industry are having staffing difficulties. As a result, production, fulfillment, and service have been affected. We all are having to adjust where we can to be able to provide the level of service our customers are expecting."

Because of these shortages, it's become more important than ever for LBM distributors to provide as many options as possible for contractors. Whether it's with a deeper portfolio of products or by providing ones that deliver labor-saving benefits, manufacturers stress the importance of time and labor-saving solutions. "The labor shortage continues as an issue for deck builders who are trying to do more with less, and often operating with smaller crews," says MoistureShield's Bruce. "This creates a need for consistently reliable, easy to use products."

To be able to offer solutions, product knowledge becomes paramount, and the successful LBM dealer will strive to be a decking educator rather than a mere order taker. "Customers want the best of both worlds when it comes to decks and accessories," explains Deckorators DeBoer. "It's not enough to offer a product or design that is aesthetically attractive. You also need to think about how a space is going to function and whether that product is going to last. Your biggest defense is knowledge. Know your products, know their warranties, and know how they need to function."

"To stay competitive," stresses Fortress' Kim Boos, "LBM dealers must be able to 'show the dream' with advanced computer design programs, virtual reality software and interactive, mobile-friendly websites. By creating a value-add experience, the deck designing, purchasing and installation process can actually become easy and enjoyable."

YellaWood's Daryl Evans, also sees product knowledge as key, not only as a means to provide solutions, but because customers are more product-savvy than ever, and LBM distributors need to be prepared to respond. "We're finding that customers are spending more time researching specific products for their ideal deck before engaging a contractor," he explains. "Higher-grade materials customers were previously unfamiliar with, like KDAT boards and built-in water repellants, are now being asked for by name. This is a challenge because contractors need to be ready to have deeper dialogues about the best product choices for each project and be prepared to offer alternative products to balance demand for premium products."

ABOVE: For 2022, Deckorators has launched a new color in its Voyage Decking mineral composite deck board. Called Sedona, the new color reflects a shift toward warmer earth tones in design trends.

ABOVE LEFT: Modern Mill's ACRE decking offers the look and feel of wood in a sustainable, low-maintenance alternative that doesn't sacrifice performance—guaranteed not to fade, crack, splinter or rot.

LEFT: Available in the App Store and Google Play, the Trex AR Decking and Railing Visualizer gives users the ability to plan decking projects by viewing Trex's decking and railing portfolio, exploring deck shapes, colors, and styles, and experimenting with decking and railing pairings. As well, the app can estimate square footage and order product samples.

GROWING YOUR PRODUCT BRAIN

In this post-COVID-19 world, it can be challenging at best for the LBM distributor to stay on top of product knowledge. Nevertheless, decking manufacturers are doing all they can to make sure the dealer has as many resources as possible at their disposal. Online product training coupled with the slow return of in-person events are helping LBM distributors and contractors alike stay as informed as possible.

For example, the Humboldt Sawmill Company launched a third American Institute of Architects continuing education course in mid-2021. "We train upwards of 6,000 specifiers annually through a combination of in-person and online continuing education courses," says Hewitt. "The vast majority of those are online as specifiers value the flexibility of going through those materials as they are able, whether in the evenings or on weekends, to meet their training requirements." ▶▶

Arxada has partnered with Matt Risinger of the Build Show to create an educational video and podcast about understanding treated wood where he discusses product basics, from how to choose the most appropriate treatment level for a customer's needs to what fasteners and flashing to use.

In the case of Trex, in addition to more in-person interactions balanced with virtual trainings, it will soon be reopening its Trex University training facility, while Westlake Royal Building Products offers on its websites a variety of downloadable materials such as installation guides and training videos.

Introduced in 2021, the MoistureShield Value Partner program (MVP) provides training and rewards programs. As well, its MoistureShield University provides a digital product learning platform for contractors, dealers and their sales teams. And for Culpeper Wood, it provides training resources exclusive to its customers. "We are a certified provider for AIA Continuing Education, we offer on-site Lunch & Learn opportunities and even online webinars which can be scheduled at your convenience," explains Brown. "When a customer walks in to a retail lumber yard, they expect your team to be the experts. Ensure they are by taking advantage of educational opportunities."

If the continuing challenges and upheavals of the pandemic environment have taught the decking industry anything, it's to go with the flow. Industry experts don't see a quick or easy end to labor shortages and supply chain issues, and as a result, LBM dealers can find themselves feeling as if they're riding a never-ending roller coaster.

As Culpeper Wood's Chris Brown puts it, "Demand has been all over the chart the past two years. Much of this can be attributed to the historical rises and falls in the lumber market. Yet housing starts are at numbers which our industry cannot fulfill. Mortgage rates have been at levels which promote new starts, remodels, and rapid changes in the real estate market. The DIY market has been booming and the surge in the outdoor living category shows no signs of easing. Factor all of this in with vast swings in pricing and it creates a difficult situation to navigate for both manufacturers and retail lumber yards." By staying ahead of the trends, however, and being able to provide thoughtful solutions, LBM dealers can make that roller coaster feel more like a calm and soothing carousel. ■

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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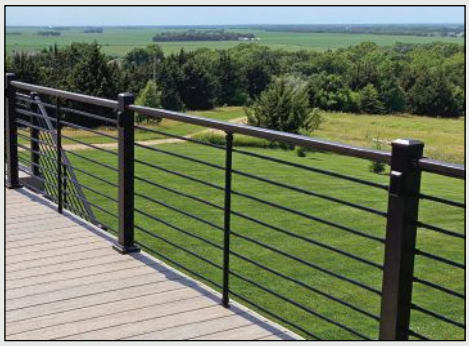

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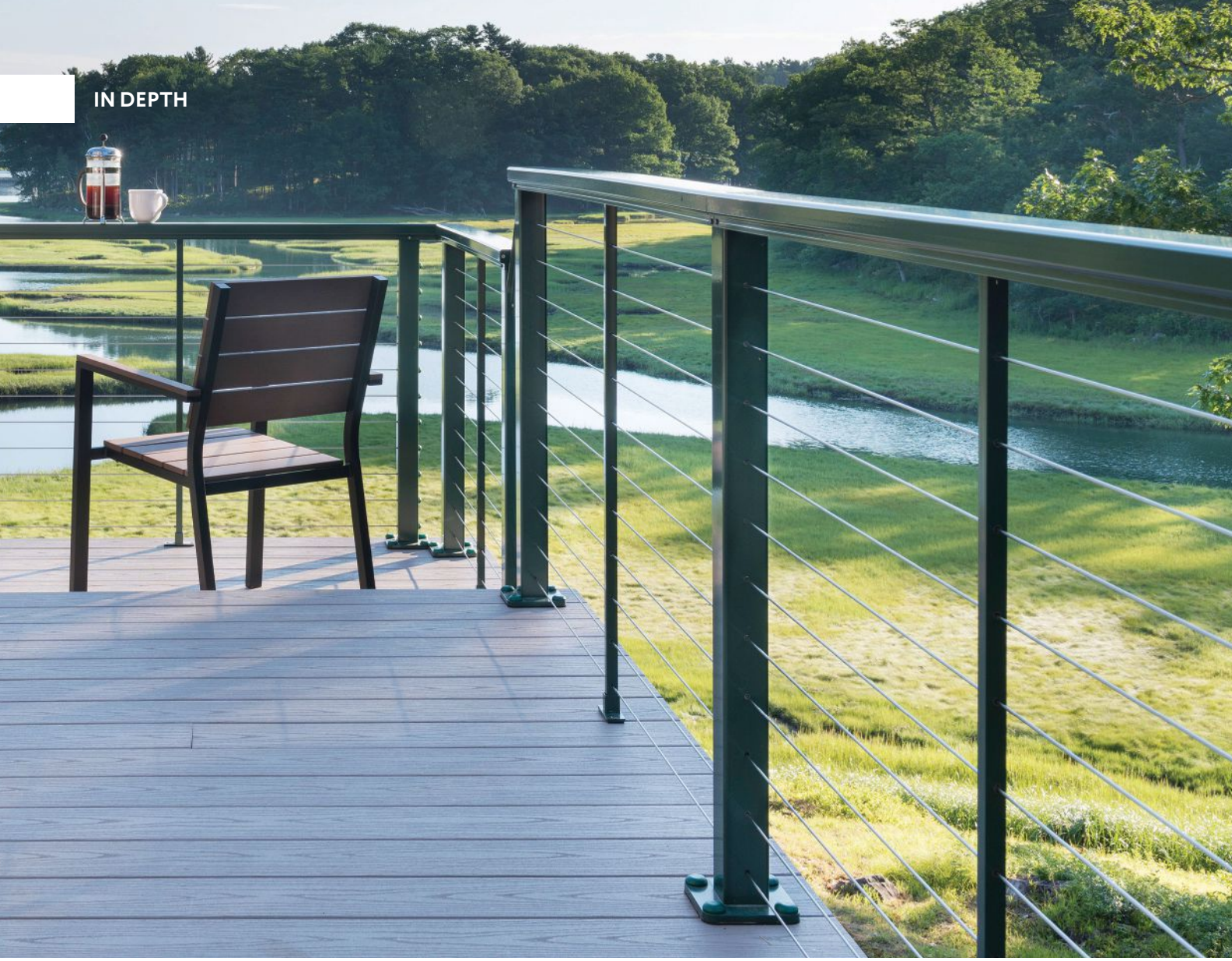


DECK RAILINGS & ACCESSORIES

SIMPLE AESTHETICS LEAD THE WAY IN A MARKETPLACE THAT'S DEALING WITH GROWING DEMAND.

BY MIKE BERGER

LEONARDO DA VINCI is reported to have once quipped, "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication." Seeing that Da Vinci remains one of the world's greatest artists and inventors, we would do well to respect his thoughts, as they certainly could be used to describe the current state of the deck railing and accessory industries.

With people spending record amounts of time in their home's outdoor living spaces, homeowners are more aware than ever of the aesthetics of those spaces. So when they go about building new outdoor spaces—and statistics indicate they're doing so in record numbers—those projects more likely than not include deck railings and accessories. For the LBM dealer, that means more sales, but only if he or she is prepared for the challenges of a volatile market.

POST-PANDEMIC GROWTH

Over the past two years, homeowners have spent significantly more time in their homes than ever before due to the COVID-19 pandemic. And while people are slowly transitioning back to traditional workplace environments as the pandemic de-escalates, homeowners have nevertheless become exceptionally conscious over the last two years of the appearance and personal style of their outdoor living spaces. As a result, they're addressing the aesthetics of those spaces with higher-end railing and accessory choices, and it's a trend that's not likely to change any time soon.

"We believe the demand for outdoor living and related architectural products will continue to gain traction," says Jennifer Wilde, director of digital marketing and creative services for Feeney. "After spending so much time at home during the past couple of years, consumers are increasingly aware of the importance of their everyday living environments and are looking for ways to make them more functional, attractive and enjoyable."

Don Douglas, senior product manager, Railing Category, for Fortress Building Products, also expects to see continued growth, both in the new construction and remodeling segments. "Homeowners are continuing to commission beautiful, functional 'outdoor rooms' and are looking to their contractor to recommend railing, post caps and lighting accessories to make those living spaces feel complete," he points out.

Kevin Harris, director of sales and marketing for AGS Stainless, agrees with the predicted growth. "I've spoken with a number of decking and railing manufacturers, and as strong as 2021 growth was over 2020 numbers, there is a consensus that 2022 will be an even better year for the industry," he explains. "Additionally, the research organizations that track the decking and railing industry have solid evidence that home owners are making stronger investments in their outdoor living spaces. They want to be just as comfortable in their outdoor spaces as they are in their indoor spaces. That makes this the perfect time for dealers to add railing fabricated from higher quality, more visibly impactful materials, materials like stainless steel, to their product catalogs."

REFINED, CUSTOM OPTIONS DOMINATE

Leading the growth charge for 2022 are railing and accessory products that enable homeowners to create very personalized spaces while embracing a clean, modern aesthetic. Heading up that trend is the use of colors. No longer are basic black or stark white the only options; more products are being created in bold colors.

"There is a growing trend toward creating seamless indoor-outdoor spaces that harmonize to create a cohesive aesthetic," explains Feeney's Wilde. "As such, it's becoming even more important for dealers to offer building products in a range of colors that complement popular exterior and interior palettes. This gives retail customers more choices when it comes to coordinating their spaces, making it easier to achieve a seamless look." ▶▶

ABOVE: Deckorators ADA-compliant secondary handrail is now available in Bronze. According to Deckorators, the handrail components can be used to construct any ADA-compliant secondary railing to comply with building codes for safety and livability.

LEFT: Fortress' patented Simplified Stair Bracket is made to work with its AL13 HOME residential aluminum railing and FE26 steel railing product lines. According to the manufacturer, it reduces stair installation time and increases accuracy of the panel cut-to-size.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Feeney's ColorEasy powder-coated finish, shown in Hartford Green.

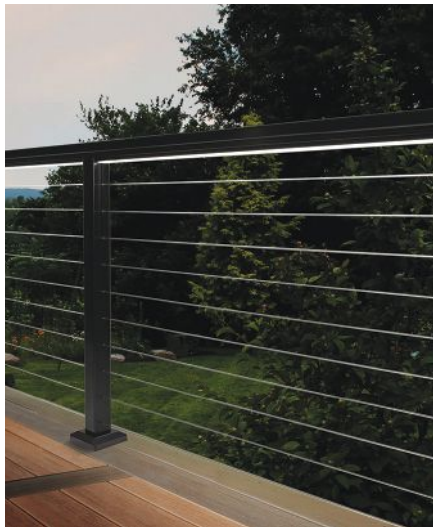
In response to homeowners seeking out products that deliver on the aforementioned aesthetic shift toward clean lines, manufacturers point out that cable railings systems are significantly growing in popularity. "Cable railing, particularly vertical cable, is an on-trend option that shows no signs of going away," says Fortress' Don Douglas. "Its contemporary, clean appearance is a great choice for customers who value high visibility beyond the edge of a deck without sacrificing durability or safety."

Heather Bowman, director of marketing for Superior Plastic Products/Key-Link Fencing & Railing agrees with Douglas' assessment of cable railing popularity. "We continue to see growth in our aluminum business, especially cable railing, as homeowners look for minimalist design and sleek, clean lines," she points out.

Cable railing, however, is not the only option for delivering a minimalist, modern look. Growing in popularity is horizontal bar or rod railing systems. "Horizontal baluster railing (aka rod rail) appears to be the next big thing," says Roland Pfender, president of Absolute Distribution, Inc. (ADI). "Discriminating consumers are looking for something different and like the aesthetics of the rod rail into aluminum railings or stainless steel."

AGS Stainless' Kevin Harris also sees a growing demand for this alternative railing style as an alternative to cable for a variety of reasons. "Although the two infills share the same overall design aesthetic, bar rail offers several advantages over cable railing," he explains. "For example, while both infills minimize obstruction of the surrounding area, many people feel bar rail is actually a more elegant look. Additionally, bar rail does not require the periodic re-tensioning that's necessary with cable railing systems."

Deck accessory manufacturers also point out the growing use of decorative lighting, especially incorporated into railings, decorative panels, or other accessories. With the pandemic-driven increased use of home outdoor spaces, lighting such as stair lights, under rail lighting, accent lights, and post cap lights can be an ideal solution for safely extending that use. "Deck lighting is a growing segment because lighting really enhances both the look and functionality of the deck," says Bowman.



ABOVE: According to Deckorators, its new low-voltage recessed deck and riser lights are the perfect addition to any outdoor space. Designed to be easy to install, the line includes recessed deck lights, stair lights, transformers and a variety of features such as Bluetooth connectivity.

RIGHT: RailFX from Absolute Distribution, Inc. has added Under-Rail Strip Lighting to its product lineup. This lighting option is compatible with all top rail options. According to the manufacturer, these light strips feature high quality LED lights and quick connect wiring for easy installation.

PRODUCT SCARCITY CAUSES CONCERNS

While segment growth can be a great thing, inability to meet the demand of that growth is a major frustration for deck railing and accessory manufacturers. Because of widely reported disruptions in the availability of raw materials, labor shortages, and trucking/shipping snafus, keeping enough product flowing to LBM dealers has been challenging to say the least. "Across the board, the railing segment is experiencing challenges due to increased fluctuation of ocean freight, increased port congestion, fewer trucks available to transport product from the ports and increased hard material costs," says Fortress' Douglas.

"Like most companies, we've experienced scarcity of items such as aluminum ore and ingots needed for extrusions, which has been the primary concern for us when it comes to manufacturing," adds Feeney's Wilde. "Supply shortages and delayed deliveries of hardware and components along with staffing shortages experienced by our suppliers and downstream customers have also been challenging."

Obviously, any inability to deliver product is a major concern for manufacturers, and they're extremely aware of the strain these shortages can put on both the LBM dealer and contractor. ▶▶

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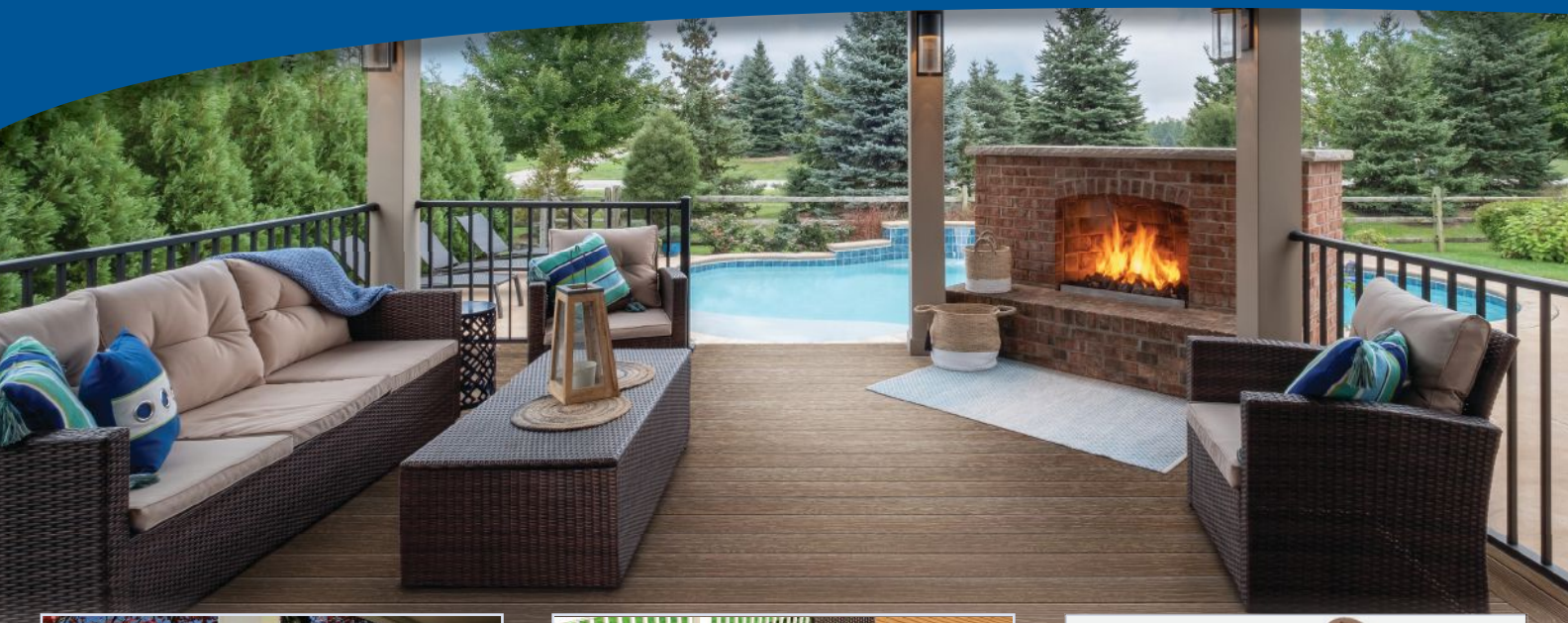

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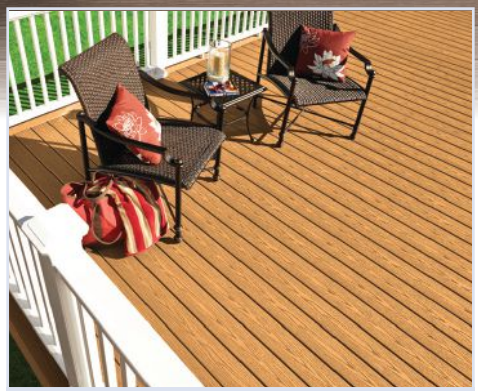

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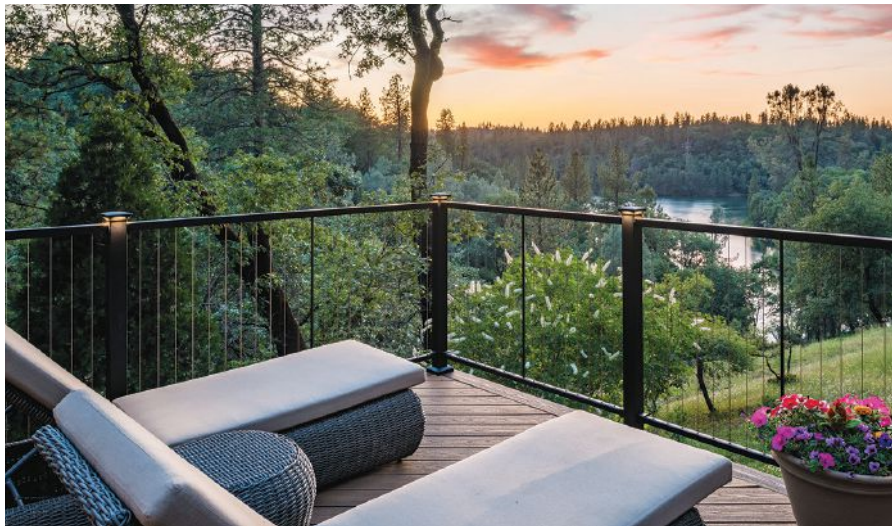


ABOVE: In response to the demand for minimalism and clean lines, Superior Plastics/Key-Link has reissued its external cable fittings as a smaller part, which, according to the manufacturer, means they require less raw material and have less bulk but still possess the same tensioning capability.

ABOVE RIGHT: FortressCable V-Series steel cable railing utilizes a proprietary advanced automotive coating process to resist rust and corrosion.

BELOW: According to AGS Stainless, its Cascadia stainless steel horizontal bar railing system is the only one on the market to have ICC-ES certification. AGS says that where a typical all-stainless steel railing system would usually require the builder to submit engineering calculations and technical drawings to their local permitting authority, Cascadia is pre-approved for use in residential applications through the U.S. and Canada.

"Supply shortages are preventing contractors from closing out jobs and getting final payment on their work," explains AGS Stainless' Kevin Harris. "If a lot of the contractors projects fall into this category, this can put a financial strain on their business. What's happening is that their customers are still waiting for product to arrive and be installed. And, until everything is installed, their customers may not be willing to make final payment on the project. So where a remodeler might typically have four to five projects going at one time, today they might be forced to keep 14 jobs active. This could become a real challenge for both the homeowners, and the contractor. if the contractor is not able to manage this challenge to their cashflow and scheduling process, it could result in some business closures, further impacting our already very tight, skilled labor market."

Fortunately, manufacturers used 2021 as a learning opportunity and took steps to avoid last year's pitfalls as much as possible. Whether through investing in back-up suppliers, increasing inventory, ramping up manufacturing capacity or maintaining supply pricing, manufacturers feel confident they're positioned as best as possible to keep up with 2022 demand. "We continue to invest in production efficiencies, increased capacity and meeting the demand of our valued customers," says Jase DeBoer, senior marketing manager of outdoor living at Deckorators. "We pride ourselves on keeping our vendors up-to-date on any delays that may occur due to the global supply chain shortages."

AGS Stainless' Harris also is optimistic about being able to meet demand thanks to manufacturing strategies. "Because of the way we fabricate at AGS, we have largely been insulated from these challenges," he explains. "As an example, although there are many commonly used materials in the railing industry, we fabricate our railing systems exclusively from one type of stainless steel (marine-grade, 316 stainless). Standardizing all of our railing systems on one type of material allows us to purchase raw materials in very large quantities. This helps to insulate our clients from the large price fluctuations and shortages in raw materials currently afflicting our industry."

Still, 2022 won't be without its share of challenges when it comes to product deliverability, and LBM dealers should brace themselves for potential delays. "We worked hard to place orders well in advance—over 12 months in some cases—and are still waiting on products to land for the 2022 season," says ADI's Pfender. "With longer lead times, all we can hope for is patience on the part of our customer and the consumer."

Feeney's Wilde agrees that patience will be a virtue for the LBM dealer. "We've made it a priority to proactively communicate with our clients that delays are possible and price adjustments may be required," she explains.

"Our focus on transparency and keeping customers informed has allowed us to manage client expectations while minimizing business disruptions. As a result of this approach, we've earned a number of new clients throughout the pandemic and strengthened our bond with our existing clients."

RESPONSIVENESS EQUALS SUCCESS

Because of these supply-side challenges, builders and homeowners alike are relying more than ever on LBM dealers to be solution centers, and deck railing and accessory manufacturers say the successful distributor is one who is prepared to do more than just place an order or close a sale. "Dealers are much more than a channel to sell to customers," points out Wilde. "They can play a pivotal role in providing customers with a broad range of services before and after the sale—for example, offering advice on selecting the right product for a particular application, installation tips, financing assistance, and so on."

To that end, LBM distributors' success strategies need to include placing railing products and deck accessories front and center in as visible a location as possible. "Railing is an afterthought in a lot of cases, even though it shouldn't be," says Superior Plastic Products' Bowman, "and a lot of installers grab what's available or comes from a big name, even if it's not the highest quality product or the best choice. So companies that specialize in railing need to work to make sure that builders understand their options."

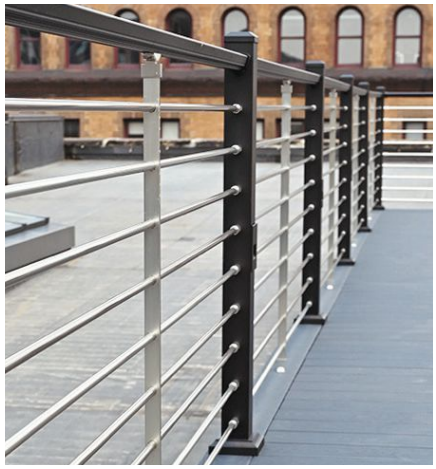
Feeney's Wilde agrees, stressing the importance of product visibility. "LBM dealers can benefit from creating a more prominent online footprint," she says, "for example, by creating online showrooms, incorporating e-commerce functionality, and elevating their retail location to another level by offering design services with qualified staff who understand design trends and how to create integrated spaces."

Just as important as product visibility is the actual availability of the product, and while that's an issue that can be out of a dealer's hands, they should nevertheless be mindful of what they have in inventory and be ready to sell it. "The channel can stay competitive by stocking product for the entire backyard package, and with it, railing" recommends Fortress' Douglas. "If a customer walks onto a yard to purchase decking but can't complete the backyard job with railing, they will spend their money at the lot down the street. Demand is higher than ever, so having inventory on the shelves is critical. Don't let customers walk away. Lead times are significantly longer than normal, so forecast as far out as possible and order ahead of peak building season. Preparation is key."

Obviously, part of that preparation involves setting expectations with the customer and following through with communication throughout the order/delivery life cycle. "Set realistic expectations regarding product availability and lead times," Pfender recommends. "Build in a cushion for unexpected circumstances. I do think that's already happening in most cases."

"Dealers need to be available for their customers," says Bowman. "Contractors on the job don't want to wait more than a few minutes for an answer. The most responsive dealers either have multiple methods available (phone, social media, chat, texting) or very accessible sales representatives to make sure they're easily reachable if a contractor has a question or problem."

Even when you factor in potential disruptors such as raw material shortages or shipping slowdowns from the manufacturer to the LBM dealer, it seems a safe bet to say that the world of deck railings and accessories looks to be a profitable one for 2022. But with proper planning and clear communication, LBM dealers can stay ahead of those disruptions and continue to provide profitable options to their customers. ■



ABOVE: Feeney recently introduced ColorEasy, a new powder coating program for its DesignRail Aluminum Railing System and Awning Kits. ColorEasy was developed to complement popular exterior and interior finishes and features 18 face-resistant colors that meet AAMA 2604 specifications for superior impact and weather resistance.

LEFT: DekPro Prestige aluminum railing systems (available through Absolute Distribution, Inc.) is now being offered in a horizontal baluster configuration. Also referred to as rod rail, the system is offered as a low maintenance option while providing homeowners an upscale aesthetic.

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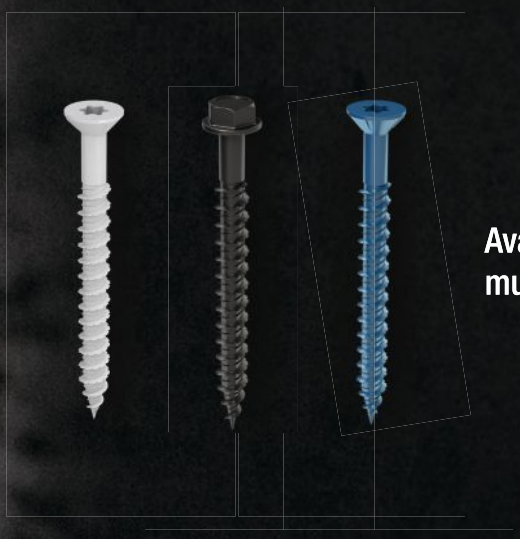

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To help deck contractors and builders save time and money while increasing user productivity and comfort, Simpson Strong-Tie has continued to enhance its Quik Drive auto-feed screw driving systems to provide improved ergonomic means of delivering fasteners.

DECK FASTENERS

CONTINUED GROWTH IN OUTDOOR LIVING BRINGS THE POTENTIAL FOR FASTENER PROFITS.

BY MIKE BERGER

WHEN YOU THINK OF THE ANCIENT WORLD, a common image that many people think of is that of tall, fluted marble columns. But did you know the ancient Greeks used hidden fasteners to create them? While the columns themselves were built in sections, the builders relied on metal pins to align the sections and keep them together.

In this changing world, it's nice to know some things never change. Fasteners, whether they're hidden or not, are just as important now as they were 3,000 years ago, especially when it comes to the deck industry. With the explosive growth of the outdoor living movement that's been spurred in no small part by the COVID-19 pandemic, the deck fastener market has the potential to be a profitable one. That growth, however, has brought an increasingly growing list of challenges for LBM dealers, not the least of which is supply chain issues. "It's hard to not mention challenges intertwined with COVID-19 and supply chain issues," says Eric Ashack, product manager for SPAX. "What COVID-19 has shown the fastener manufacturers and consumers, however, was just how much this industry depends on Asian manufacturing. With these vendors struggling to manufacture and ship product, U.S. manufacturers have been bombarded with opportunities. Unfortunately, Covid-19, along with other reasons have created employment shortages in our area as well."

Designed to be used on wood or steel joist systems, the MoistureShield Aegis Clip offers a 90° installation process and fastener options. Made from glass-reinforced polypropylene, the teeth on the bottom of the clip bite into the grooved deck board to help control lateral movement of the deck boards.

It's a problem that's not likely to ease any time soon. "I think the pandemic and the supply chain issues will have an impact on the way businesses operate for years to come," says Brandon Haly, division sales manager, LBM East for Grabber Construction Products. "Companies will have to adapt and maybe change the way they do a lot of things. Resilience is one of our core values and our culture is built around seeing each challenge as an opportunity. So sure, there are always challenges and we'll be ready."

Phil Lail, president of Pan American Screw Fastener Group, also sees the supply chain as his company's biggest concern, but like Haly, is up to the challenges. "We have seen secondary processes like plating, coating, passivating for stainless steel and laser sorting lead times stretch from 20 to 30 days upwards of 90 days in many instances," he explains. "Keeping the supply of product flowing for our customers is paramount and we are making some bold moves in the amount of inventory we try to keep on hand. Since we manufacture most of our products ourselves our lead times have remained fairly constant but delays in shipping have hurt us the most. Despite this our fill rates remain in the 95%-plus range for our LBM customers."

"Everyone's goal is to keep construction employees on the job. As a US-based company, FastenMaster worked hard last year to source enough raw materials to ensure we had sufficient inventory to service our customers on-time and in-full," points out Web Shaffer, general manager of FastenMaster. "We expect the COVID-19 supply chain problems to persist for the foreseeable future, and our top priority is to ensure that our dealer network has the items they require to support contractors."

GROWTH ALONG WITH PAIN

Despite these concerns, fastener manufacturers are optimistic regarding the opportunities the next 12 months presents. "As the outdoor living space market continues to be one of the most popular segments for home improvement spending, we see the growth of the deck fastener segment over the next 12 months to continue to be strong," predicts SPAX's Ashack. "SPAX is responding by continuing to invest in more capital equipment in our manufacturing operations in order to support the demand we're seeing from our customers for deck fastener products that are made in the USA."

Grabber's Haly also sees continued growth due to the increased interest in outdoor living. "It certainly increased interest and demand quite extensively during the Covid lockdowns," he says. "We saw a surge in home renovation projects, particularly outdoor as people had more time to focus on home improvements. We anticipate that trend to continue into this spring as we are already hearing of extended lead times for projects to begin."

Jacek Romanski, channel marketing director for ITW-GRK Fasteners, agrees with Haly's assessment. "We believe the current outlook around large remodeling projects, including deck building, will stay strong as homeowners continue extending living spaces to the outdoors coupled with the backlog of projects from constraints in labor, materials, and supply disruptions."

Dani Zizak, chief marketing officer for National Nail/CAMO, believes the growth forecast for decking has never been higher, and any growth in the decking segment means growth for deck fasteners. "Experts are seeing growth by volume to exceed 5.5% in the next two years." ▶▶

ABOVE: According to Grabber, the LOX Recess of its UltraPro Wood-to-Wood screw is designed to handle more torque than other recess screws, while the Scavenger double bugle head design seats cleanly into wood.

BELOW LEFT: SPAX Deck Spacers are engineered to ensure uniform gaps between boards. Available in four different spacing dimensions to allow consistent debris and water displacement, they eliminate the need to use a nail or speed square for spacing.

BELOW:EDGEXMETAL Clips from CAMO are designed to fasten any grooved deck board on metal substructure. They can be driven by hand using CAMO's Never-Miss guide or while standing up using CAMO's ClipDRIVE stand-up tool (for grooved boards) or CAMO DRIVE stand-up tool (for any decking).

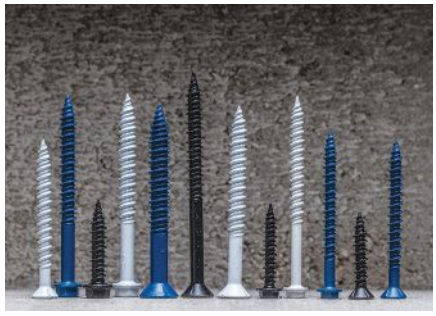
Mike Engle, product director of hand drive fasteners for PrimeSource Building Products, likewise sees similar market potential. "'Backyarding' and expanding the outdoor living area will continue to be a theme for the foreseeable future," he points out. "As companies redefine back-to-office plans, it is clear a hybrid approach is here to stay...particularly for industries that adapt to this model like the technology industry and its affiliates. With decking category growth pegged at 8% annually, fasteners used to complete outdoor living area projects will experience parallel growth to meet consumer demand."

Some manufacturers are going as far as predicting double-digit growth, partially driven by new construction from the aforementioned interest in outdoor living but also spurred by remodeling of existing decks. "I see it growing as the outdoor living category grows so I see double digit growth for the next 12 months," says Mike Reasons, national sales manager of outdoor living for BlueLinx. "The growth in the outdoor living category is not just pandemic driven, but driven by the significant number of decks across the country in need to repair or replacement."

Says Pan American's Lail, "Our LBM supply companies, Sure Drive USA and Big Timber, continue to see robust sales in the deck fastening segment and many of our dealers tell us they have jobs booked through the third quarter. Demand has been strong, but supply chain issues have caused some major disruptions in product availability. We are forecasting another year of double-digit growth in our hidden deck fastener and packaged threaded fastener product groups. Our robust inventory levels have made it easier to pick up new business during the supply chain disruptions many of our competitors are suffering through."

That exuberant growth, however, may bring pain with it, both for the manufacturer and the LBM distributor. "I believe there will be a fastener shortage from the multiple market disruptions," speculates Uli Walther, president of U2 Fasteners. "There will be a scramble for contractors to get the products and I believe whoever has the strongest inventory will give customers options to try new products."

Tony Kovac, director of product development for The Hillman Group, shares Walther's concerns. "The past two years have been unique and the demand for new builds and upgraded decks outpaced contractors' ability to meet this demand. There will be some backlog activity and growth, but not at the rate that we've recently experienced."



TOP: GRK Fasteners has optimized its Deck Elite portfolio packaging and quantities to cover from 100 to 400 square feet of decking. According to the manufacturer, its new screws are designed for use in wood deck boards, providing a fast drive for increased productivity and an ideal wood tone finish that results in fewer callbacks.

TOP RIGHT: Hillman Group's Power Pro's concrete anchors are designed for light and medium-duty concrete, block, and brick applications. The corrosion-resistant anchors are ICC-ES Code Compliant, are available in blue, white, and black and in various lengths and diameters. They feature a fully threaded tip, and according to the manufacturer, the wide serrated threads and mid-crossband threads offer a cleaner and faster cut while providing superior pullout and shear load strength.

MIDDLE RIGHT: Pan American Screw Fastener Group's Sure Drive USA division has introduced a new pneumatic Mantis Deck Clip installation tool. According to the manufacturer, it boasts a stronger neodymium magnet built into the slide tray to hold the coated clips secure at any angle during installation, thus eliminating dropped deck clips that slow down the job.

RIGHT: U2 Fasteners has recently added several more sizes of stainless steel screws for coastal applications and severe corrosive environments. To increase product awareness, the company has been using social media to get screws free of charge to anyone who would like to try them.

INNOVATION AND AESTHETICS LEAD PRODUCT DEMAND

While manufacturers agree there's growth in the forecast across the entire deck fastener segment, they also point out that products which deliver innovation while increasing speed and ease of installation will be at the top of contractors' shopping lists. "We expect to see a continued, high-level focus on innovation and the development of ways to make installations faster, safer, and more efficient," explains Robert Shirley, product marketing manager for Simpson Strong-Tie.

Grabber's Brandon Haly also sees product innovation in high demand. "There are always things being developed that increase product quality in terms of manufacturing processes, materials, and coatings, and I've seen a trend with contractors and builders being more interested in having conversations about those kinds of things —more curiosity about product innovations and technology. It's very cool." ▶▶

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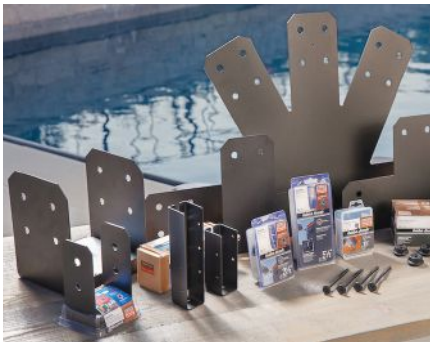
ITW-GRK Fasteners' Romanski agrees, adding that LBM dealers should pay particular attention to products that enable contractors to better deal with labor shortages. "Time is money, and these days even more so due to limited or a lack of labor that continues to plague the construction industry," he points out. "The importance of quality products that get the job done right the first time has never been in stronger demand. Contractors are asking for fasteners they can install without stripping, breaking, or pre-drilling and then move to the next job."

"The biggest challenge is staying ahead of contractor needs," says Blue-Linx's Mike Reasons. "Speed is one of the main advantages that different fasteners and fastening methods have. To the contractor time is money so any new ways to go faster than someone else is key. The market as a whole needs to continue to innovate and find out what the next big things is going to be in innovation."

It's not just product innovation, however, that's in demand. Overall aesthetics remain equally important. As homeowners continue to show interest in outdoor spaces that have an air of sophistication, deck fasteners that follow suit will be in demand. "With more of a focus on the outdoor living space, people are looking for a more visually pleasing, decorative or ornamental finish," says SPAX's Ashack.

"Aesthetics and longevity are playing an important role in product selection," agrees The Hillman Group's Kovac. "Gone are the days when pros can just use a blue concrete screw because it was the only color available. Black railings require a matching fastener that withstands the elements."



TOP: Due to continued interest in outdoor living spaces, Simpson Strong-Tie has added to its line of Outdoor Accents decorative hardware and accessories to include post bases, deck joist ties, straps, gable plates, knee braces, and more, all in black exterior-grade coatings with matching structural fasteners.

TOP RIGHT: SPAX deck joist and beam flashing tape is made to create a tight seal around deck screws. According to the manufacturer, the flexible, waterproof tape is engineered with advanced rubber Butyl adhesive to seal off fasteners, joists and beams from moisture, preventing premature wood rot while allowing joists to breathe.

MIDDLE RIGHT: New Grip-Rite Structural Screws with Prime Guard Plus coating are now available in the brand's exclusive Dual Drive Power Head and will soon be available in Flat Head styles to replace lag screws which contributes to time, labor and cost savings.

RIGHT: According to Pan American Screw, its Sure Hold Composite Fascia Board Screw is the only one-step fascia board screw on the market. It has wings built into the shank to bore a hold larger than the diameter of the threaded portion, allowing the fascia board to expand and contract naturally.

CHANGING METHODS NEED NEW PRODUCTS

As deck designs become more complicated and construction methods adapt to the needs of alternative materials, deck fasteners that can meet these unique needs will also be in high demand. "Decks are getting more and more complicated and intricate as contractors embrace design trends and homeowner pressure to have an outdoor space that compliments the rest of the house," says BlueLinx's Reasons. "With this trend, contractors are finding needs for more and unique fastening methods for more intricate inlays and designs."

The Hillman Group's Kovac also sees the growing need for fasteners that solve specific problems. "The instability in the lumber market could hasten the demand for alternative building materials such as steel framing, composite decking, or incorporating more stone elements into deck designs," he explains. "The increase of joining dissimilar materials could require deck builders to either stock additional fasteners or look for fasteners that can perform when fastening multiple materials."

National Nail's Zizak agrees with Kovac's insights. "The other trend we are seeing is the move toward metal framing, fueled by the lumber shortage and price escalations. As metal framing prices became competitive with wood, more manufacturers jumped in, and contractors became more comfortable with the easy installation and customer satisfaction of having a no-rot substructure."

With alternative building methods on the rise, contractors will need access to fasteners designed for these unique needs. "We continue to see growth in the mass timber and cross laminated timber applications," says Pan American's Lail. "Once it was prominent in only a select few geographical areas of the country, but we are seeing that market expand quickly across the US and Canada. Sales of our BTX and STX construction lags screws were up over 35% last year and we are seeing growth from North Carolina to California and all points in between." ▶▶

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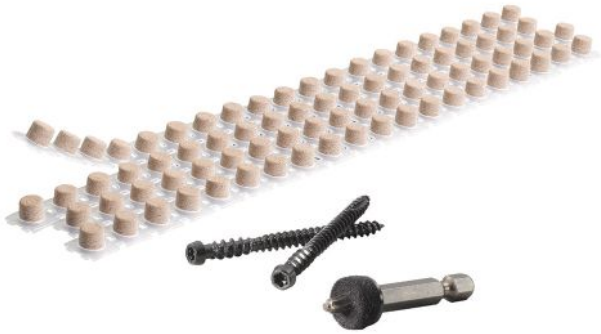
RIGHT: CAMO's ClipDRIVE stand-up tool is designed for fastening CAMO Universal Deck Clips. It attaches to any drill and allows the user to work while standing. ClipDRIVE features a height-adjustable handle and weighted nose that the user can quickly swing the tool from joist to joist and easily target the exposed screw head.

BELOW: Now available in collated strips, FastenMaster's Cortex Decking Plugs are available in a wide range of colors to match AZEK, Trex, and WOLF decking. According to FastenMaster, Cortex Plugs deliver a 50% installation time savings when compared to loose plug installation.



FIND SUCCESS IN PROVIDING SOLUTIONS

With such a changing building environment landscape, it's easy for builders and contractors to feel confused and frustrated. Supply dilemmas, new product releases, and changing trends can all add up to delays they can ill afford.

That's where the savvy LBM distributor finds success, deck fastener manufacturers say; by providing clear, honest communication and knowledgeable product recommendations, dealers can cement their relationships with their customers. "Service and trust is something we should all try to improve on," recommends Grabber's Haly. "I would tell any LBM dealer to focus on the same things we try to do every day at Grabber: follow through on promises; exceed expectations; be empathetic, and be open to input from others."

Know what you're selling, manufacturers say, so that you're a solid resource and not just a point of purchase. "It's very important to educate your customers that code compliant fasteners will last the lifetime of the material," points out U2 Fasteners' Walther. "Have the documentation and literature on hand for code inspectors and contractors."

Pan American's Phil Lail agrees about the importance of education for the LBM dealer. "With so many fastener options in the market right now for threaded fasteners and hidden fasteners, education is the key to making good choices. Dealers should make sure their staffs are up to date on the latest products and how they compare to others in the marketplace. Your end users stake their reputations on their work and count on the dealers to help them make the right choices."

Scott Smith, chief commercial officer for PrimeSource Building Products, recommends that LBM dealers partner with product lines that deliver innovation in addition to serving as an information source. "Customers and professionals desire high quality fasteners to offer solutions for building challenges," he says. "Ease and speed of application is paramount for the user while fastener innovation remains at the forefront in the industry. So, dealers who partner with brands focused on innovations—in drive systems, threading systems and coatings—will achieve success while driving incremental business."

But it's not just having the knowledge, manufacturers point out. LBM dealers need to be able to expertly convey that information, and one of the best way they recommend is with effective product displays.

"Retail displays and education are the key to meeting needs of both the DIY and pro contractor," explains BlueLinx's Mike Reasons. "With all of the different options that exist, it is important for LBM dealers to be the educator and expert. Having ways to show how a product works and how it can save time is important to the end consumer. This goes with both fasteners and decking. I find that many dealers try to be all things to all people. I think picking the right products for your business is key and then focus on educating why you chose those products to promote."

With the overwhelming interest in outdoor living showing no signs of slowing down any time soon, it should be a simple equation for the LBM dealer to find success with deck fasteners. By being able to offer innovative products that work with a variety of applications, LBM distributors should see significant sales opportunities that, manufacturers say, can lead to even bigger wins when customers need more than just fasteners.

As PrimeSource's Horst describes, "Dealers should be prepared to stock the complete package when it comes to outdoor living spaces. Bundling deck boards, fasteners, pneumatics, railing options, and finishing products—as well as on-trend backyarding items like outdoor kitchen cabinets—makes it easy for customers to procure everything needed for a project from one source." The rest, as they say, is money in the bank. ■

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In addition to engineering an easy-to-install product with adaptable styles, Evolve Stone has also created an installation system with building science at the forefront—maintaining proper drainage and drying. According to the manufacturer, there is no hydrostatic pressure and no leaks. This methodology protects the substrate beneath it while weathering a wide range of temperatures, precipitation, freeze/thaw cycles, wind loading, and UV exposure.

Further adding to its advantages, Evolve Stone is designed to be among the most intuitive stone products on the market to install. With 'workability' similar to wood, Evolve Stone cuts with any standard woodworking tool, making modifications simple while reducing the need for expensive accessories.

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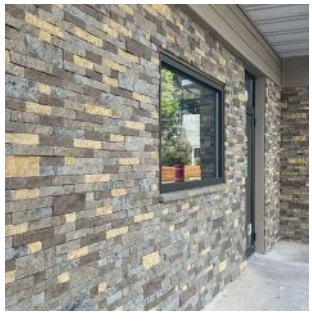
nailed with standard stainless-steel finish nails into the surface of the stone, having the fastener naturally recess below the stones surface, making the nail virtually invisible.

"We created Evolve Stone because the ease of installation helps combat the serious shortage of skilled labor, while providing a system based on proven building science," Greg Fritz, CEO, told LBM Journal. "Plus, feedback from builders has been overwhelmingly positive. Once they see how Evolve Stone is installed, the immediately connect the dots on cost savings, ability for turnkey exterior installations, and improved cycle times."

Manufactured in the U.S., Evolve Stone is ICC-ES listed, ESR3970 for Non-Rated and ESL1247 for Fire-Rated.

Learn more at evolvestone.com



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Simpson Strong-Tie's Outdoor Accents Avant Collection knee brace

Simpson Strong-Tie has introduced a selection of knee brace connectors to its Outdoor Accents Avant Collection decorative hardware line. Available in two sizes to accommodate both 4x and 6x lumber, the Outdoor Accents APVKB knee brace connectors are fabricated from ZMAX galvanized steel with a black powder coat for corrosion protection against the elements. Both sizes are installed with the 3-1/2" structural wood screw and STN22 hex-head washer, designed for ease in adding decorative flair to diagonal supports and other applications where knee brace connections are preferred or required. The knee brace connectors feature screw holes to help take the guesswork out of screw placement. **strongtie.com/outdooraccents**

Board & Batten siding from Westlake Royal Building Products

Westlake Royal Building Products has added a Board & Batten siding profile to its award-winning Cedar Renditions by Royal aluminum siding line. Cedar Renditions Board & Batten siding has a unique woodgrain look that can be used as an accent to enhance any exterior facade. The Board & Batten profile also complements Cedar Renditions lap siding, together with trim and accessories. In addition to offering a modern look, Cedar Renditions benefits include seamless overlapping, easy installation, 100% recyclable, moisture-proof and virtually maintenance free, and a PVDF topcoat. The product is protected by a 25-year prorated limited warranty. **westlakeroyalbuildingproducts.com**

ODL's 7/8" blinds-between-glass

ODL has expanded its Blink Blinds + Glass line with a new, 7/8" version. Featuring durable blinds sandwiched between two panes of glass, Blink 7/8 Custom provides a slim option for light and privacy control to patio doors up to 18 square feet and windows up to 12 square feet with a 7/8" IG pocket. The design is engineered to eliminate light gaps, shadows, and sunlight glare with the unique benefit of minimal maintenance and enhanced safety for children and pets, as the enclosed blinds lack dangling cords, never need to be dusted, and will not bend or tangle like exposed blinds. The new Blink 7/8 Custom blinds are now available for dual-operator applications greater than 48" tall, including patio doors. Blinds in 7/8-widths for single-operator applications less than 48" tall, including windows, are also available. **blinkblinds.com**

MoistureShield's new Cladding

MoistureShield, a division of Oldcastle APG, a CRH company, has unveiled its latest composite innovation, MoistureShield Cladding. Designed to resemble rich, natural hardwoods without the extra upkeep, MoistureShield Cladding is said to offer a durable, low maintenance finish while adding an elegant aesthetic to any exterior. Featuring MoistureShield's proprietary Solid Core manufacturing process, the new cladding is engineered to be protected against moisture absorption, warping, rotting, and damage from insects on all four sides, which the manufacturer says ensures the resilient, color-enriched composite cladding will withstand the elements, providing a natural aesthetic that doesn't require staining or painting. MoistureShield also offers the only cladding-approved deck board rated for use in the ground, on the ground, or under water, the company says. **moistureshield.com**

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LP SmartSide Outside Corners
The new LP SmartSide Outside Corners, offered in both primed and ExpertFinish, are engineered to create a sleek, polished corner look and eliminate the need to build corners during construction, which contributes to jobsite efficiency. This latest pre-finished accessory is available in cedar texture for a deep cedar-grain aesthetic, and is pre-primed for exceptional paint adhesion. Additionally, LP SmartSide Outside Corner Trim is designed seamlessly to resist water intrusion or seam separation while serving a variety of design needs. It is available pre-primed or pre-finished with a curated color collection to choose from. **lpcorp.com**

Deck joist and beam tape from SPAX
SPAX deck joist and beam tape is designed to extend the life of wooden decks. Placed directly on the top of joists and beams, it acts as a moisture barrier. Stock is available in two widths: 1-5/8" (4.13 cm) joist tape for joists and 3-1/4" (8.26 cm) beam tape for all double joists and beams. SPAX deck joist and beam tape is engineered to be strong, durable, and flexible with UV resistant facer. The tape's ridged polyethylene surface is slip resistant. It is designed to be simple to install and can apply to horizontal and vertical surfaces including all joists, double joists, beams, stair stringers, stair treads, ledger board and other surfaces. Backed by a 10-year limited warranty. SPAX deck joist and beam tape is packaged in individual 75' rolls and in master cut-case cartons of 16 rolls for joist tape and 8 rolls for beam tape packs ready for retail shelves. **spax.us**

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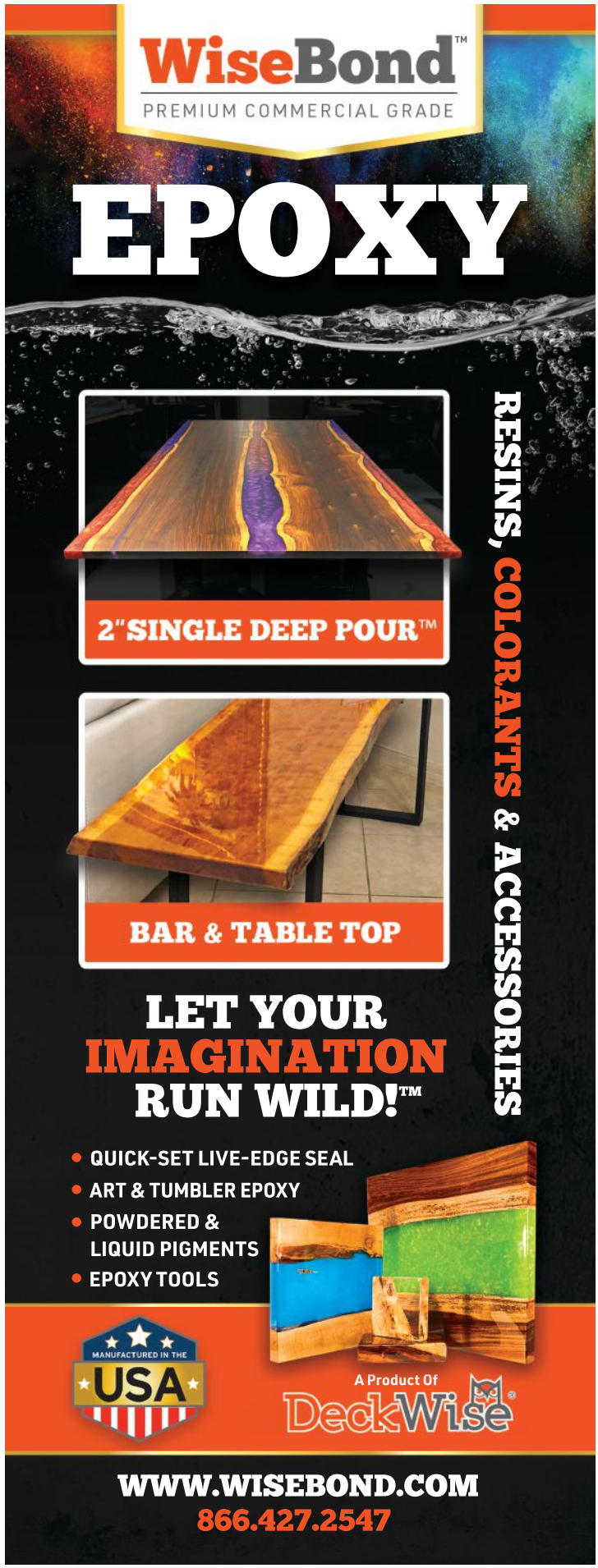
TurboClip hidden deck fasteners
TurboClip Universal Hidden Deck fasteners are designed to work with all major composite deck board manufacturers, decreasing installation time and increasing builder profits. Users can just insert, drive, and snap to complete deck installation while working with a stick of 16 preloaded hidden deck clips. **turboclipusa.com**

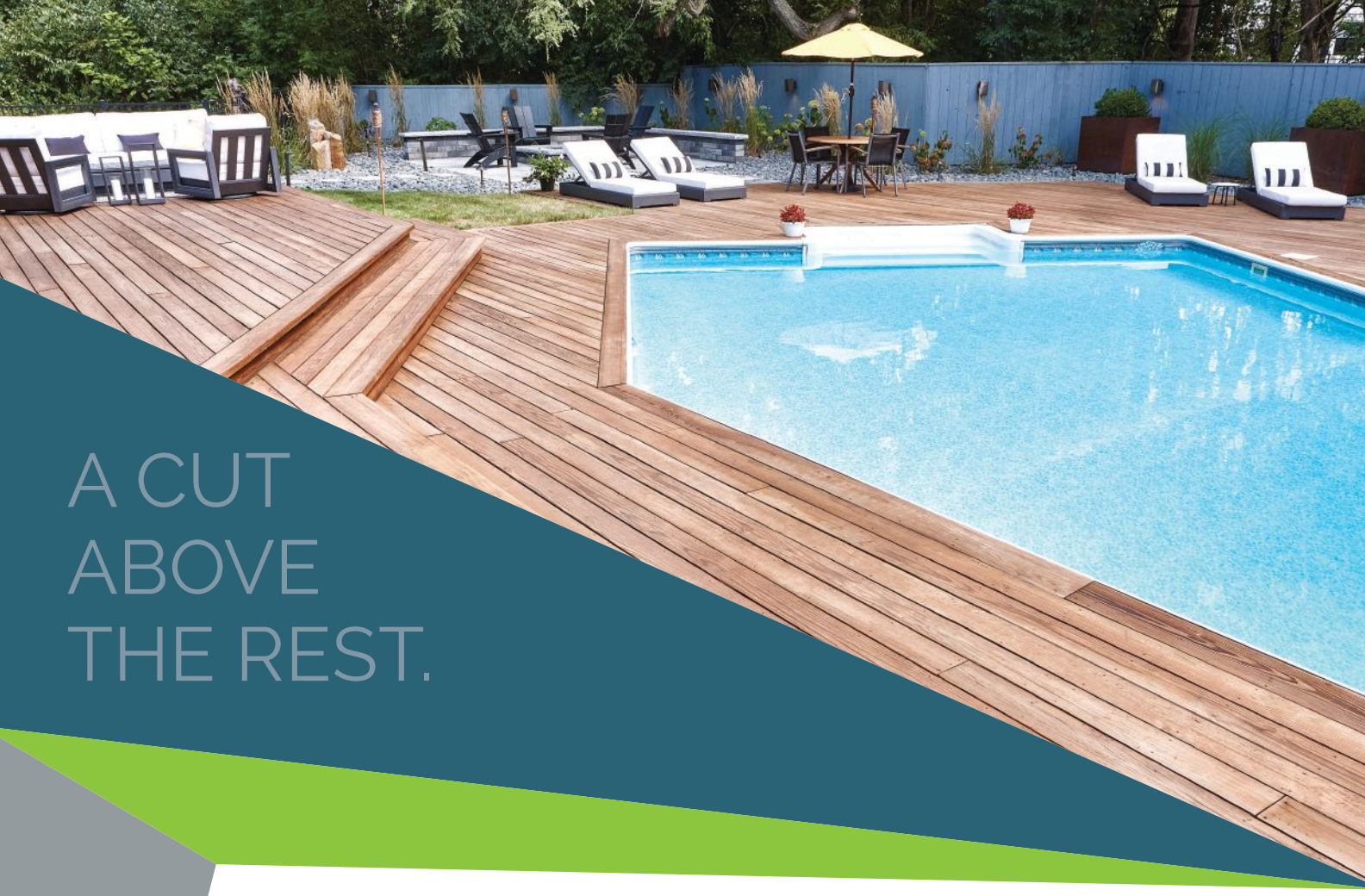
PowerPro Concrete Screw Anchors
PowerPro Concrete Screw Anchors from Hillman Group are engineered to cut threads into concrete, brick, and block. The patented design anchors are available in three colors and are recommended for interior and exterior projects. They can be used with a standard ANSI drill bit and, according to the manufacturer, offer 25% greater pullout values versus the competition, as well as 50% greater corrosion protection. **hillmangroup.com**



Deliverance Powered Safety Hammer from MAZE Nails
The new Deliverance Powered Safety Hammer is available through MAZE Nails. The air tool is designed to eliminate the need for skilled nail pounding as a solution to the construction industry's labor shortage. Developed as an advantage over traditional pneumatic nailers, the Powered Safety Hammer can fire hundreds of different types of economical, bulk nails so that the contractor is not limited to whatever nails are in his pneumatic tool. The Powered Safety Hammer weighs just 5 lbs., yet is designed to drive long nails and spikes with ease. Each product comes in its own blow-molded case, along with accessories for both driving and extracting nails. **mazenails.com**

KEEN Utility Birmingham work shoes
KEEN Utility's new Birmingham is a work shoe features a breathable engineered mesh upper, designed to keep the feet cool and supported when conditions heat up. Product highlights include a lightweight, compression-resisting KEEN.ReGEN midsole engineered to return 50% more energy than standard EVA foam and a KonnectFit heel-capture system provides a secure, locked-in feel. Additionally, a 100% non-metallic construction is designed to allow for easy passage for workers who may be required to go through metal detectors on the job. Features include asymmetrical carbon fiber toes that, according to the manufacturer, are 15% lighter than steel while offering a more unobtrusive fit as well as oil and slip-resistant, non-marking rubber outsole. The Birmingham will be available in two different colorways for men. **keenfootwear.com**

Milwaukee Tool M18 tire inflator
Milwaukee Tool's M18 tire inflator is said to be the fastest of its kind on the market, and can top off 33" light truck tires in under a minute. Equipped with TRUEFILL Technology to provide speed and accuracy, the inflator includes an auto pressure check feature, and an automatic shut-off feature. The inflator has the versatility to save up to four PSI memory presets. When the professional consistently fill tires to the same PSI, they do not have to take the time to set the PSI target with each application. Optimized for passenger, light truck, and other medium-duty tires. **milwaukeetool.com**



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FineLine weld from ProVia

ProVia's FineLine weld technology uses a proprietary welding process to join vinyl window corners. ProVia's FineLine weld technology is engineered to enhance the aesthetics of the corner without a secondary cleaning and finishing process, resulting in a neat, seamless appearance and enhanced fit and finish to Endure windows and patio doors. On woodgrain options, the FineLine weld is designed to produce a delicate, smooth line and achieve a picture-frame quality finish reminiscent of handcrafted woodworking. White, beige, and sandstone color frames and sashes can achieve a clean and subtle line, devoid of any welding slag or bulge that can mar the appearance of the sash, according to the manufacturer. ProVia uses an on-site lab to test products for air leakage, water penetration resistance, and structural integrity to ensure a premium quality window or patio door that meets or exceeds ASTM and AAMA A440 standards. **provia.com**

DEWALT XTREME 12V MAX Brushless Oscillating Tool

The XTREME 12V MAX Brushless Oscillating Tool (DCS353) is developed to deliver the versatility and ease for multiple work settings. The tool is designed to be compact and performance-packed with a brushless motor that delivers up to 18,000 OPM with a 3.2-degree oscillation angle. For enhanced visibility, the tool is equipped with an LED while its variable speed trigger offers professional-grade control. This XTREME 12V MAX Brushless Oscillating Tool is available this spring as a bare tool or kitted with a 12V MAX 3.0 Ah battery, two blades, a charger, and a kit bag. **dewalt.com**

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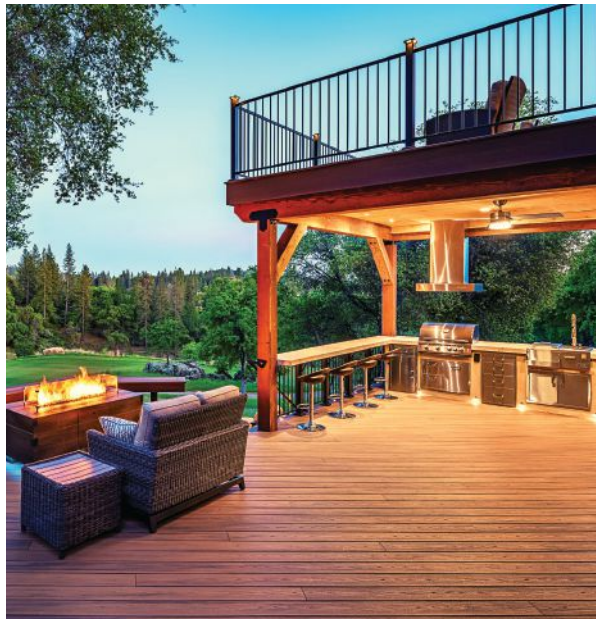

Pro Plug Hidden Fastening System
Envision Outdoor Living Products is expanding its fastener lineup with the addition of the Pro Plug Hidden Fastening System for its Ridge Premium composite decking collection. Fluted deck boards, common among composite manufacturers, are not widely available for use with Starborn's Pro Plug system; Envision worked directly with Starborn to develop modifications that will accommodate Ridge Premium's fluted deck boards. The Pro Plug System for Ridge Premium includes the three components of the original Pro Plug: epoxy-coated carbon steel screws or stainless steel screws; a patented PVC/Composite tool that attaches to a standard drill/driver to drive screws to the correct depth without overdriving or stripping the screw; and plugs made with Envision's decking material for a perfect match to the deck boards. **envisionoutdoorliving.com**

Owens Corning Thermafiber RainBarrier Dark Mineral Wool
Owens Corning is expanding its Thermafiber RainBarrier continuous insulation portfolio with the introduction of Thermafiber RainBarrier Dark. Equipped with a fiberglass dark veil facing material that is adhesively applied and manufactured to maintain its integrity post-installation, Thermafiber RainBarrier Dark is designed to help builders achieve both aesthetic and performance objectives. In installations where continuous insulation may be visible, Thermafiber RainBarrier Dark is engineered to blend into the background, supporting performance without interrupting the design ethos. The adhesively applied facing is engineered to avoid the cracking that can occur with more rigid materials. **owenscorning.com/rainbarrier**

Composite decking from Armadillo
Armadillo's composite decking is designed to offer the elegance and warmth of natural hardwood in a range of colors and finishes. According to the manufacturer, Armadillo is a low-maintenance, high-performance, long-lasting deck. Armadillo composite decking is wrapped on all four sides with a polyethylene protective shell developed to create a natural wood grain finish and protect against fading, weathering, stains, mold, and mildew. **armadillodeck.com**

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 171 members, with more coming in each month. In all, the companies have provided 21,501 years of combined service to their communities.

By no means does the LBM Journal's Century Club list include every 100-year-old company... at least not yet. That's where you come in. Do you work for, or know of a lumberyard or building materials retailer that is 100 or more years old? Send them our way, so that we can give them the recognition they deserve. Century Club members receive a certificate for their store, window decals for their front doors, free admission to the LBM Strategies Conference where they are guests of honor at a Century Club induction ceremony, as well as recognition in their local media, all free of charge. Nomination is easy! Just visit LBMJournal.com/nominate and answer a few questions. We'll take it from there. For a complete listing of LBM Century Club members, visit lbmjournal.com/lbm-century-club.

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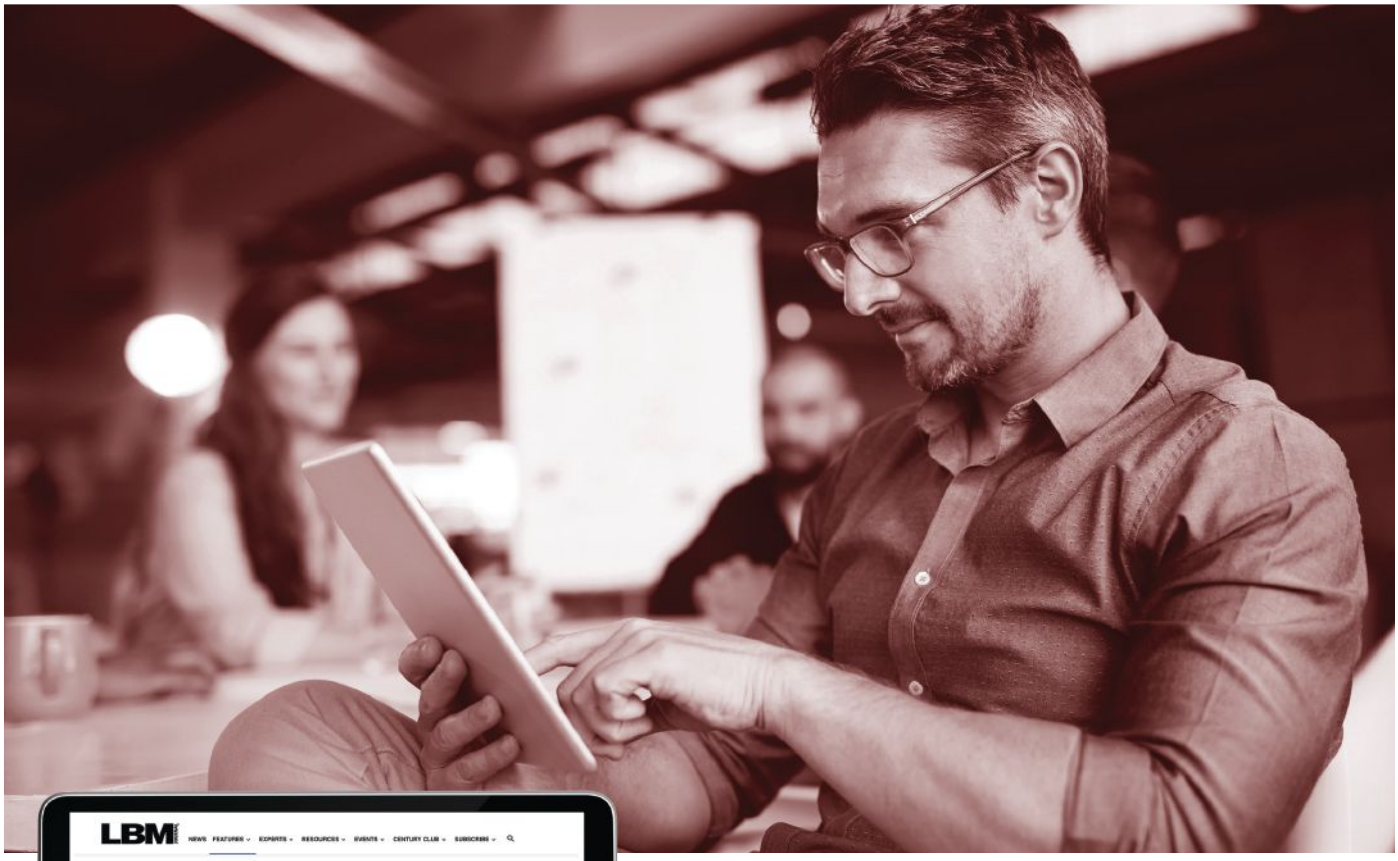

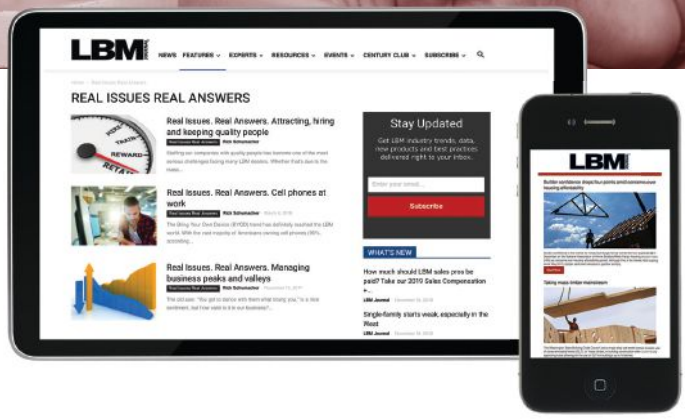

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IBC=inside back cover, IFC=inside front cover, OBC=outside back cover,
BB=belly band, INS=insert, PB=polybagged, WP=white paper

SEE HOW YOUR JUDGMENT COMPARES WITH OTHERS AT **LBMJOURNAL.COM**. RESULTS WILL APPEAR IN THE BUZZ SECTION OF THE JUNE 2022 ISSUE.

LET'S (NOT) TALK POLITICS!

TWO OF YOUR REPS ACTIVELY SHARE THEIR POLITICAL OPINIONS, WHICH IS IRRITATING YOUR CUSTOMERS AND THREATENING YOUR BUSINESS. WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

BACK IN 2009, when you invested your life savings to buy a closing LBM business, most everyone thought you were throwing your money away. More than a decade later, it's clear that most everyone was dead wrong. Not only have you recouped your investment, you've also provided good paying jobs for your crew, you've built a solid reputation for quality products and great service with local builders and remodelers, and you're thinking about adding a showroom in a nearby market. While you're facing the same challenges with supply chain issues, inflation, and trouble finding good people, you're confident that if you stay focused on serving your customers, your business will continue to grow.

One complicating factor that you hadn't planned on is strong, opposing political opinions being front and center in the workplace. You've worked your whole life not knowing the political persuasion of most coworkers or customers, and you were fine with that. Suddenly, more members of your team seem intent on making sure people know which side they're on.

You have no problem with people being politically active and having strong opinions…but as a businessperson, you strive to be as apolitical and neutral as possible. Just as there are no partisan campaign bumper stickers on any company vehicles, you want your team to focus on serving your existing customers and cultivating new ones, not talking politics.

Unfortunately, your two top salespeople are among the most vocal about their politics, and that's causing problems with customers. A recent conversation made that clear. "I buy nearly all of my materials from you, and I have for years, because you carry quality products, and your service is spot-on. But for some reason, your salesperson assumes that we're on the same side politically. We're not, and frankly, I'm a little tired of him trash-talking the people who I support. If you want to keep me as a customer, your rep may want to tone it down and focus on business."

As it happens, your salespeople who tend to talk politics are on opposite sides of the political spectrum, they're both sharing their opinions where they're not wanted and, given the tight labor market, they both know how hard it'd be to replace them. What would you do?

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CAST YOUR VOTE ONLINE AT: LBMJOURNAL.COM

- **MAKE IT STOP.** Make a rule that politics are not to be discussed on company time with colleagues, and especially not with customers.
- **RELAX.** Tell your team that it's fine to talk politics, but make sure they know that the person they're talking to shares their opinion.
- **MONEY TALKS.** Explain that talking politics with customers could lose the company business. Tell your reps that they'll lose any accounts who complain.
- **LET IT BE.** You can't dictate what members of your team discuss with each other and with customers. If you try to control the conversation, you're going to lose employees and customers.

SOMETHING ELSE?
If you'd take a different plan of attack, email your suggested solution to James@LBMJournal.com. If we publish your reply, we'll send you an LBM Journal mug.

CONGRATULATIONS ARE IN ORDER

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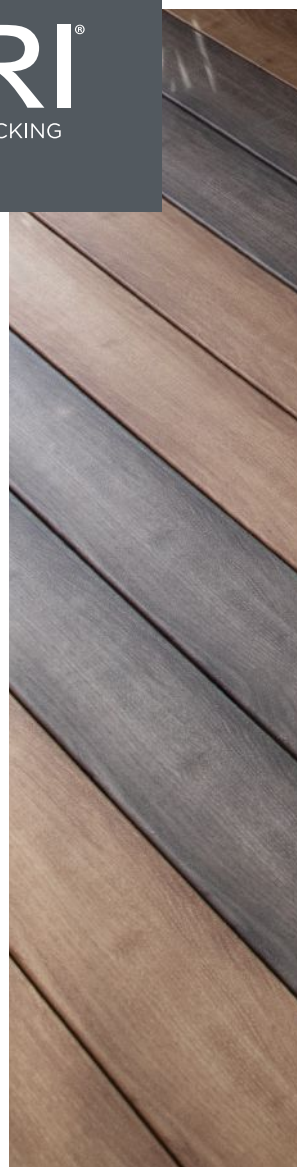

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