

LBM JOURNAL[®]

AUGUST 2026 | \$15 U.S. | LBMJOURNAL.COM

THE OUTDOOR LIVING OPPORTUNITY

BUILDING THE BUSINESS OF
BACKYARD DREAMS

DECKS & DOCKS: FROM LOCAL ROOTS
TO NATIONAL REACH

IS YOUR INSIDE SALES COMPENSATION PLAN
DRIVING SALES? READERS WEIGH IN





LEADING THE PACK

RAILING, DECKING, TRIM,

Wolf Outdoor Living™ is the **Pro channel** source for **railing, decking, trim,** and **exterior finishes.** Trusted products from Keylink Railing, Fortress Railing, CityPost Railing, and Wolf Home Products offer solutions for installations ranging from basic to fully customized.

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IN OUTDOOR LIVING AND EXTERIOR FINISHES

KEYLINK Collection

Known for its **versatility** and **domestic manufacturing**, Keylink offers a wide range of styles, colors, and configurations for design-driven projects. Built from high-quality aluminum with **PCI-4000 certified** powder coating, it delivers lasting durability and visual appeal in demanding outdoor environments.

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Renowned for **speed** and **efficiency**, Fortress Railing features precision-engineered aluminum and e-coated steel **panelized** systems. Offering faster installation without sacrificing durability or aesthetics is a solution that meets the needs of both **commercial** and **residential** jobs.

CITYPOST SIMPLE · AFFORDABLE Collection

CityPost combines premium components with a patented top rail bracket to create a **simple, affordable** cable railing system with flexible options for size, color, and mounting to fit virtually any project. Take out the guesswork with **fixed prices per linear foot** and an easy-to-use quote builder.

WOLF HOME PRODUCTS[®] Collection

Wolf Railing installs easily and provides both design and **budget flexibility**. Our **low-maintenance** PVC railing options will maintain their appeal for the duration. Plus, its strength and durability make it highly desirable for coastal installs.



INSIDE

AUGUST 2026



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LBM JOURNAL VOLUME 24, NO. 8 (ISSN#1930-5516) is published monthly with the exception of the combined November/December issue by Custom Built Publishing, LLC. Copyright 2026 by Custom Built Publishing, LLC, 10880 175th Court West, Ste. 240, Lakeville, MN, 55044, 952.892.7793. All rights reserved. Annual subscription rate: \$48 U.S.; \$60 Canada; and \$120 all other countries. Single copy price \$15 + S&H. Periodicals postage paid at Lakeville, MN, and additional mailing offices. Printed in the USA.

U.S. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to LBM Journal, 10880 175th Court West, Ste. 240, Lakeville, MN, 55044.



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Leading Suppliers Council



OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF



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ON THE COVER: Feeney DesignRail Custom in Black with CableRail infill. 36" Bordeaux Square "Reclaimed Wood" Fire Bowl from American Fyre Designs. TimberTech PRO Legacy Collection decking in Mocha.
PHOTO BY NIC RENTFROW



CONTRIBUTORS



Rick Davis

Back to School | P. 18

Rick Davis is the contributing sales editor for *LBM Journal* and regarded by many as the leading sales trainer and consultant in the LBM industry. He has been the owner of Building Leaders, Inc. for 20 years and trained tens of thousands of salespeople in our industry.

Thea Dudley

Credit Caseload | P. 22

After working for her subcontractor Dad but realizing manual labor wasn't for her, Thea Dudley moved to the power seat, granting credit and collecting payables. With over 35 years of experience, including as a VP of finance, she has worked with manufacturers, dealers, and contractors to improve cashflow. She hosts the "LBM Talks Credit" podcast, LBM webinars, and has written three books on the subject.

Bradley Hartmann

The Handball Coach, the Opera Singer, and the Skin Chicken | P. 20

Bradley Hartmann has written 15 books and hosts both "The Construction Leadership" and "The Craft of LBM Sales" podcasts. He advises LBM dealers, distributors, and manufacturers across the country and trains thousands of commercial and residential construction leaders annually through his executive coaching and consulting, online training programs, custom workshops, and keynote speeches.

Russ Kathrein

Defining the Peacetime General | P. 26

Russ Kathrein is vice president of lumber & building materials at Do it Best, based in Fort Wayne, IN. He is passionate about the art of leadership and the human element of business. He has successfully led operations by first getting the people part correct and aligning the team, then focusing on fundamentals.

John D. Wagner

M&A Starts in the Yard | P. 24

John D. Wagner is a managing director for 1stWEST Mergers & Acquisitions, which has transacted \$1.5 billion+ in deals with a specialty in distribution and LBM sectors. John is the author of 25 books and 2,600+ articles published in several major outlets. His most popular book is "M&A Basics For People in a (BIG) Hurry!"

James Anderson

In Depth: The Outdoor Living Opportunity | P. 44

James Anderson is a career journalist who has served as reporter, editor, and publisher of community newspapers and now serves as editor-in-chief of a national business magazine. His work in trade media focuses on manufacturing, entrepreneurship, and the trends shaping small businesses and specialized industries.

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

ON A BITTERLY COLD WINTER DAY in Aberdeen, SD, a very bored and many years younger version of me sat down with one of my dad's boring business books. As it turned out, the book was anything but boring. In fact, the message from that book—"The Magic of Thinking Big" by David J. Schwartz—forever changed the way that I see the world. It's based on the concept that how we live our life is based on how big we think. "Case history after case history proved that the size of bank accounts, the size of happiness accounts, and the size of one's general satisfaction account is dependent on the *size of one's thinking*," he wrote. "There is magic in thinking big."

For example, beginning on page 40, Managing Editor Wendy Sturges shares the story of Decks & Docks, which began as a single-location supplier of marine construction materials on the Florida coast. Today, in addition to dock materials, the company carries railing, siding, fencing, lumber, hardware, and decking. These early believers in composite decking have 700 employees across 76 locations—with revenues that would place them in the top 20 of the 2025 LBM 100. With the acquisition of six California locations, they're on a mission to build a national brand.



A growing number of LBM dealers who've built a niche as go-to suppliers for decking and railing are thinking big when it comes to The Outdoor Living Opportunity (pp. 44-50). As reported by James Anderson, the market for outdoor living (which includes not only decking and railing, but grills, fire tables, water features, lighting, furniture, pavers, hardscaping, retaining walls, shade structures, fencing, and more) is projected to reach \$36.8 billion within the next year.

A less obvious example of thinking big in this issue comes from *LBM Journal* readers who weighed in on this month's Real Issue by supplying ideas for Solving the Inside Sales Compensation Puzzle (pp. 32-37). Determining how to structure the pay for inside sales pros may not seem big ... but think about it. One dealer is testing "salary plus commission with a margin kicker bonus to see if the behavior drives inside sales to actively seek more work." If it works, that dealer may have found the key to attracting more reps, paying them better, and building a sales culture that scales because everybody benefits.

One thing I love about our LBM community is that it is rich with people who put their big thoughts (and crazy ideas) into action. My big thinking moment was hearing people insist that a new magazine with no funding can't possibly succeed, then going ahead and launching *LBM Journal* anyway.

If this concept speaks to you, share a big thinking moment with me, and you may receive your own copy of "The Magic of Thinking Big".

— Rick Schumacher
Executive Editor & Publisher

HAVE A QUESTION FOR RICK?
RICK@LBMJOURNAL.COM

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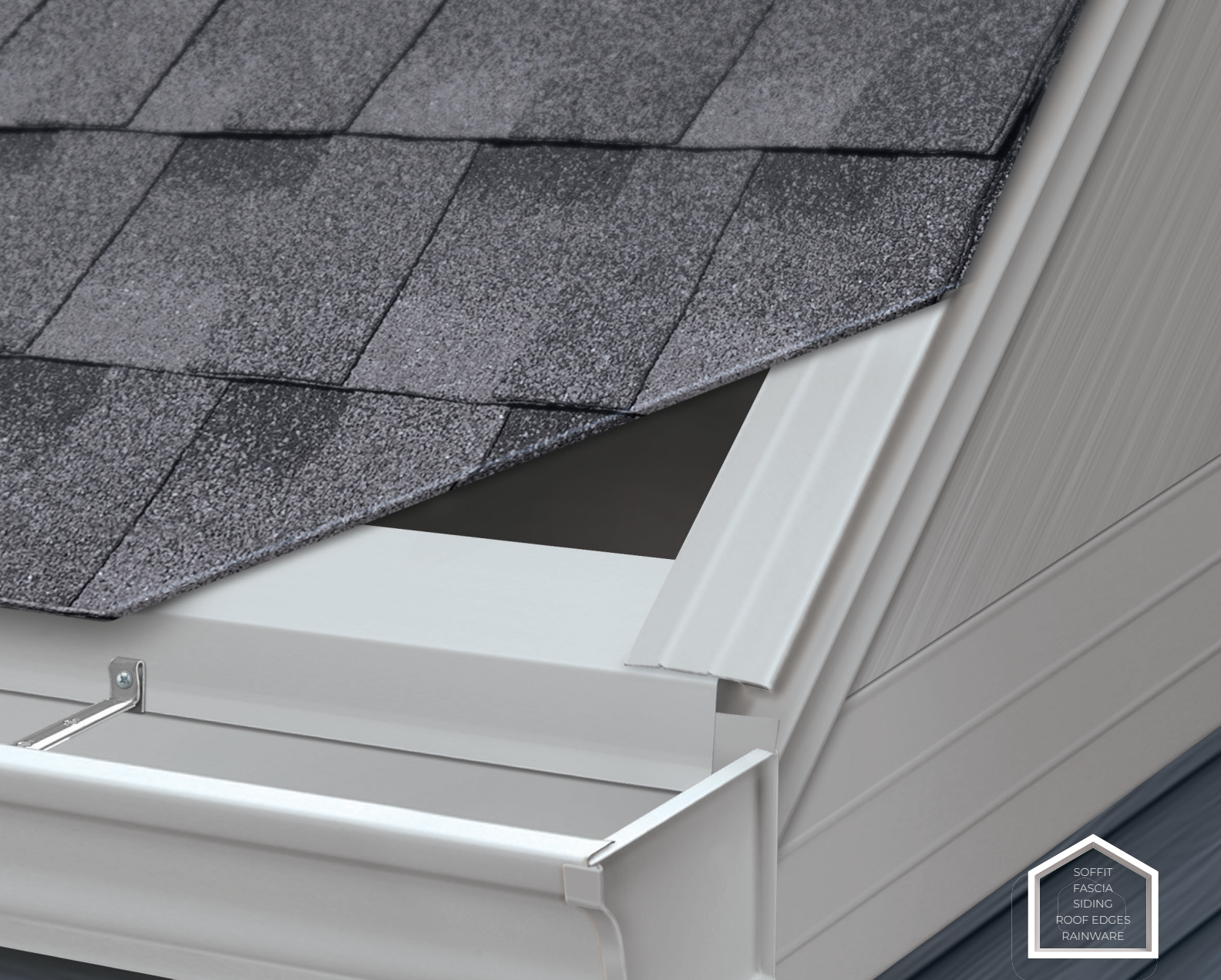
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NABORS HOME CENTER



DREXEL BUILDING SUPPLY



WOODHAVEN DESIGN CENTER

BY THE YARD

Mississippi-based **Nabors Home Center** opened its newest location in Water Valley. This is the fifth location for the company. The expanded site features a full-service lumberyard, a dedicated appliance department, Milwaukee tools, and STIHL outdoor power equipment, along with services like pool water testing and propane refills.

Drexel Building Supply shared the company has donated to nearly 200 college students to help with college expenses over the past 10 years. The scholarships are given to children of employees with three years of service or longer, according to the company.

Hancock Lumber celebrated two significant milestones for its Oxford Components Manufacturing facility—hosting a ceremonial groundbreaking event and hiring Brian Mills as general manager. Once complete, the 44,000-sq.-ft. Oxford, ME facility will feature advanced automation and the latest technology that will support the production of wall panels, pre-cut and labeled framing packages, stair systems, and more.

41 Lumber recently donated more than \$7,000 in DEWALT tools and equipment to schools across Michigan's Upper Peninsula, supporting hands-on learning opportunities for students exploring trades and technical skills. The donations included more than \$2,300 in tools for Chassell Township School, as well as nearly \$4,750 in equipment for Washington Middle School and Calumet High School.

Woodhaven Design Center officially opened the doors to its new showroom and design center in Freehold, NJ. The new 5,000-sq.-ft. showroom is an extensive curated selection of products for kitchens, baths, closets, flooring, windows, doors, decking, stairs, railings, moulding, countertops, tile, and more. The showroom offers customers the ability to coordinate multiple aspects of their projects in one visit, according to the company.

Rex Lumber, a 4th-generation, family-owned lumber manufacturing company, is celebrating 100 years of business. It was founded in 1926 by W. D. McRae in Graceville, FL. Today, the company has four locations in Florida, Mississippi, and Alabama.



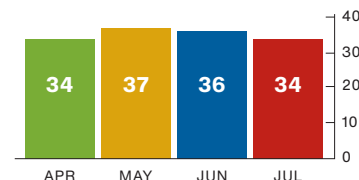
Louisiana-based **Pierre Part Store** is marking a major milestone in the company's history. Since 1911, this hometown destination has been a trusted staple for hardware, lumber, groceries, and friendly service, according to co-op group Do it Best.

Union Pacific is connecting **Builders FirstSource** (BFS) to key markets as the company expands in one of Colorado's fastest-growing regions. Located east of Denver at Rocky Mountain Rail Park in Bennett, CO, BFS' new railserved facility supports the region's continued eastward growth. With Bennett quickly emerging as a hub for new housing and development, the site strengthens BFS' ability to efficiently serve customers across the Colorado Front Range and beyond.

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Builder Sentiment Stays Weak as Affordability Concerns Persist

Economic uncertainty and persistent affordability challenges driven by rising material prices, high land costs, and elevated mortgage rates continue to weigh on builder sentiment. Builder confidence in the market for newly built single-family homes fell two points to 34 in July, down from an upwardly revised reading of 36 in June, according to a recent National Association of Home Builders (NAHB)/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index (HMI). Sentiment has remained below 40 for 15 consecutive months, the longest such stretch since 2012.



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PEOPLE IN LBM



ANDERSON



COHEN

Mead Lumber Company announced that President and CEO **Dave Anderson** will retire at the close of the company's fiscal year on Nov. 30. **Jon Cohen** has been named as his successor and joined Mead Lumber July 1 as president. Anderson will continue to serve as CEO through the transition, with Cohen assuming the role of president and CEO on Dec. 1. Upon his retirement, Anderson will continue to serve on the Mead Lumber Board of Directors.



MURPHY



THOMPSON

HPM Building Supply announced a planned leadership transition with **Adrian Murphy** moving from vice president of manufacturing to senior advisor, lumber and vendor strategy, and **Colin Thompson** promoted to vice president of manufacturing and construction. This transition coincides with HPM's preparations to open a state-of-the-art wood-treating facility in Washington state this fall.

Bliffert Lumber announced the promotion of **Alyssa Richter** to commercial operations manager. Since joining Bliffert in 2019, Richter has taken an approach rooted in curiosity and continuous improvement, according to the company.



Outdoor Living Supply announced the appointment of **John Merritt** as CEO, effective July 13. Merritt succeeds founder Brian Price, who will transition from CEO to board chair. He will continue supporting the company's long-term strategy, leadership team.



Pennsylvania Lumbermens Mutual Insurance Company (PLM) announced that **Courtney Flanagan** has joined the organization as vice president of claims. Flanagan will oversee the company's claims operations and strategy and will focus on advancing performance, supporting team development and expert claims service.



CO-OP & BUYER'S GROUPS

Randy Rusk, a longtime leader at **Do it Best** and **True Value**, announced his retirement after more than 30 years of service. He was most recently appointed director of communications for True Value following Do it Best's acquisition in 2024. Prior to that, he served as executive director for the Do it Best Foundation and as communications director.



Do it Best Group announced the company's strategic decision to align the headquarters of **Do it Best** and **True Value** in Fort Wayne, IN. Do it Best Group is the anchor tenant for the Electric Works innovation district, one of Fort Wayne's most visible revitalization efforts. From that same campus, Do it Best Group will lead the next chapter of True Value, one of the most recognized brands in independent home improvement. This next phase aligns both headquarters in one geographic location, integrating leadership and operations and creating greater opportunities for innovation, efficiency, stability, and growth.

LMC announced the promotion of **Deirdre Garland** to vice president of marketing. Garland, who has been with LMC since 2017, most recently led the company's kitchen and bath business, advancing marketing strategy, strengthening member engagement, and enhancing supplier partnerships.



In Memoriam

Idaho-based **Mountain West Building Supply** announced employee

Austin Botkin died June 16. Botkin was 20 years old. His grandfather, Ed Botkin, was the founder of Mountain West Building Supply.



Alden J. Robbins, Robbins Lumber co-owner and vice president of sales, died July 2 from injuries sustained in a fire and explosion at the company's Searsmont, ME facility on May 15, according to a statement from the Robbins family.



Dawson Taylor, an industry veteran and longtime leader of **Taylor's Do it Centers**, died July 4 at age 103, according to an announcement from the company. Over the years, Dawson's three sons and five grandchildren joined him in the business, helping grow it into today's Taylor's Do it Centers and Pleasants Hardware.





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INDUSTRY UPDATES

Simpson Strong-Tie has donated \$25,000 to the American Red Cross in support of relief efforts following the devastating earthquakes in Venezuela on June 24. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has deployed assistance in the affected areas, including 326 volunteers and 62 staff members from the Venezuelan Red Cross. Along with the initial donation, Simpson Strong-Tie is matching employee donations up to a total of \$5,000 per year.

Culpeper Wood Preservers has completed a multi-phase capital upgrade at its Elizabeth City, NC treating facility and returned the plant to full operation. The location, which was taken offline earlier this year as part of a planned upgrade program, is now producing CCA (chromated copper arsenate) and CA-C (copper azole) marine-treated lumber.

Deckorators announced the opening of its Lackawanna, NY, production facility. This move adds 50 new full-time jobs and doubles production capacity for the brand's decking products made with proprietary Surestone technology. Deckorators invested more than \$77 million into the facility, a 30-acre, 253,310-sq.-ft. plant. The decking brand updated an existing 168,310-sq.-ft. manufacturing building and built a 19,000-sq.-ft. addition for added capacity. An 85,000-sq.-ft. on-site warehouse is held for future growth.

Bradley Hartmann & Co. and **SalesJack** announced a collaboration that makes SalesJack the analytics engine behind Bradley Hartmann & Company's Sales Performance Analytics group (SPA). SalesJack will automate the data extraction and transformation process, and provide new, modern dashboards for SPA members.

LP Building Solutions broke ground on a new LP SmartSide ExpertFinish Trim & Siding manufacturing facility in North Branch, MN. The approximately 350,000-sq.-ft. facility will be built on a recently-acquired 120-acre site. It is expected to create 125 jobs at full capacity and is slated to begin production in the first quarter of 2028.

DISTRIBUTION NEWS

Trex Company has announced the realignment of its North American distribution network. **Specialty Building Products (SBP)** will be Trex's sole national distributor of decking and railing products across North America. In addition to SBP covering national distribution, Trex will also further expand its regional distribution footprint with **WS Building Materials** (formerly Snaveley, Weekes, and Logan); **Coastal Forest Products** in New England; and **BlueLinx** in the South Central region.

TOUGH CALL SOLUTIONS

JUNE 2026 ISSUE SURVEY RESULTS FROM LBMJOURNAL.COM AND LINKEDIN.

FIGHTING THE MOVE-ON MENTALITY

Your reputation as a great place to work has helped you attract young pros. However, hiring them isn't your problem. Retaining them is. You keep watching promising young employees leave right around the two- or three-year mark. Here's how readers responded:

Adapt. **50%**
Instead of counting on retention, focus on stronger incentives to stay like retention bonuses, enhanced benefits, and clear timelines for advancement.

Stay the course. **33%**
Continue making your company a great place to work, with a strong culture and employee development, and know that not everyone will stay.

Seek experience. **14%**
Since the turnover you're experiencing is primarily among young talent, try to attract more seasoned pros who seek stability and a great place to work.

Accept it. **3%**
Members of today's generation often view long-term careers differently. Accept this as both a reality and a challenge.



MERGERS + ACQUISITIONS

Ogden & Adams Building Solutions announced it will acquire the assets of **Maquoketa Lumber Company** based in Maquoketa, IA and **Bellevue Lumber** based in Bellevue, IA. The lumber companies specialize in lumber packages, millwork, siding, roofing, windows and doors. Ogden & Adams plans to retain all staff and to continue operations under its current flagship name Ogden & Adams Building Solutions at the current Maquoketa Lumber and Bellevue Lumber facilities.

QXO, Inc. and **TopBuild Corp.** announced that stockholders of both companies overwhelmingly approved all proposals required for QXO to complete its acquisition of TopBuild at the companies' respective special meetings held June 29. On July 1, QXO announced the transaction had been completed.

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LBM TALKS



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INDUSTRY EVENTS

SEP 14-16

2026 WMA MILLWORK CONVENTION & TRADESHOW
Orlando, FL | worldmillworkalliance.com

SEP 14-18

BCMC 2026
Columbus, OH | bcmcshow.com

SEP 15-17

LMC LEADERSHIP SUMMIT
Seattle, WA | lmc.net

SEP 23-25

CONSTRUCTION SUPPLIERS ASSOCIATION 2026 CONFERENCE & TRADESHOW
St. Simons Island, GA | gocsa.com

SEP 25-28

DO IT BEST & TRUE VALUE FALL MARKET
Indianapolis, IN | doitbestonline.com

OCT 14-16

2026 LBM STRATEGIES CONFERENCE
Milwaukee, WI | lbmstrategies.com

OCT 28-30

LMC EXPO 2026
Philadelphia, PA | lmc.net

NOV 4-6

NAWLA TRADERS MARKET
Anaheim, CA | nawla.org

NOV 9-11

LBM ADVANTAGE FALL PLANNING CONFERENCE
Everett, MA | lbmadvantage.com

NOV 17-19

DECK EXPO
New Orleans, LA | deckexpo.com

2027

JAN 19-20

BLD BizCon North
Brooklyn Park, MN | bldconnection.org

FEB 1-2

BLD BIZCON SOUTH
Altoona, IA | bldconnection.org

FEB 2-4

2027 NAHB INTERNATIONAL BUILDERS SHOW
Las Vegas, NV | buildersshow.com

FEB 25-27

ORGILL DEALER MARKET
Orlando, FL | orgill.com

MAR 5-7

DO IT BEST & TRUE VALUE SPRING MARKET
Orlando, FL | doitbestonline.com

MAR 8-10

LBM ADVANTAGE ANNUAL BUYING SHOW
Grapevine, TX | lbmadvantage.com

MAR 23-25

LMC ANNUAL 2027
Tampa, FL | lmc.net

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CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY #8

A STORY ABOUT RESILIENCE TO REBUILD

There's one thing we've learned throughout our 50 years serving communities in the Rio Grande Valley: growth doesn't always come easy. But the path to growth often reveals what a business is made of. At Matt's Building Materials, we've experienced both steady expansion and unexpected challenges, and each has helped shape who we are today.

After losing a store to fire in 2022, we made the decision to rebuild not just quickly, but thoughtfully. That process pushed us to evaluate every aspect of our operation from store layout to merchandising to customer experience. The result has been meaningful progress, a renewed commitment to serving our communities, and increases across ticket size, sales, profitability and overall performance.

A big part of our ability to be agile and respond to whatever has come our way is due to our ongoing relationship with Orgill. Following the fire at our Pharr, Texas location, Orgill's programs and planning support gave us a strong framework to rebuild and improve while still allowing us to tailor decisions to our market's needs. Whether it's merchandising strategies or promotional programs, Orgill's expert guidance and input has helped us move forward with confidence.

We've also benefited from strong support at the local level. Our sales representative has been a consistent resource, helping us identify opportunities, stay organized, and execute effectively.

Looking ahead, we're focused on building on that momentum, continuing to improve our operations, invest in our people, and strengthen the role we play in our community. Every step forward is a step toward something stronger than before.

Isaac D. Smith

Co-Owner | Matt's Building Materials | Rio Grande Valley

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LBM STRATEGIES

2026 CONFERENCE



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Shane Soule

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WELCOME NIGHT RECEPTION

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15

KICK-OFF KEYNOTE:

An Unusual Approach to Develop Uncommonly Effective Leaders

Levi Smith

Building Top Performers: A Blueprint to Develop the Next Generation of Sales Reps

Dan Efenecy

Built to Grow: How Hancock Lumber Turned Components into a Growth Engine

Mark Hopkins

The Long Game: How Diversification Builds a Business That Lasts

Chad Amble

What the Market Is Telling You: Research-Backed Strategies to Win Pros in 2027

Beth PopNikolov | Grant Farnsworth

PANEL DISCUSSION:

Attracting Next Gen Pros: 40 Under 40

Moderator: Sadie Hammond Berube

Josh Beach | Bryan Bardenett | Ashley Elliott

Ethan Stahl | Tania Swanson

M&A Insights: The Metrics that Drive LBM Company Value

John D. Wagner | Ted Rieple

DEALER TO DEALER: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

Recruiting Next Gen Pros led by Julie & Brendan Hagman

Mergers & Acquisitions led by John Wagner & Ted Rieple

Real World AI led by Shane Soule

Leadership in Practice led by Russ Kathrein

Succession Planning led by Sam Brownell

UNWIND, PLAY & CONNECT:

A NIGHT OUT AT 3RD ST. MARKET HALL

The learning's done—now it's time to relax. Join fellow attendees for a private evening where great food, drinks, and friendly competition await.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16

(Programming ends at 10:30 am)

KEYNOTE:

Old Guard & Young Guns: A Practical Framework for Sales Succession

Bradley Hartmann

PANEL DISCUSSION:

Unfiltered: What Builders Really Need from Their Dealer Partners

Moderator: Bradley Hartmann

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BY RICK DAVIS

IT'S AUGUST and we all remember the anticipation and excitement that came each August as we prepared for the new school year ahead. Perhaps your mom or dad took you shopping for new clothes or supplies. Maybe you were just excited about having a fresh start with a new scorecard. Or maybe you were one of those kids who was most excited about the new lessons ahead and the chance to build on everything you learned in the previous grade.

That's what the new school year always promised: new ideas that built upon the lessons of the year before. Addition and subtraction built the foundation for multiplication and division. Then you would advance to algebra and eventually geometry. So as the new school year begins, it's always worth asking what skills you can build on from your past, even as an adult.

For many salespeople, a decades-long career often begins with the salesperson repeating the first year or two of experience 20 times. For the most successful, however, life-long learning is a passion that mirrors the learning of childhood. At 10 years, the learning salesperson is significantly more skilled than when they launched a career. At 20 and 30, the learning salesperson is a Jedi warrior with skills that a beginner can't possibly match.

Looking back on my own career, I can think of many lessons I gleaned that built a skill set which has continually evolved over many decades. Only recently did I consider that lessons I learned in my youth set the stage for long-term sales success. Here are a few:

BACK TO SCHOOL

1. Get the First Appointment

More than 40 years ago, I had been struggling as a young sales upstart. Then I called a prospect and heard him describe the fascinating way his organization built preassembled rooms in a factory and shipped them out to the field. They were the manufacturers for a hotel chain called Knights Inn as well as multifamily developers.

I'll never forget saying, "Wow! You have an amazing company! I think that I work for one too. I'm not sure we should do business, but it seems like we should at least meet to 'see if we're a fit.'" His friendly response and agreement taught me a lesson and phrasing that I have used literally thousands of times in my career with great success.

2. Tune in to the Client's Favorite Subject

Yes, you're probably reading this and thinking that everyone knows this, but do they? Most salespeople strive to first understand what products a builder buys, from whom, how much, and how often. This is not tuning in to the buyer; it's tuning in to selfish motivations to make a sale.

When I started working with architects and high-end custom home builders, it became necessary for me to understand how they were interacting with their homeowner clients. More importantly, I had to become acutely aware of unique scheduling challenges, education of their staff, code requirements, and even the way they communicated with the homeowner to fulfill expectations. Instead of pushing a product to them, I became part of their team selling to the end buyer. Listen to understand your customers' marketing and operational challenges before learning about their product preferences and you'll be an asset they consider indispensable to their success.

3. Closing is Incremental

I read the books and listened to all the audios of my sales heroes—e.g., Tom Hopkins, Zig Ziglar, Earl Nightengale. These legends all shared the same philosophy about closing deals and specific closing techniques. It dawned on me during a job interview that these approaches do not work for business-to-business salespeople.

It became crystal clear to me when I was asked, in a job interview, to describe how I close a sale. I was about to spit out the expect high-powered, confident answer, "I ask for the order!" But I paused and reflected. I told my future employer that closing is a series of little victories. Getting the first appointment? Victory. Understanding your buyer's challenges? Victory. Finding reasons for succeeding follow-up meetings? All victories! "By the time I get the first order," I concluded, "it's because I've built a lot of relationship momentum that makes the close a simple administrative process."

So, to honor the start of a new school year, first ask yourself if you agree with these ideas. If so, put them to use. More importantly, like a student always building on past knowledge, keep your eyes, ears, and mind wide open for the new learning moments that will help you grow constantly in your career.

Rick Davis is the Sales Education Leader for ABC Supply and the President of Building Leaders, Inc. You can buy his books or learn more about his online sales training platform at buildingleaders.com.

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MIDWEST

BY BRADLEY HARTMANN

THE HANDBALL COACH, THE OPERA SINGER, AND THE SKIN CHICKEN

THREE SUMMERS AGO, my family visited Barcelona, Spain. As proper tourists, we toured Camp Nou, FC Barcelona's (FCB) stadium, museum, and gift shop. I left with a T-shirt and two books about the man who spent two decades with the club and made it legendary. No, not Lionel Messi. It was a Dutchman, Johan Cruyff (*pronounced KROIF*).

If you're looking for an American sporting icon who serves as a reasonable comp to Cruyff, well, there isn't one. The closest you can get is this: Imagine a floppy-haired, chain-smoking Baby Boomer mashup of Larry Bird, Vince Lombardi, and Steve Jobs. He had Bird's genius as a player, Lombardi's influence as a coach, and Jobs' imagination and ego to rethink how the game was played.

Journalist Simon Kuper described him as "the Freud or Gaudí of the game, the most interesting, original, and infuriating man in football's history." Three stories illustrate how Cruyff was willing to rethink every football convention and turn his curiosity into a competitive advantage.

Hunting With the Handball Coach

FCB is best known for its soccer teams, but it also has teams who compete in basketball, volleyball, rugby, and even handball. Most soccer coaches viewed these other sports as a distraction from the main attraction. Not Cruyff. He actively sought out other Barça coaches, including the handball coach, hunting for new ideas. Cruyff recognized that innovation wouldn't come from staring at his own team or even the competition.

Same idea applies to us. While touring another lumberyard is never a bad idea, it might be more beneficial to talk to the chief revenue officer of the Texas Rangers or visit a robotics startup serving Amazon distribution centers. These are two examples from the annual conference of our LBM Sales Analytics roundtable. The solution you've been hunting for is out there; it's probably just in a different industry.

Bradley Hartmann was raised in a lumberyard, worked in area purchasing at PulteGroup, and is passionate about helping LBM sales teams make it easy for builders to buy. You can email him at bradley@bradleyhartmannandco.com.

Butchering the Language

Cruyff understood the need for clear communication. He worked hard to become multilingual. Along with Dutch, Cruyff spoke English, German, Spanish, and Catalán.

In one press conference, Cruyff tried to articulate the "goosebumps" he felt during the game. Hunting for the idiom *piel de gallina*, he got close: *gallina de piel*. Skin chicken.

Every reporter laughed as they understood what the Dutchman meant. Cruyff laughed too. This minor linguistic mistake became part of his legacy. That T-shirt I bought? It's a Cruyff skin chicken tee.

How is this relevant to us? One of the largest growth opportunities in LBM is the Hispanic demographic. Yet too many organizations still view Spanish speakers as laborers instead of business owners, "runners" instead of customers.

The fifth-generation Fruman brothers leading National Lumber in Baltimore are an example worth studying. Spend a few minutes on their social media channels and you'll see a company actively engaging with Hispanic customers. Like Cruyff, they care enough to try.

Hiring an Opera Singer

Cruyff was always looking for an edge, and he believed elite performance could come from unexpected places. While coaching Ajax (*AH-yahks*) in Amsterdam, Cruyff brought in an opera singer to teach his players how to breathe. His thinking was simple: If I investigate enough unlikely places, I'll probably uncover some novel ideas.

The Final Lesson

No matter how successful we become, we all have blind spots and contradictions. But Cruyff's legacy is built on curiosity. When other coaches studied soccer, Cruyff studied handball. When others hired translators, Cruyff learned new languages. When others invested in the latest cardio fad, Cruyff hired an opera singer.

Your next breakthrough probably isn't hiding in another lumberyard. It's more likely waiting in a baseball stadium, a robotics warehouse, or a conversation with a customer who sees the world differently than you do. Curiosity won't solve every problem. But it remains one of the few competitive advantages that costs nothing and can change everything. Just ask the handball coach, the opera singer, or the skin chicken. Different stories, same lesson. Keep hunting.

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BRADLEY HARTMANN, LBM Journal's *The Sport of Selling* columnist, former Division I Quarterback, and CEO of Bradley Hartmann & Co., grew up in a lumber yard and apprenticed as a carpenter before building more than 1,000 homes with PulteGroup. Hartmann hosts *The Craft of LBM Sales* and *The Construction Leadership Podcast*, is the author of 15 books, and teaches construction leadership at the master's level at University of Oklahoma.

Are you on track to achieve your goals this year?
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DEVELOPING CONSTRUCTION LEADERS SINCE 2011

BY THEA DUDLEY

Hi Thea,
How much should one credit manager be able to handle? I am the owner/operator of a three-location building materials company. At what point do I need to get the credit person some help, or does my credit manager need to up their game?

— Realistic or Duped

CREDIT CASELOAD

Dear Realistic,

This is a frequent leadership “ask.” Every owner, president, or CFO thinks there’s a magic number and every credit manager knows the real answer is, “it depends, but also stop giving me 14 other jobs while you’re asking.”

While there is no actual industry standard for how many A/R one credit manager can handle, are we still pretending that one person can manage millions in receivables, chase lien rights, babysit sales, fight with general contractors, process credit apps, fix billing errors, research tech for the department, learn AI, and play therapist—all before lunch?

In case I wasn’t clear: NO. To get an answer that works for your company, you must understand there’s a complexity about the role, not just the dollar volume. The illusion that one person can handle \$20 million in A/R and all the items above, plus compliance and any other random bits that come along is a fantasy. It’s no wonder credit people always look like they have resting bulldog face and a general disdain for anyone in their doorway.

A/R isn’t just a number—it’s a workload shaped by risk, systems, processes, and how much chaos the company tolerates. Is the person a true credit manager, meaning it’s their full-time job? Or are they credit manager-plus? A little payroll, accounts payable, human resources, truck maintenance scheduler, and general catch-all for anything

that may fall under the word “office.” If your credit person is on the timeshare program, something is going to suffer. Usually, it’s your A/R.

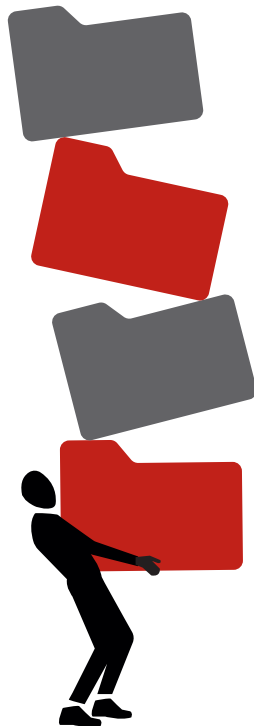
The number of credit people you need to support a healthy A/R program varies by company. Anyone that tells you they have a magic, all-in-one answer is usually the blowhard who hasn’t done the job EVER or is so detached from it they have no idea what’s up. They just want to sound smart. Noted.

You can get to the answer by assessing your company, its processes, and the skill of the person you have in the role. What business segments make up your customer base? Large general contractors, custom builders, remodelers, roofers, insulation, drywall, tract builders, commercial jobs—large and small. Do you sell to dealers as well? Supplement the big box guys? Each of those categories comes with approval and collection nuances that most people aren’t aware of.

Example: Many of the large contractors or tract builders have adopted portals that require someone in your office to log in, input your invoice, and track payments there. Someone must learn the software and follow up. Or you don’t get paid. They don’t care about your invoice number, they’re purchase order-driven. Good luck to you if you don’t have that on the invoice. Shouldn’t this fall under “billing issues?” Sure, but to quote a credit manager peer, “We’re the diaper of the company. All the poop lands here.” Any no-pay, short-pay disputes stay on that A/R until someone cleans it up. And guess who is looking at that non-stop?

Sit down with your CM and have an honest, no holds barred discussion. Understand your A/R processes in their current state. Not best practices, not what you think it is, but as it is TODAY. That’s how you define the “magic” number for your company.

When it comes to your cash flow, remember that opinions don’t define reality.



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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BY JOHN D. WAGNER

M&A STARTS IN THE YARD

A FEW YEARS AGO, we were on a site visit with a prospective acquirer for one of our clients when—despite alerting everyone to tighten things up for the visit—our client’s forklift drove by with a flat tire. If that weren’t enough, there was an additional passenger hanging off the back. The acquirer also pointed out that workers in the millwork shop had no ear or eye protection.

That prospect never even made an offer to acquire the company. And who could blame them?

When an acquirer is deciding to submit a letter of intent for your company, of course they have looked over the financial performance. But there is always a site visit before they “green light” the acquisition. It should come as no surprise that a clean, safe yard is viewed as a sign, a metaphor, for how the overall company is run.

Dunnage and banding lying around is a bad sign, as are overflowing dumpsters, shrink wrap pinned against the fence by the wind, beat-up trucks, workers lacking safety gear, and dirty restrooms.

And that’s to say nothing of the demeanor of the crew, where a friendly wave to the visitors goes a long way in saying that everyone is treated well. From an acquirer’s point of view, your yard is a “living audit” of risk, discipline, and attitude.

Where Else Does M&A Start in the Yard?

Excess OPEX: Recall that a single dollar saved in operating expenses is a dollar credited to EBITDA, and that EBITDA dollars are multiplied in an acquisition. (A single extra EBITDA dollar can easily be \$5, \$6, or \$7 in company valuation. Add zeros to all figures.) If there is wasteful OPEX spending, your value can be affected negatively. Sweep through your OPEX line items and see what expenses can be eliminated. Classic examples are chronic overtime and idle labor; underused or duplicative rolling stock/equipment; inefficient delivery routing and “free” delivery promises; excess or underutilized space; and unnecessary third-party yard services.

Inventory accuracy: Sloppy counts, mistagged units, and ghost inventory will lead to a difference or “delta” between what you have on the ground and what’s in your ERP system. All acquirers do a pre-close inventory count, so they get an opening balance sheet. If the difference between the hard count and the ERP system is a negative number, exceeding 1.5% of your inventory value, your inventory system might be suspect to deeper examination, and a potentially delayed closing. If there is *more* inventory in the yard than in your ERP system, you don’t automatically get a check for the extra, though it’s negotiable. The acquirer will (quite rightly) point out that this is the inventory level—whether it was in your ERP or not—that drove the EBITDA on which they are valuing the business.

Safety record: Accidents are expensive, and a record of accidents will give an acquirer pause. They are afraid of future OSHA problems, higher insurance costs, and potential litigation if you can’t show you operate with a culture of safety.

Load accuracy and on-time dispatch: Wrong or late deliveries cause chargebacks, lost customers, and weaker forward revenue, which are a direct hit to valuation.

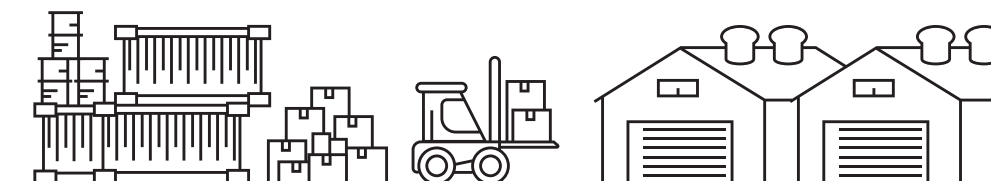
All of these items cited above are areas of concern that will force an acquirer to ask, “Are reported margins real and repeatable? How much risk is hidden in the operation?”

If your yard practices protect products and ensure accurate counts, acquirers gain confidence that your gross profit is solid—and they are more willing to pay a full, or even premium, multiple of EBITDA in their offer.

When the yard is tight, well-labeled, safe, and professional, acquirers see less operational and legal risk, while you, the seller, will have to offer fewer “reps and warranties.” And the buyer will minimize escrows, and earn-outs can be avoided.

A disciplined yard makes a deal easier to finance, easier to close, and easier to integrate, and that ease translates directly into dollars wired at closing. So yes, it all starts in the yard.

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



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BY RUSS KATHREIN

A FEW MONTHS AGO I wrote about George McClellan and Ulysses S. Grant. The idea was simple: the same person who builds an army, or a company, can be completely wrong for the moment that requires him to actually use it. That column generated a lot of conversation, which told me the concept landed somewhere real.

But I left something out. I lumped all peacetime generals into one bucket. That was too simple. The McClellan example was just one kind of peacetime general. There are others. And knowing which type you are dealing with matters, because how you help them, reposition them, or replace them depends on the answer.

DEFINING THE PEACETIME GENERAL

The Optimizer

This one does not freeze. She moves constantly, improving processes, tightening margins, and finding efficiencies. In a stable environment, she looks exceptional.

The issue is that optimization is not strategy. It assumes the current model is sound and that refining it is the highest use of the organization's energy. When the market changes underneath you, that assumption breaks. The Optimizer keeps sharpening a saw that is cutting in the wrong direction. Her instinct in a downturn is to cut and streamline, which is correct to a point. What she cannot do is reimagine. The answer to every challenge is a better version of what the organization is already doing.

The Consensus Keeper

This one is the trickiest to spot, because she looks like a strong leader in almost every way. She builds trust across teams, communicates well, and makes sure everyone has a voice before a decision gets made. In a growing, stable operation, she is outstanding.

The problem is that when speed is required, consensus is a luxury. There are moments in any organization where a decision has to be made with incomplete information, and waiting for everyone to be comfortable is the same thing as deciding not to move. If you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice.

The Builder Who Can't Deploy

This is the person who can build a team or organization, but freezes when the moment comes to actually use it. More data. More time. One more study. Paralysis by analysis is his fallback tactic. He feels safe by not committing, when in fact that inaction is a decision that takes risk without any control of the outcome.

I worked with a peer who would never say no. He would just ask for more data, hoping the decision would go away or get made on its own. When the team is in a crisis, the last thing they need is data they are never going to act on.

The Pleaser

This person wants to make everyone happy. He agrees with most everything and deploys whatever orders his boss gives him. No pushback. No analysis. Just execution. In calm times, a leader can mistake this person for a trusted advisor, because he always agrees with you. The danger comes when things go wrong and he points back at you: he was just doing what you told him to do.

Pleasers rise during extended calm. They don't take risks, but none are required. They flatter their bosses and get promoted as a reward. They do not become exposed until a crisis arrives that requires someone willing to make hard calls and live with the outcome.

What to Do With This

With the exception of the last example, none of these people are failures. They are leaders who succeeded in conditions that rewarded what they do well. The failure belongs to whoever promoted them into a moment that required something different without asking the question first.

The question you have to ask, honestly, about every person in a leadership role and about yourself: what kind of moment are we in right now, and what does that moment actually require? Not what did it require last year. Not what the job description says. What does this moment, the one right in front of you, demand of the person in that seat?

Sometimes the person you have is exactly right. Sometimes they need a different structure around them. And sometimes the harder truth—the one no one wants to say—is that the leader who got you here isn't the leader who will get you through what's coming.

Russ Kathrein is the Vice President of Lumber & Building Materials at Do it Best based in Fort Wayne, Indiana.



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Allyson Horst, vice president of marketing at Wolf Outdoor Living/PrimeSource Building Products, is a growth-focused marketing executive with more than 20 years of experience building brands, leading business transformation, and driving commercial growth across the building products and consumer goods industries.



The Wolf Outdoor Living brand debuted earlier this year with PrimeSource Building Products—how is this partnership beneficial for LBM dealers?

The launch of Wolf Outdoor Living gives LBM dealers access to a comprehensive outdoor living portfolio from a single, trusted source. By bringing together established brands including Wolf Home Products, Keylink, Fortress Railing, and CityPost under one umbrella, dealers can simplify sourcing, expand their product offerings, and better serve contractors and homeowners with solutions for virtually every style and setting. The Wolf Outdoor Living brand is backed by PrimeSource's national distribution network and direct fulfillment capabilities, helping dealers improve efficiency, inventory access, and overall customer support. As our brand and portfolio grows, dealers will have access to more industry education, merchandising, and innovation.

What trends are builders and homeowners looking for in outdoor living product lines?

Builders and homeowners continue to seek outdoor living products that blend performance, aesthetics, and value. Demand is growing for complete outdoor environments that extend usable living space from the indoors to outside, while meeting evolving building requirements and increasingly extreme weather conditions. Homeowners want on-trend, low-maintenance decking, railing, and exterior finishes that complement a variety of architectural styles, while pros are looking for dependable systems that are easy to install and/or are easily customizable. The Wolf Outdoor Living portfolio meets these needs with a broad range of railing and decking collections and design options, along with solutions built for today's lifestyles and tomorrow's building demands.

What's new from the brand this year?

The biggest news is the debut of the Wolf Outdoor Living brand itself, which unifies multiple leading outdoor living product lines into one pro-focused platform. In addition to the most expansive metal railing portfolio in the market, the company launched Wolf Haven Decking™ at the start of the new year. Haven Decking is a high-performance PVC board that combines the beauty of real wood texture with rich, authentic color options. Designed to deliver the benefits of premium PVC at a composite decking price point, Wolf Haven Decking offers lightweight yet durable scalloped boards that can be installed 16 inches on center. For faster, cleaner installation, the grooved boards are compatible with Grip-Rite® Ninja Hidden Deck Clips, making it easy for pros to install attractive, long-lasting outdoor living projects.

What educational resources are available for dealers that might be new to the brand?

Dealers new to our portfolio can work directly with local Wolf Outdoor Living and PrimeSource sales representatives to learn about product offerings, specification options, and merchandising opportunities. Because the portfolio is now unified under one brand, dealers can more easily navigate the complete offering and identify opportunities to grow their outdoor living business. Dealers can also promote and partner in the Wolf PRO training program. Wolf PRO contractors are fully trained and certified to deliver superior service from project start to project completion. Wolf PRO's are trained on product specifications, care and maintenance, proper storage and handling, professional tips, and best practices. After certification the PRO will receive an extended labor warranty and cash back rewards, building loyalty for the contractor and dealer alike.

Anything exciting coming in the near future from Wolf Outdoor Living?

We are positioned for continued growth in the outdoor living category following a series of strategic acquisitions and the consolidation of our product portfolio. The company will continue to innovate in railing, decking, trim, and exterior finishes, along with lighting accessories, delivering complete outdoor environments for contractors and homeowners. Over the next year, expansion of the full portfolio will make stocking options more widely accessible. With thousands of SKUs, domestic manufacturing capabilities, and a commitment to the pro, dealers can expect continued investment in solutions that support both current market demands and future building requirements. ■

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BY LBM JOURNAL READERS



This month's Real Issue comes from a dealer wrestling with how to structure compensation for inside salespeople in a way that motivates them to actively sell—not just process orders.



What insights would you share with the LBM dealer who posed this question: “We recently shifted to a more graduated compensation structure for our outside sales reps to address underperformance and create clearer incentives for growth. At the same time, we’re struggling with how to properly structure compensation for our inside sales team. The current setup doesn’t seem to be driving the behaviors or performance we want—particularly around proactive selling, follow-up, and supporting outside reps effectively. For those of you running both outside and inside sales teams: How are you structuring comp differently between outside and inside roles? Are inside reps on commission, bonus, or strictly salary? How do you handle shared accounts or overlap (e.g., inside support on outside-driven jobs)? What behaviors or metrics are you tying compensation to for inside sales? Have you found a structure that actually drives inside reps to sell vs. just process orders? We’re trying to avoid creating conflict between roles while still holding both accountable for growth and margin.”

TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OF THE TOP ANSWERS FROM THIS MONTH’S SURVEY.

Responses from lumberyards, full-line building material dealers, and specialty dealers/distributors:

“Our support staff receives a salary and then a portion of the outside sales reps’ commission that they help on, and a higher commission on the walk-in or small customers they sell to.”

“We don’t have an outside sales force, but regarding the inside sales department: We look at sales performance metrics but there are clearcut winners. We also look at what other contributions they have or are they just stagnant order takers? I am interested in the answers you receive.”

“Inside sales makes a percentage of their sales team’s net profit.”

“When inside sales puts in an outside sales order, they get a small percentage of regular commission and the outside rep gets their full commission.”

“We structure our outside sales and inside reps’ compensation completely differently. Our outside staff are compensated on a commission-only basis. The inside team is a combination of wages and commission for personal accounts as well as a joint-performance team commission. Our outside reps have their own dedicated support staff separate from the inside sales team, but the inside team is expected to help ALL customers regardless of what sales rep (inside, outside, or ‘house account’) the account is assigned to.”

“All of our salespeople (inside, outside, door, window, and building materials) are paid on their gross profit generated. The inside salespeople have a guaranteed salary plus commission. The outside salespeople have a draw against their commissions but with no guarantees. The door and window salespeople are similar to the inside salespeople and the building material salespeople are similar to the outside salespeople. We split commissions on shared accounts.”

“This quarter we started a 2% commission on net profit per order. Our only rules are there must be at least a 10% margin and the invoice must be paid within 120 days to receive the commission. We wanted our associates to get more motivated and active in earning the business of new customers and the trust of regulars who all seemed to overwhelm our two most popular reps. It’s worked well so far with no conflict. Our best reps aren’t being bogged down in every small order and still earn a good commission from handling the bigger orders. It’s also motivating our other reps to be more helpful and capitalize on every opportunity.”

“Our inside sales reps are on a compensation plan that includes a base salary plus commission. Commission is based on sales and gross margin growth targets.”

“Our inside sales support for the outside reps get a hourly pay and commission on number of orders input for the team. The commission is 1% of gross profit and they are also graded on timeliness and accuracy. The front counter gets paid hourly and are similarly set up as inside support roles. The commission is a percentage of gross profit individually and a group bonus that is quarterly and based on hitting a certain amount of total volume. This part helps spread the load between people. The total volume is loosely based on last year’s total dollar volume of walk-ins during the quarter. We look at weather and other variables.”

“We pay a commission on sales for all reps including inside.”

“Our outside sales staff shares a small portion of their commission with the inside sales support staff.”

“We give sales people a percentage of net operating income (NOI) to incentivize them to support their fellow sales team members and provide ancillary services to support prior sales or future sales that may not result in an immediate sales commission. Paying out of percentage of NOI also focuses attention on the bottom line, because if there is no or negative NOI, then this component of compensation does not pay out.” ▶

"Salary plus bonus, based on performance."

"We introduced a commission for inside sales teams on gross profit dollars earned at or above our target margins by category. For instance, on commodities, anything at or above 16% gross profit pays 2% on the gross profit earned. We are building to an outside sales team and want to incentivize our team to be more aggressive. Commission is forfeited on orders that require multiple deliveries due to inaccuracy, etc. We are a small operation and our inside sales team also does the majority of purchasing for special orders. Lowering our cost of goods is baked into the incentive program as we wish to incentivize our team to use LBM traders, compete suppliers, and provide customers their specified material at the most competitive price."

"We compensate our sales representatives on profit margins. We incentivize by using a tier system on sales and profit margins."

"Bonuses are based off overall profit and performance. We haven't found a good way to distinguish between processing orders and the sales they have driven."

"Our rewards programs are all team-based. If we beat last month's sales, everyone gets an extra comp day. We stay away from commission sales just to encourage teamwork."

"We do not have outside sales staff."

"We struggle with incentivizing inside sales as well. We tie bonuses to GMP dollars at the end of the year, plus other factors related to overall contribution to the organization."

"We've found that pay structure is not a one-size-fits-all animal. Numbers and commissions may drive one individual, while another prefers a steady wage and is driven by their desire to help. There is room for both types on the team. We usually start with salary/wages only and create an add-on commission when we find someone is particularly driven by numbers and competition. They all have opportunity to earn a team bonus and we also offer an incentive bonus that is specifically intended to drive a behavior or strengthen their skills. Pay structure and incentive bonus opportunities may change from year to year as the salesperson and the team evolve."

"We recommend a commission-based system. However, the team commission system rewards underperformers."

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"We give a bonus for each inside salesperson based on total outside sales team production. While they provide differing levels of support to each outside salesperson, overall we want them focused on helping the outside sales team close more business."

"We get paid an incentive/base salary. It's not necessarily ideal for driving sales either. Inside support doesn't feel like they'd be fairly compensated if they went out and got their own accounts. I think it'd be helpful to pay a base salary plus a 'keystroke incentive' as well as a higher percentage of commission for accounts/sales they produce on their own. It shouldn't be as much as outside sales but maybe half of their percentage."

"A select few inside salespeople are compensated by a 5% commission from the outside sales staff's commission. Other are straight hourly."

"Our outside sales team is commission. Our inside team is salary. We have one person who we are testing on a salary plus commission with a margin kicker bonus to see if the behavior drives inside sales to actively seek out more work."

Responses from wholesale distributors, manufacturers, and service providers:

"This perspective may help: A previous sales job had a guaranteed hourly rate but the company's goal/policy was a draw against commission. The company would let you slide for a while, but if your paychecks amounted only to your guaranteed hourly rate, you were not working there much longer. Especially in sales when a company depends on that growth, and an employee's salary covers their living expenses, why is there incentive to do more?"

"You likely need to improve your incentives. But, it's also possible you need to improve your people. A good way to understand which one needs more attention is to follow up directly with your best inside sellers. Ask if some/any of them are motivated by your incentives today? If not, they are doing good work for reasons other than compensation, which is not sustainable/scalable (focus on the incentives). If so, the incentives are driving positive behavior ... just with too few people who are motivated by incentives (focus on the people). Most likely, it's a little of both."

"We drive sales through yearly budget goals and single and double bonus opportunities."

1. Outside/inside roles are the same. 2. Inside reps are strictly salary. 3. Shared accounts are all-inclusive. 4. Metrics for compensation on inside sales stay the same. 5. Showroom visits from public are inside sales."

"Do you have a lot of turnover with your inside staff? It is difficult to structure the inside as opposed to the outside in regards to whom gets the commission due to the fact that our inside staff deals with all salesmen and customers. We give a bonus for numerous reasons: number of calls received during the day, number of mistakes on orders, number of days taken off (outside of vacation and PTO). It's purely subjective, but it gets their attention. We have inside reps that have been with us longer than some of our outside reps. We are a single location, family-owned business with an incredibly low turnover rate. Pay a fair wage and they won't leave."

"I'm always concerned that salespeople don't try and ensure that a customer gets everything they need. It's not just about making more money on that sale, but providing a level of service that keeps that customer from having to delay a project or make more trips, and may even end up with a better result. Could there be an additional bump for selling products that are not building materials?"

"Our salary and bonus pool is divided between all team members."

"We have a setup where meeting sales goals are commissioned, but when you fall below that there is a percentage deduction off base commission."

"Set sales goals for inside staff. Have them team up with the outside reps and they both share in team's success."



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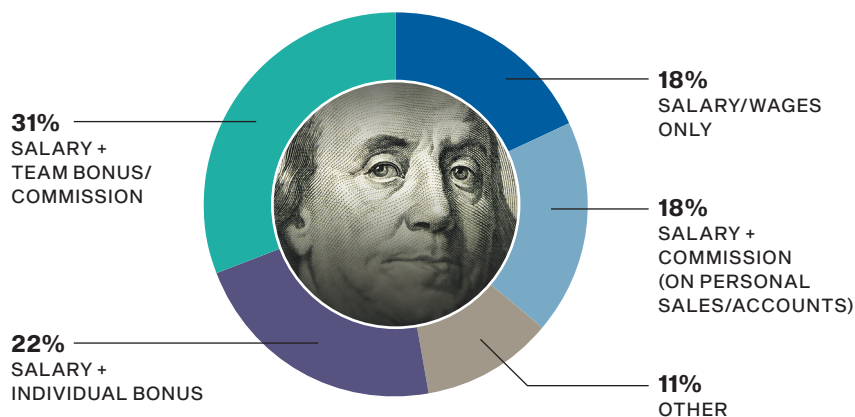
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How does your company structure compensation for your inside sales team?



Comments from dealers:

"We have salary plus split commission (part is personal accounts, part is whole.)"

"Some are salary/wages only, some have a commission add-on, and all have opportunity to earn a team bonus."

"We use a keystroke incentive/base salary."

"We don't have an inside sales team. We have five employees plus a bookkeeper covering two stores. Everyone is hourly."

Comment from a vendor:

"We have some stores that are compensating based on commercial customer sales increases." ■

HAVE A REAL ISSUE?

Send it to Rick@LBMJournal.com.

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Storage Systems for LBM Dealers

- The Auto-Stak System
- Cantilever Rack Systems
- Metal Buildings
- Drive-Thru Systems
- Millwork Storage Systems
- Pallet Rack Systems
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A Better View Starts with Better Railing

Outdoor living spaces have become far more than simple extensions of the home. Today's decks, balconies, porches, and rooftop retreats are designed as destinations, places where homeowners gather with family, entertain guests, and connect with the outdoors. As these spaces continue to evolve, railing has taken on a larger role in both aesthetics and performance.

For lumberyards, dealers, and contractors, this shift presents an opportunity to offer products that deliver more than safety and code compliance. Homeowners increasingly want railing systems that maximize views, complement modern architecture, and enhance the overall outdoor living experience. That demand has fueled growing interest in cable and glass railing systems, categories that continue to gain momentum across residential and light commercial projects. Digger Specialties, Inc. (DSI), manufacturer of Westbury® Aluminum Railing, offers multiple solutions designed to help dealers and builders meet these evolving preferences while maintaining the quality, durability, and ease of installation that have made Westbury a recognized leader in the railing industry.

When the View Matters

Whether overlooking a lake, mountain range, golf course, wooded property, or backyard landscape, homeowners invest significant resources into creating outdoor spaces that showcase their surroundings. Traditional railing systems can sometimes interrupt those sightlines. As a result, many homeowners are seeking alternatives that provide safety while preserving visibility.

Westbury offers three distinct options designed specifically for view-oriented applications: VertiCable® Vertical Cable Railing, Bella Cavo™ Horizontal Cable Railing, and Veranda Glass Railing. Each system provides a different design aesthetic while delivering the clean lines and low-maintenance performance expected from aluminum railing.

A Modern Take on Cable Railing

Cable railing continues to be one of the fastest-growing categories in outdoor living. Its sleek appearance complements contemporary architecture while providing an open feel that enhances visibility.

Westbury VertiCable approaches cable railing from a unique perspective. Instead of traditional horizontal cables, VertiCable utilizes vertical stainless-steel cables integrated within an aluminum railing system. The result is a clean, modern appearance that maintains open views while providing the added peace of mind and safety advantages of a vertical cable design.

For homeowners who prefer the contemporary look of traditional horizontal cable railing, Westbury Bella Cavo offers a streamlined solution. Available in one-rail and two-rail options, Bella Cavo combines premium aluminum railing components with horizontal stainless-steel cable infill to create an elegant, minimalist design.

Both systems provide the visual appeal homeowners seek while allowing contractors to offer distinctive options that fit a variety of architectural styles and project requirements.

Glass Railing That Lets the Landscape Shine

For projects where the view is the focal point, glass railing continues to be a popular choice. Westbury Veranda Glass Railing is designed to create an unobstructed visual connection between outdoor living spaces and the surrounding environment. Large glass panels provide a sophisticated appearance while maintaining safety and structural integrity.

From waterfront decks and elevated patios to luxury residential applications, glass railing helps create a seamless transition between indoor and outdoor spaces. Homeowners enjoy uninterrupted sightlines while builders benefit from a premium product that enhances the overall value and appeal of a project.

As outdoor living designs increasingly emphasize openness and connection to nature, glass railing remains one of the most effective ways to showcase a property's best feature, the view itself.



Built on the Westbury Advantage

While aesthetics often drive initial product selection, long-term performance remains equally important. Westbury railing systems are manufactured from premium aluminum and finished with a durable powder-coated surface designed to withstand the elements with minimal maintenance.

Unlike wood railing that may require ongoing staining, painting, or replacement, aluminum railing offers lasting beauty and performance. This durability has made Westbury a preferred choice among contractors, dealers, and homeowners across North America.

In addition, Westbury's broad range of colors, styles, and infill options allows professionals to recommend solutions that align with virtually any home design, from traditional and transitional to contemporary and modern.

Delivering What Homeowners Want

As consumer demand for outdoor living continues to grow, products that enhance views, elevate design, and simplify maintenance are becoming increasingly important. Cable and glass railing systems represent more than a design trend; they reflect a broader shift toward creating outdoor spaces that feel open, inviting, and connected to the surrounding environment.

For dealers and contractors looking to differentiate their offerings, Westbury VertiCable, Bella Cavo, and Veranda provide attractive solutions that help homeowners enjoy what they value most, the view.



Open the possibilities with Westbury VertiCable, Bella Cavo, and Veranda Railing



VertiCable® Vertical Cable Railing

When the view is the feature, choose railing designed to showcase it. Whether you prefer the modern look of vertical cable, horizontal cable, or glass infill, Westbury offers premium aluminum railing systems that deliver exceptional visibility, lasting durability, and low-maintenance performance. Transform every deck, balcony, porch, and patio into a destination worth seeing.



Bella Cavo® Horizontal Cable Railing



Veranda Glass Railing



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DECKS & DOCKS EXPANDS FROM NICHE OPERATION TO BICOASTAL BUSINESS

BY WENDY STURGES

OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS, Decks & Docks has made a name for itself by steadily evolving from a marine supply source to a nationwide decking dealer, with room to grow.

The company began in St. Petersburg, FL in 1991 as a single location before it was purchased by Gary Roberts and Mark Wallace. The pair brought their sons, CEO Shawn Roberts and President Tyler Wallace, onboard as well to help the company grow.

"[Decks & Docks'] genesis was squarely based off of marine construction materials which, over the course of the years, got more sophisticated with how they were building docks, and Florida is obviously the epicenter of boating," Shawn Roberts said. "So there was a need for niche marine supply back in the '90s. It was very small."

Fast-forward to today, and the business has grown to 76 U.S. locations including lumberyards, design centers, and manufacturing facilities. While still offering the dock materials that defined its early years, the business has expanded to offer a range of building materials, including railing, siding, fencing, lumber, hardware, and of course, decking.

"We were early believers in composite decking, and Tyler and I have been selling it for 22 years at a pretty high clip in markets that had very little or none, so we definitely took advantage of that movement in the market," Roberts said. "The marine stuff was a catalyst and a niche way to get there, and it's a fun market to be in. Eventually, we got off the coast and kept growing, and now we're on a mission to build a national brand."

Building the Brand

Despite now having dozens of locations, Wallace and Roberts said the company is not interested in creating a "one-size-fits-all" approach when opening or acquiring new stores. Rather, the company works with each location manager to make individualized day-to-day decisions, even down to the marketing.

"We have a marketing department here at the corporate level, but they work really closely with each of the branches, so we have marketing people dedicated to specific regions," said Chief Operating Officer Nicole Smith. "What's going to work in one market might not work in another, so we really do lean into what makes sense from a local level and lean heavily on the branch manager to kind of help us figure out what works and what doesn't. We also do a lot of customer events, and try to make sure our customers feel valued and recognized."

That approach also extends to how the company decides where to feature showrooms.

"Each market has its own demand, so we try to put the design centers in very industrial locations," Smith said. "It gives the retail customer a better option to come in and design their dream space, and also allows our contractors to come in and spend time with their customers."

In addition to products carried by Decks & Docks, the company has also expanded into manufacturing and now produces Vanguard, its own line of extruded seawall material. Wallace said this has allowed them to even further



cater to customers by being able to provide a steady supply stream to contractors.

Whether through new locations or acquisition, Roberts and Wallace said the company's continued growth has been made possible through the support of Decks & Docks employees, many of whom have been with the company for several years. Smith said the company utilizes a "next man up mentality," meaning it places an emphasis on promoting from within and building a roster of future company leaders.

"We have very little turnover, and I'd like to say it's just because [employees] really like working for us, but I think most people have a lot of fun," Roberts said. "We've been hyper growing, which means there's been all kinds of really dynamic and fun opportunities presented. We've been very fortunate in that regard."

Westward Expansion

As Decks & Docks looks toward the future, Wallace said the opportunities for growth are vast, particularly as it expands into the western half of the U.S. The company now has six California locations, making them truly bicoastal.

"We have a ton of geographic span left," Wallace said. "We've been at this for a while, but we just started the inland expansion six or seven years ago, and we've got some really great people helping us build out those interior regions of the U.S. I think that the geographic expansion is what's most exciting."

Many of these locations were established via acquisitions, according to the company, but longtime customers at those stores shouldn't expect a corporate takeover, Wallace said.

"Half of our growth comes from acquisition, so maintaining the local presence they've always had is important. We don't go in and change the business Day One. We allow things to work as they always have and not be a disruptor in the market in a bad way. We try to do that in a good way."

Roberts added the company recognizes that many of these companies see the value in that when making a deal with Decks & Docks, particularly those smaller family business that may not have a succession plan in place when owners retire.

"We wouldn't be in California right now if it wasn't for the path that we're on of being that specialized provider of outdoor building materials. The company we bought in San Diego has been around since 1957," he said. "When it comes to the point where they need to do something else with their company, and they don't have a solid plan, it's nice to think that we're their choice." ■



GET TO KNOW DECKS & DOCKS

YEAR FOUNDED:	1991
NUMBER OF LOCATIONS:	76
NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:	700
CUSTOMER BASE:	80-90% Pro • 10-20% Retail/DIY
TYPE OF OWNERSHIP:	Family, corporate
PRIMARY BUSINESS SOFTWARE/ERP:	Epicor BisTrack
TOP 3 BRANDS BY REVENUE:	AZEK/TimberTech • Trex Owens Corning Structural Lumber



Coston Marine Services, Palm Beach Gardens, Florida: AZEK decking, Thruflow grated decking, Everlast composite sheet pile, Owens Corning pile strips.

CAPTURE THE WHOLE JOB, FROM FIRST BOARD TO FINAL RAIL

Decking anchors most projects, and it often determines whether the rest of the build stays with you. When your lineup gives contractors a clear path forward, the order tends to grow. When it doesn't, parts of the project move elsewhere.

Deckorators® is built around that inflection point. With a decking lineup that spans entry-level to premium, Deckorators reduces the need for contractors to source from other suppliers and creates a more direct path from the first product to the rest of the build. That's where higher average order value begins. Not from a single upsell, but from maintaining continuity across the project.

WHERE JOBS START TO BREAK APART

Gaps in a lineup do more than limit selection. They introduce decision points where the order can split.

Deckorators addresses that by covering a full range of project needs. At the premium end, Voyage and Summit decking made with Surestone® technology deliver the stability, low moisture absorption, and reduced thermal movement that higher-end builds demand. Wood-plastic composite lines like Vista and Venture provide options where value and appearance stay in balance.

That range keeps your yard relevant across more projects. The greater impact shows up after the initial decision. When contractors don't have to rethink product choices mid-project, orders stay intact and additional categories remain attached.

TURNING THE FIRST SALE INTO A LARGER ONE

Winning the decking sale doesn't guarantee you capture the full job. Every additional category introduces a decision. If that step requires a reset, whether new systems, new components, or unfamiliar installations, the likelihood of the contractor sourcing elsewhere increases. Growth happens when the transition feels like a continuation, not a new purchase.

MAKING RAILING THE NEXT STEP, NOT A NEW ONE

Railing is one of the most common points where orders split. Not because it's unavailable, but because it often behaves like a separate system.



Deckorators keeps that transition straightforward. Aluminum, cable, composite, and glass railing options are aligned within a single platform, so you can cover a range of styles and price points without adding complexity. Aluminum railing, led by Rapid Rail and Contemporary Rail, supports core volume with a shared post system that simplifies stocking and reduces component variability. Other options build from that same foundation, giving contractors flexibility without changing systems mid-project.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE SYSTEM HOLDS TOGETHER

The difference between supplying materials and capturing a job shows up in how much of the project stays in one place. A decking-only order sets the baseline. When railing and related components remain aligned, the order expands, and you see higher average order value and better inventory productivity as demand extends across categories.

That outcome doesn't come from selling more products. It comes from removing the point where the job breaks apart. Deckorators is built to eliminate that break point, from the initial decking decision through final installation. The question is whether your current lineup does the same.

Explore the full Deckorators lineup at deckorators.com/products

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THE OUTDOOR LIVING OPPORTUNITY

Wolf Serenity Decking in Weathered Ipe is pictured here framed with darker Onyx. This dual-sided PVC deck is paired with Wolf Vinyl Railing, both low-maintenance outdoor living products engineered to last.

How LBM dealers can position themselves as the go-to destination for homeowners looking to expand their living area into the backyard.

BY JAMES ANDERSON

Projected to reach \$26.8 billion within the next year, the outdoor living market has outgrown its deck-and-railing origins and is reshaping how dealers think about their yards and product mix. While expanding into outdoor living creates a number of opportunities for dealers, manufacturers suggest that dealers who will truly succeed in the category are those who do so with the end user in mind.

For Tony Simoncini, buyer at Friedman's Home Improvement, located in California's wine country, that means launching what he calls the chain's "destination backyard experience."

"With four locations and a business mix that serves both pro customers and DIY homeowners, Friedman's has focused on becoming a complete outdoor living destination where customers can move seamlessly from project materials to the finishing touches that personalize their space," Simoncini says. At Friedman's, that means customers can walk out with everything from deck boards to grills, area rugs, and throw pillows.

Manufacturers have seen this trend building as outdoor spaces have evolved from an exterior amenity to an extension of the home's architecture. As homeowners continue investing in their properties, they're looking to create complete outdoor living environments rather than simply adding a deck or patio.

"Whether it's a residence, hospitality project, or commercial environment, outdoor spaces are now expected to deliver the same level of design, comfort, and functionality as interior spaces," says Katrina Ralston, president of Feeney.

Evolving trends in how homeowners are investing in their outdoor living experience creates opportunities well beyond decking and railing, driving demand for lighting, privacy solutions, decorative panels, shade structures, and other architectural elements that help define the overall experience, Ralston says. "The biggest opportunity for dealers is to move from selling projects to helping customers create a complete outdoor lifestyle."

At Oldcastle APG, Joe Raboine, vice president of design, says the growth in the outdoor living category is driven by a deeper cultural shift toward wellness, connection, and creating meaningful experiences at home.

Kitchens, fire features, shade structures, lighting, porcelain pavers, retaining walls, water features, pools, landscape integration, and even wellness-focused spaces like saunas and cold plunges are now seen as lifestyle investments, rather than just remodeling.

"We're also seeing big interest in biophilic design principles—spaces that help people reconnect with nature and improve mental well-being," Raboine says.

The market is currently fueled by a demand for "high style, low stress" environments, says Dan McHugh, district sales manager for the Upper Mid-Atlantic region at Wolf Outdoor Living, a PrimeSource brand comprised of Keylink Railing, Fortress Railing, Wolf Railing, and City Post Railing. ▶

Feeney DesignRail Custom in Black with CableRail infill. 36" Bordeaux Square "Reclaimed Wood" Fire Bowl from American Fyre Designs. TimberTech PRO Legacy Collection decking in Mocha.



PHOTO: NIC RENTFROW

"While the broader economy fluctuates, the premium sector remains steady," McHugh says. "Affluent homeowners and the explosive multi-family building sector are prioritizing specialty, high-performance products over budget-friendly commodities."

This trend creates a significant pull in the LBM distribution channel for dealers to serve as "one reliable source," he says. "It's no longer just about the deck boards; it's about the complete architectural extension of the home."

Category Adjacencies

At Friedman's, Simoncini says that outdoor living has become a year-round traffic driver in his market. "We are fortunate to live in an area with beautiful weather, incredible scenery, and a strong culture centered around outdoor entertaining and spending time with family and friends. Customers increasingly view their backyard as an extension of their home and living space rather than simply an outdoor area," he says.



As Friedman's celebrates 80 years serving Sonoma County, CA, its unique combination of a home improvement center, nursery, and drive-through lumberyard makes it easy for customers to complete every stage of an outdoor project. Complete patio displays help customers visualize how furniture, umbrellas, rugs, and décor come together, creating an inspiring shopping experience that helps bring outdoor living ideas to life.



The shift toward outdoor living space has changed the way Friedman's thinks about merchandising, product assortment, and the customer experience.

"Today, customers are not just shopping for decking or patio furniture individually. They are creating complete outdoor environments that reflect their personal style and support the way they want to live and entertain."

While the outdoor living season varies by geographic region, one thing is certain no matter the temperature: sunset. For that reason, Feeney's Ralston says that dealers looking to make the next logical entry in the market beyond decking would be wise to focus on lighting.

"Lighting is one of the most natural and successful category expansions we see today," she says. "In many ways, lighting is just as important outdoors as it is indoors. It extends the usability of a space, enhances safety, creates ambiance, and plays a significant role in the overall design experience."

Particularly for dealers in warmer climates, demand is also on the rise for products that will allow for more year-round use, according to Jim Harrington, senior vice president, rail and metal products for James Hardie.

"To achieve this indoor-outdoor lifestyle, homeowners are seeking shade and increasingly looking for pergolas to make their outdoor spaces more comfortable year-round and usable in a wider range of weather conditions. Beyond adding architectural interest, pergolas provide much-needed shade in the sun and protection from the rain. Advanced options from StruXure are increasingly in demand with features that include automated open and close louvers, built-in lighting, optional screens, fans, heaters and more."

According to Raboine at Oldcastle, expansion categories for dealers to stock include hardscapes, railing, lighting, shade elements, outdoor kitchens, and complementary landscape materials that help complete the overall outdoor experience.

"We're seeing especially strong momentum around porcelain pavers, modular paver systems, outdoor kitchens, and integrated living space concepts that blend decking with patios, walls, seating areas, and landscape features. Homeowners want cohesive environments where materials and styles work together seamlessly," Raboine says.

Additionally, dealers are encouraged to anticipate needs beyond the basic.

“For dealers already selling decking, the most logical next categories are railing, fasteners, privacy screens, pergolas, and lighting. These products naturally extend the outdoor living conversation and give dealers the opportunity to offer more complete, design-forward solutions that enhance both the functionality and overall look of an outdoor space,” said Patrick Barnds, vice president and general manager with TimberTech Decking, James Hardie. “One category that they may be less familiar with is alternative substructure materials. The real-world experience is that many of these deck frames start to have issues with rot or other failures after 10-15 years. However, with composite or advanced PVC decking that can last 30-50 years or longer, you want the deck substructure to last at least as long. And increasingly strict local building codes are requiring the use of fire-resistant or non-combustible framing materials. These factors make for a compelling case to use wood-alternatives, such as TimberTech’s Aluminum Framing system.”

At Wolf Outdoor Living, McHugh says dealers looking to differentiate are stocking commodities but also stocking an expanded range of solutions to upgrade out-



The Outdoor Accents Sage System DIY Pergola from Simpson Strong-Tie combines strength, elegance, and ease, allowing homeowners to create stunning outdoor structures with durable ZMAX galvanized steel connectors that feature a sleek black powder-coat finish. With flexible components and DIY-friendly installation steps on how to build a pergola, you can confidently design and personalize your outdoor projects with style and simplicity.

door living spaces. Dealers leaning into the outdoor-as-gathering-space trend will want to focus on complete decking projects, including under-deck water management, joist tape, and fasteners. Premium railing systems allow for boundless customization and a sophisticated, classic profile, he adds.

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“Adding outdoor lighting for posts, stairs, and under-rail applications extends the hours of the space,” he says, “turning a simple deck into a luxury evening retreat.”

The Friedman’s approach has been centered around creating complete solutions rather than simply adding products.

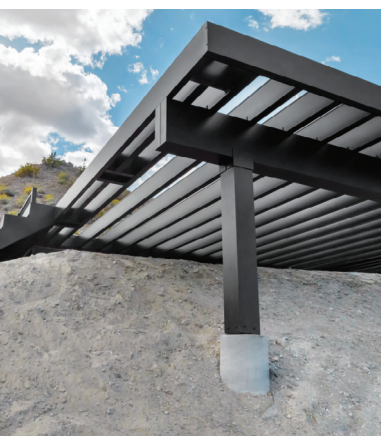
“We focus heavily on quality, comfort, design, and value while ensuring we remain competitive on price against national chains. We believe there is an important place in the market for retailers who can provide better quality and more curated assortments than national chains while still delivering approachable pricing compared to specialty patio retailers,” Simoncini says.

Design Always Matters

One of the biggest mistakes dealers make is treating outdoor living as a product category instead of a design category, says Ralston at Feeney.

“Today’s dealers aren’t just competing against other building product suppliers. They’re competing against online-first retailers, direct-to-consumer brands, specialty outdoor living companies, and big-box retailers with significantly larger marketing budgets. Competing on product and price alone is becoming increasingly difficult.”

Ralston says that the dealers leading their markets are the ones that inspire rather than simply supply. Consumers are increasingly viewing outdoor spaces as extensions of their homes and are looking for ideas, expertise, and guidance—not just materials, adding that another major opportunity for dealers is digital visibility.



ABOVE: Made to resist moisture, rust, mold, and insect decay, TimberTech’s Aluminum Framing system is crafted from recyclable aluminum and features a Class-A flame spread rating.

RIGHT: Designed to be fully customizable, the Pergola X from StruXure (a TimberTech Brand) includes features like automated open and close louvers, built-in lighting, optional screens, fans, heaters, trim options, and more.



“Homeowners now begin their research online and increasingly through AI-powered search tools. Dealers need to be visible where consumers are looking for inspiration and answers. The goal should be to create consumer demand before a contractor is ever involved, so homeowners are asking for specific outdoor living solutions when the project begins.”

To do so, Ralston says, dealers need to invest in expertise. Outdoor environments present unique challenges, from weather exposure and durability requirements to maintenance expectations and regional climate considerations. The dealers who help customers navigate these challenges become trusted advisors, not just product suppliers.

Finally, she says, many dealers underestimate the importance of outdoor living showrooms, which should be designed for homeowners, not contractors.

“Contractors need a place where they can confidently bring clients, explore options, and help them visualize the finished space. A great showroom turns product displays into inspiration and creates a significant competitive advantage,” Ralston says.

Missed Opportunities

Raboine at Oldcastle says that a missed opportunity for dealers is underinvesting in displays, visualization, and storytelling. Homeowners connect more with complete environments than small product samples because they can envision experiences with family and friends.

“I also think some dealers underestimate the importance of design guidance,” says Raboine. “Today’s consumers are looking for confidence and inspiration, not just materials. Dealers who can simplify decisions and guide the customer journey create a major competitive advantage.”

To help provide a better idea of finished products, Massachusetts-based Chace Building Supply recently debuted a 1,200-sq.-ft. display featuring a collection of six custom-designed and professionally-built mini deck installations using TimberTech products.

“This display was created to give our customers a true, real-world perspective on what’s possible,” said Rich Chace, owner of Chace Building Supply, in a news release from LMC. “From color variation and texture to railing styles and skirting details, we wanted to make it easier for homeowners and contractors to visualize their projects and feel confident in their selections.”



Papyrus and Charlestone pavers are part of Belgard's modular line of pavers from Oldcastle, which are designed to seamlessly work together to create a limitless number of paver patterns.

TimberTech's Barnds said the company works to provide tools and support to make out-of-the-display ideas like these possible.

"We support dealers with a range of tools designed to make these expanded product conversations easier and more effective. This includes a robust marketing customization platform for co-branded materials, merchandising and showroom support with custom displays, website support, sell sheets, and comprehensive literature for dealer teams, contractors, and consumers."

At Wolf, McHugh says that the most common pitfall he sees is leading with price and sticking exclusively to lower-end, wood-fiber composites.

"While these products are common," he says, "they leave the dealer vulnerable to competition. Dealers often miss the opportunity to educate customers on the long-term performance differences between PVC and composite. For instance, failing to highlight that PVC does not absorb moisture or that it cools down faster than capped composites can result in a lost opportunity to up-sell a client to a more durable, low-maintenance, on-trend product like Wolf Haven or Serenity decking. Additionally, many dealers fail to leverage extended warranties—such as the 35-to-50-year stain and fade protections—as a tool to justify a higher initial investment to the homeowner."

Top Performers

Dealers such as Friedman's that are considered top performers in the industry often share common characteristics. Ralston from Feeney notes that she sees high performers selling the experience rather than just the products.

"Homeowners aren't buying railing, lighting, or decking. They're investing in a place where they'll entertain friends, spend time with family, and create memories," she says. ►

Expanding Outdoor Offerings

One of the biggest names in decking is turning 30 this year, and as Trex looks ahead, President and CEO Adam Zambanini says the company's future includes a focus on outdoor living accessories.

For LBM dealers looking to expand upon their current decking and outdoor living offerings, Zambanini says there are three integrated categories that Trex has its eye on right now for their strong attach-rate opportunities: railing, lighting, and cladding.

"Railing has continued its high penetration momentum because it's often required with most deck builds," he says. "However, it's more of a core component than a new attach-opportunity given that it's necessary for code compliance. This has created an opportunity for our dealers to sell the entire system, decking and railing, from the get-go."

"We are well positioned for this growth given the commercial synergies between decking and additional outdoor living products desired to create an inviting, curated space, a significantly expanded product portfolio to support homeowners in designing their dream deck, and offering pre-assembled designs that help address labor constraints in some areas of the U.S. We offer the most robust portfolio of high-performance, low-maintenance, and eco-friendly products that elevate outdoor living," he says.

Trex's lighting category is growing steadily, and Zambanini adds that it is an excellent attachment to decking, especially when incorporating smart and LED lighting systems. "This is typically a lower-dollar add-on for homeowners than railing, and one that is gaining popularity."

Finally, Zambanini says that cladding has been strong in the exterior remodel space. Typically sold as a separate envelope project than attached to a deck or outdoor-living space sale, Trex still sees expanded opportunities for dealers to serve these customers.



A. Trex Transcend composite railing in Classic White with round aluminum balusters on Trex Enhance composite decking in Rocky Harbor.

B. Trex Signature glass railing in Charcoal Black powder-coated aluminum posts and rails with Trex Transcend composite decking in Tiki Torch.

C. Trex cladding using Trex Transcend composite decking in Tiki Torch.

“The best dealers are often those who understand that distinction and lead with the outcome rather than the components. They ask better questions, focus on design, and help customers visualize the finished space.”

Ralston says savvy dealers also invest in knowledgeable teams that understand both aesthetics and performance, allowing them to recommend solutions that fit the customer’s goals and environment. Most importantly, she adds, they position themselves as trusted advisors. Through expertise, design guidance, showroom experiences, and local support, they provide value that can’t be replicated by an online retailer.

“In today’s market, that combination of knowledge, service, and inspiration is often the strongest differentiator a dealer can have,” Ralston says.

Other key details dealers should zero in on with customers are maintenance and longevity, particularly as gains continue in the renovation and remodeling sectors, says Peter Jonswald, vice president and general manager for TimberTech Railing, James Hardie.

“With homeowners staying in their homes longer, product durability and ease of maintenance have become critical considerations” he says. “Smaller yard sizes in newer developments are driving demand for solutions that create greater privacy and more intimate spaces for entertaining. And as we examine current railing trends, there is a clear continued shift toward low-maintenance solutions that deliver multiple infill options with minimal visual obstruction. These goals are being achieved through smaller top rail and post profiles, as well as a broad selection of infill options, including horizontal and vertical cable and glass.”

Dealer Support

The most effective tool for dealer success is professional education and certification, says McHugh at Wolf Outdoor Living. Programs such as his company’s Wolf PRO Program provide contractors with specialized training on product specifications and best practices, which directly leads to fewer callbacks and higher-quality builds. By offering pro training events at their locations, dealers bring extended value to their pro customers.

At Oldcastle, Raboine says that design support, visualization tools, merchandising guidance, and contractor education are all critical.

“Dealers benefit tremendously from tools that simplify the design and selection process for homeowners while also helping contractors sell larger, more cohesive projects. We’re seeing growing demand for AI-assisted visualization, configurable outdoor room concepts, digital product libraries, and easier ways to help homeowners understand how products coordinate together.”

One of the biggest gaps that still exists is in simplifying the overall customer journey, Raboine adds. “Outdoor living projects can feel fragmented and intimidating to homeowners. The companies and dealers that help streamline design inspiration, product selection, contractor coordination, and project confidence will have a major advantage moving forward.”

Make no mistake, the challenges are real, Simoncini says. Outdoor living categories require more selling floor square footage and more inventory investment than commodity products, and the seasonal nature of some categories creates inventory management complexity. Carrying premium brands means your team needs to know the products well enough to sell them with confidence, so staff training is not optional.

“For dealers who get those pieces right, the payoff is meaningful,” he says. “The categories carry good margin, the average transaction size is higher, and a customer who buys a deck, a railing system, a grill, and a patio set from you is a customer who trusts you with the whole project. That’s the relationship every independent dealer should be working toward.” ■

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CONTRIBUTORS

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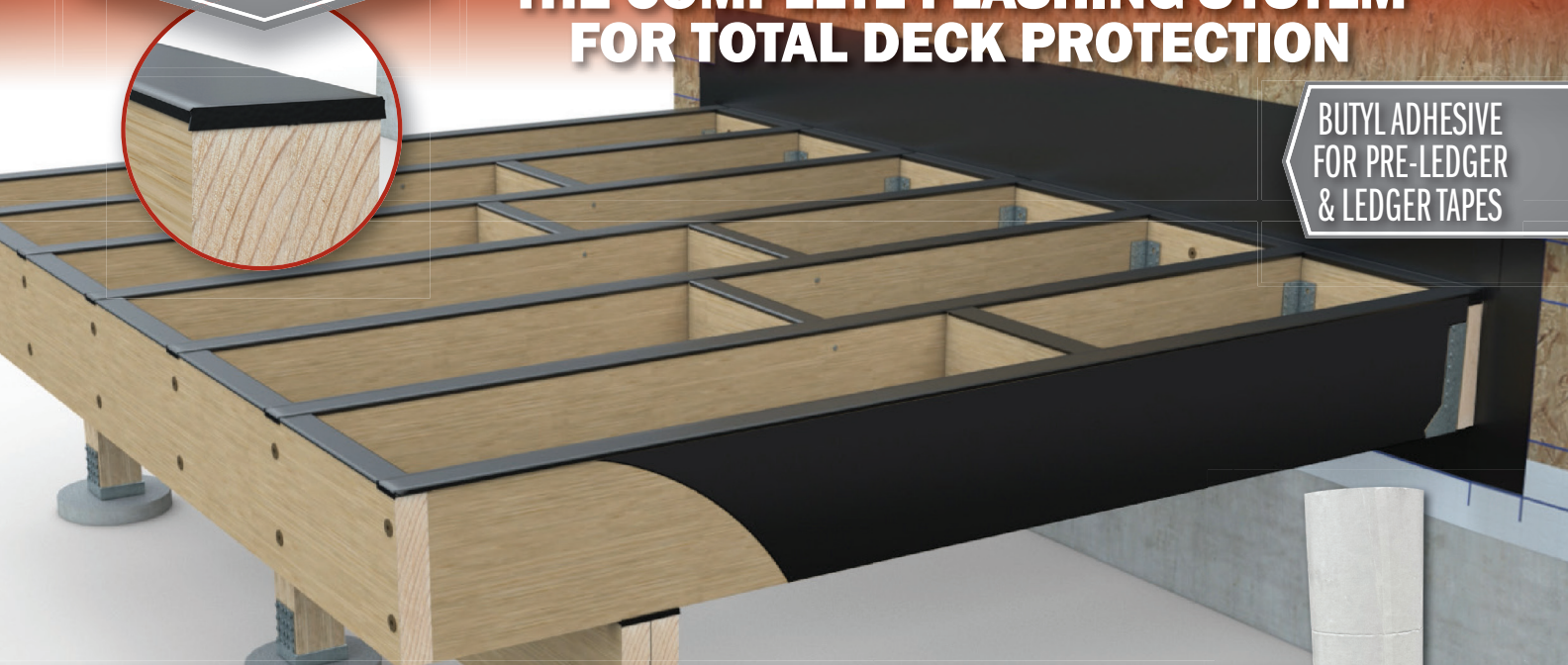
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Westlake Royal Building Products is broadening its Dutch Quality Stone collection with expanded color offerings. The new color additions include Soft Barley and Summer Plains, along with extended availability of Snowpack and Mist across select profiles and accessories, giving customers more options for creating natural, layered looks across a range of applications. Westlake Royal Building Products says Soft Barley offers a warm, creamy neutral available in the Rough Ashlar and Weather Ledge profiles, while Summer Plains combines sandy browns, cool grays, and deeper blue-gray tones for added depth in Tuscan Ridge and Weather Ledge profiles. Snowpack and Mist are now available in additional profiles and accessories, expanding design flexibility across the collection. westlakeroyalbuildingproducts.com



SIMPSON STRONG-TIE PFC AND PFCB POST FRAME CONNECTORS

Simpson Strong-Tie has expanded its post frame construction lineup with the PFC and PFCB post frame connector brackets and angles. Simpson Strong-Tie says the connectors simplify installation with Strong-Drive® SDS Connector screws and require no through-bolting. Featuring heavy-duty steel construction, G90 galvanized coating, and tested uplift and shear capacities, the connectors provide durability, corrosion resistance, and structural reliability. The PFC and PFCB connectors also include built-in, hand-removable washers to help streamline jobsite installation. strongtie.com



ACRE PERFECTION SHINGLE SIDING

New from Modern Mill, the ACRE Perfection Shingle Siding is designed to capture the classic look of cedar shingles, while resisting water, weather, splintering, and damage from pests. Each panel measures 4 feet long and 5/16" thick, with an 11-39/40" width and a 5 7/8" reveal. According to Modern Mill, the panels are also designed to not require resealing over time. ACRE Perfection Shingle Siding is available pre-finished, including in Modern Mill's Signature Stain Collection colors including Biloxi, Walnut, Amory, Laurel, Montauk Gray, Mahogany, and ACRE Black. modern-mill.com

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TRITON ADVANCED GLASS SYSTEMS

MITER Brands has introduced Triton Advanced Glass Systems, a new line of high-performance glass packages developed with Corning Incorporated and H.B. Fuller. The lineup includes Triton Advanced Impact for coastal storm protection and the lightweight Triton Advanced Triple Pane for enhanced energy efficiency and noise reduction, according to MITER. Depending on the package, Triton glass offers up to 40% less weight, increased thermal performance and longevity through Corning Enlighten Glass and H.B. Fuller's 4SG Fusion Bonded Spacer technology. miterbrands.com



DIAMOND DECK & WOOD SCREWS

Woodgrain has launched a new addition to its lineup of hardware with Diamond Deck & Wood Screws, which include patented TTX drive technology, Typhoon head with nibs, and DXAS coarse thread on the screw shank and point. According to Woodgrain, these features work together to eliminate spin-out and wobble, and to reduce the amount of torque required during installation. Diamond Screws feature a 2,000-hour Nano coating, are approved for exterior and ACQ-treated lumber applications and are backed by a limited lifetime fastener warranty. woodgrain.com



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Wolf Outdoor Living	IFC-1	877.315.6669	wolfoutdoorliving.com

* Denotes regional distribution.

Note: last-minute changes will affect the accuracy of this listing.

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"We've done fine doing it the old way for 20 years," he told your sales manager last month. "I don't see why you're fixing what isn't broken."

Then came the real ask. Bob told your sales manager he'd get on board with the new system and the tighter terms ... *if* you cut him a special price on his next several loads and extend his dating another 30 days beyond what anyone else gets. "After everything I've done for you over the years," he said, "I think that's fair."

Your team has explained the why behind the changes—margins are tightening, competitors are moving faster, and the systems you're missing are starting to cost you deals with newer, younger builders. But Bob isn't really arguing against the logic. He's using his history with you as leverage to opt out of it on his own terms.

You value Bob. His volume matters, and his reputation in the builder community carries weight. But if word gets out that Bob negotiated his way around the new terms, you're not sure how you hold the line with everyone else.

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Cut the deal. Give Bob the pricing and extended dating he's asking for to keep his volume and smooth the transition.

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