

CONNECTION

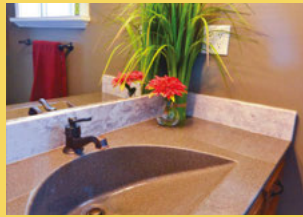
Sand & Swirl: the name reflects the product

Also:

- How to talk pricing
- Creating home show presence
- Homeowner preferences

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ON THE COVER: Utah-based Sand & Swirl, which is run by the husband-wife team Corey and ReBecca Erdmann, creates both new types of product finishes and has brought back an old method of veining. On the cover is TruStone, a process that combines images of granite and marble onto gel-coated cultured marble.

PRODUCED BY
The Tibbs Group

Genilee Parente, Editor
gsparente@verizon.net

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Phone: 470-219-8139
www.TheICPA.com

For advertising rates,
please contact
Jennifer Towner at
Jennifer@theicpa.com or
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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

A bright future



"THE CHECK IS IN THE MAIL" has a particularly worthwhile ring to it when it is the culmination of a couple years of planning followed by a year of birth and then growth. ICPA reached 76 members recently and 55 of them were manufacturers, which means we've received the next installment of the funds we need to grow. It's time to pat ourselves on the back and welcome our new and old members with open arms. Thank you for joining up with us and making us

a better and stronger association.

It's also time to thank those individuals and committee members who made this possible. Those thanks begin with the ICPA Membership Committee, which has done an outstanding job of lining up new members and ensuring our core members stayed happy, and our Executive Director Jennifer Towner, who not only helped give that committee direction, but has personally visited as many potential and existing members as her schedule has allowed.

A very good place to do all this thanking and celebrating is POLYCON Texas 2017 March 22-24 in Arlington, TX. I'm delighted

our next event is right here in this state I love and that those of you who attend will get a flavor of my area of the country. Holding a meeting like POLYCON means planning focused, business-oriented learning experiences, and we've really gone to town this year with practical knowledge we'll impart through roundtable discussions, questions and answers with experts and the ever-popular hands-on plant demonstrations. The demonstrations and one of the tours we've lined up will be in the Marshall-Gruber Company facility in Mansfield, TX, and I can assure you

that, having visited this facility, you'll be impressed by this operation.

Just as important as these learning opportunities is the chance to meet up with old friends, make new friends and take a step back to enjoy being in the industry we love by meeting those who run it. The backbone of our industry has always been its leaders, and the social activities planned for POLYCON Texas will provide lots of opportunities to get to know them better. From Texas barbecue to a cattle herd drive to the historic stockyards of Fort Worth to golf courses, this area provides us lots of opportunity for fun alongside the learning.

Pages 10-11 of this issue provide you a preview of our 2017 event. I urge everyone who reads this magazine to visit those pages, then sign up for this important gathering, which is growing each year we hold it.

In the meantime, enjoy the current issue of MasterCast™ Connection. In it, we visit with a Utah member that has taken on new ventures at the same time the company has revitalized an old way of producing cast polymer. This issue also has practical tips on how to approach the sometimes painful topic of pricing our products and on making home shows pay for themselves. A brand new report provides a peek at what tomorrow's homeowners may look like.

I hope to see all of you in Texas! ■

Bill Sanders

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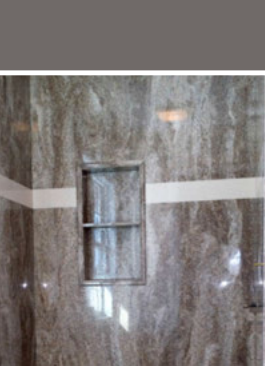
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Sand & Swirl:

Keeping the old while working on the new



BY GENILEE PARENTE

IN SOME WAYS, the story of Sand & Swirl in Ogden, UT could be filed on the bookshelf of the cast polymer industry under the category “typical”: The company is a family-owned operation that made it through the tough housing crash by believing in its good product and trying new things. It is now growing and thriving.

Several aspects of the Sand & Swirl story, however, are unique, beginning with the timing of its birth: Sand and Swirl was started just before the economy and housing market imploded. It also has chosen to stick with the old as it tries the new.



Employees on the production line pour marble.

Early days

The company is owned by the husband and wife team of Corey and ReBecca Erdmann. Corey brought the product expertise into the picture while ReBecca brought management/business acumen.

“Corey has been in the cultured marble industry over 27 years. He started out as an installer, but over the years gained experience in production and

sales,” ReBecca explains. Meanwhile, she worked in a management position for a private firm for over 20 years.

They became a couple in about 2004, having been friends for years. Both were going through divorce and both were anxious to start a business. The adventure of being business owners and a married couple began about the same time. Sand & Swirl became a company in 2005, and the couple were wed in 2006.

Corey initially got the business off the ground by ordering materials from another cultured marble manufacturing company and installing the product himself. The couple invested all the money he made back into the business and ReBecca spent her evenings setting up the accounting system and helping with the bookkeeping. As they could afford it, the new company bought equipment so that Sand & Swirl could make its own cultured marble.

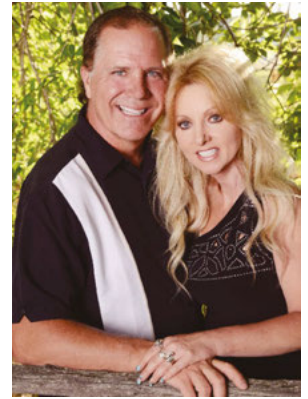
“We eventually rented a shop bay, recruited two employees Corey knew from the industry and began casting our cultured marble,” ReBecca says.

The company also hired another installer and began building a 6,000-square-foot manufacturing facility and office/showroom behind their small rental house, which sat on a half-acre lot. Most of the jobs that came flowing in were from new home contractors.

Then the market crashed.

“When the economy hit us hardest, we were just completing the office and showroom portion and had moved production to the new building. Like many others, our sales declined and some very good-paying contractors stopped paying invoices and filed for bankruptcy,” Corey explains.

The couple had to make some hard decisions. One of the first was made by ReBecca: “It was time for me to either focus on helping Corey work our business full time or to make the decision to quit the job I’d had so long,” she says. She was a purchasing manager for a company she loved. However, the couple believed strongly in their product.



Corey and ReBecca Erdmann



Installers load up materials for the day's work.

ReBecca left full-time employment in 2008 to focus on accounting, helping customers in the showroom and marketing. Corey continued as the technical expert and the person who would assure that what the company offered was high quality. They survived the crash, "by having low- to no-debt and turning to a new customer base: remodeling," ReBecca explains.

Over the hump and now a success

Another way the story of Sand & Swirl is both typical and unique is that it has mixed the old with the new. The company began with the traditional customer base and traditional methods of making the product. Like many of today's cast polymer companies, it moved into new areas and new ways of making product, moves that helped get it through the tough times. However, the company never quite abandoned the old ways and kept its name even when others were feeling the need to add the term "marble."

The company's name came from the way marble often looks.



"The name Sand & Swirl was created based on what we call the old traditional marble look with swirls as well as cultured granite that resembles sand," ReBecca says. Although new ways of making product widened those two standard looks tremendously, the Erdmann's decided to stick with the catchy original name.



"We came to the realization that we had branded ourselves with our product, which became known as the Sand & Swirl product rather than 'cultured marble.' We also really liked our logo, so we stuck with our own branding," ReBecca explains.

Sand & Swirl's business today is divided between custom home builders, remodeling contractors and some commercial work. The company also markets directly to consumers who are tackling their own remodeling projects. The staff has grown to 13 employees including showroom staff, production personnel and installation specialists.

An ear towards the future

The Erdmanns credit the success of their fairly young company to one thing: their ability to listen and act on what they hear. ReBecca gives this example:

"In 2011, we recognized that cultured marble in our area was becoming less and less popular. We were hearing comments such as 'this reminds me of my grandma's shower.'"

In response, the company re-evaluated its offering and decided to "bring life back to cast polymer" by learning an old veining technique used in the 1970s, Corey says.

"Our talented production staff modified the look for our own unique version that we call 'realistic marble,'" he explains. At the same time, that staff was learning a new way of manufacturing: TruStone, which uses imaging to create unique finished looks on cast polymer surfaces. The combination of the old method brought back to life, and the new method, which creates a vast array of possible looks, gave the company the ability "to provide a wide variety of custom options and styles to fit any budget," the Erdmanns explain.

ReBecca says that today, when a customer comes into the showroom, they are greeted with an experienced, knowledgeable staff that has been trained to answer the many questions that can arise when dealing with a broad spectrum of tastes and budgets. Sand & Swirl has designed that showroom both for consumers and as a place contractors can send their customers to make selections.

Meanwhile, the couple continues their quest to build the company's reputation for quality. That begins with an installation training program Corey developed based on high standards of quality.



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The showroom is an important part of the Sand & Swirl selling process.



“Corey was always the type of installer that contractors request for their jobs,” ReBecca says. “He wrote up very specific detailed installation guidelines that constitute high craftsmanship finished product that we can stand by,” she continues. Installers train on the job for up to three months, then are eased into the more difficult installations as they pick up the steps they need to follow Corey’s guidelines.

Corey explains that: “Having a bad experience like a leaking floor gives the whole industry a bad name. Our installers understand this and we continue to provide any follow-up training as needed.”

The company also has regular installer meetings to go over new issues that arise as well as production team meetings to analyze customer feedback, address current needs, go over waste-tracking results and address root causes of any problems.

Corey measures each job for production himself and handles both maintenance and production to keep abreast of issues as they arise.

Meanwhile, ReBecca continues to manage the financials as well as payroll, office operations and marketing.

That marketing, like the company itself, covers both old and new ground. Sand & Swirl uses print ads and home shows combined with a strong website presence, social media and a blog.

“We feel the blog is a good way to educate and answer questions about our company and our products,” ReBecca explains.

The company also relies on the oldest method of marketing in the industry: word of mouth.

“It’s why we spend so much of our effort on high quality. We know a lot of our growth comes from our reputation,” ReBecca says.

The company has outgrown the facility the Erdmanns finished in 2008 and is starting construction on a new facility that will be finished sometime early next year.

“Our new facility will allow us to increase our production capability and improve our showroom offerings along with expanding our line of products,” ReBecca says.

It may also help the couple in their goal to seek more time with each other and family.

“We have a great staff in all areas of our business, and we are now able to leave for long weekends,” ReBecca explains. “We do play as hard as we work, and we want more time to enjoy everything Utah has to offer such as camping, driving ATVs [all-terrain vehicles] and motorcycles. We both love old muscle cars, and Corey restores them,” ReBecca says.

Meanwhile, the couple says working together has never been a problem.

“We complement each other very well and have always agreed on the vision. He handles his part of the business and is out in the field quite a bit while I handle my part in the office and showroom. We go to lunch pretty much every day and can discuss issues then as needed. Believe it or not, we do not discuss work much at home!” ReBecca says. ■

GENILEE PARENTE is managing editor of **MasterCast™ Connection**. She welcomes suggestions on companies to profile as well as suppliers to feature in a special column. Reach her at gsparente@verizon.net.



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MARCH 22-24
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Put on your cowboy hat and meet us in TEXAS



THE THREE DAYS SET ASIDE FOR POLYCON Texas 2017 are jam-packed with activities and valuable programming on a schedule that stretches this year from Wednesday through Friday. This upcoming event also has more opportunities to visit with sponsors and lots of time set aside for one of the most important aspects of the meeting: networking.

POLYCON Texas 2017, Building a Solid Future Together, is March 22-24 with the main programming on Thursday at the Sheraton Arlington Hotel in Arlington, TX and the Friday plant demonstrations at the Marshall-Gruber Company in nearby Mansfield. The POLYCON planning committee has given the event and festivities a Texas flavor with social activities and tours around the Dallas-Fort Worth culture.

Check-in and registration begins Wednesday afternoon, March 22, then attendees have a wide range of activities they can choose for that afternoon. Those activities include:

- A tour of the Marshall-Gruber facility for manufacturer members
- Tours of the AT&T Cowboys Stadium or the Texas Rangers Stadium
- Several public courses for those looking to play a round of golf
- A visit to the Fort Worth Stockyards National Historic District
- A chance to see genuine Texas cowhands drive a herd of Texas longhorns down Exchange Avenue in the Stockyards National Historic District

Some activities and tours require advance reservations, so visit the POLYCON website (www.POLYCONevent.com) for more information.

On Wednesday evening, POLYCON attendees will get together for their first Texas celebration during a two-hour welcoming reception at Stockyards Station in Fort Worth hosted by R.J. Marshall Company and Marshall-Gruber Company. Details on the party, including room location, are on the POLYCON website (www.POLYCONevent.com).

On Thursday, March 23, the day begins with sponsor table visits that include give-a-ways. One of the tables this year will be an ICPA Membership and History Table. It will be filled with memorabilia from the past 20 or more years of the association.

Also this year will be a “best of the best” display, and attendees will vote for the most innovative product design, process or service in the industry. Winners will be announced and awards given out at Thursday night’s dinner. (See www.POLYCONevent.com for the rules of this competition.)

Honors at POLYCON

Several awards are presented at POLYCON honoring outstanding individuals and companies in the cast polymer industry.

- The 2017 awards will include the Royce Newsom Pioneer Award named in honor of the late Royce Newsom. This special award will be given to individuals that have made a difference to the association and industry through their efforts over many years. Recipients are selected by the ICPA Awards Committee.
- ICPA’s President also selects an outstanding individual to receive the coveted President’s Award.
- This year, honors will also be given to those companies and individuals receiving the most votes for POLYCON’s best of the best display.

The honors are presented during a special dinner Thursday night in the Sheraton Arlington’s Plaza on the Hill Ballroom.



POLYCON mixes smaller sessions with group learning.

The POLYCON program begins Thursday at 8:30 a.m. with a welcome by Executive Director Jennifer Towner and an update on current ICPA activities by President Bill Sanders. The morning session will include a presentation by a dynamic business coach, sponsor presentations, regulatory updates and a Q&A with a panel of industry experts. Throughout the morning, attendees will learn best business practices, hear about the latest and greatest products and services available to the industry, receive a regulatory update and get an opportunity to get specific technical and marketing questions answered.

Thursday afternoon is devoted to the popular roundtable discussions with four different sessions going on at various times throughout the afternoon. Attendees can pick and choose which they want to attend. Topics address issues as critical as silica-combustible dust; safety and quality controls and regulations; automation efficiencies and how they can decrease labor costs; workers-comp audit survival; market strategies, selection center techniques and other sales tools; new and next generation technologies; and business process software. The roundtables end with more sponsor table visits.

Thursday evening a reception hosted by IP Corporation will be held on the hotel's veranda, followed by a festive dinner in the Plaza on the Hill Ball-

room, at which industry awards and recognition will occur.

On Friday, March 24, attendees will participate in a day of hands-on plant demonstrations that will give them an opportunity both to learn about, and also try out new techniques and technologies. The demonstrations will be held at the Marshall-Gruber Company facility, 220 Airport Drive in Mansfield, TX. Those demonstrations include Autocaster operation, maintenance and repair; mold building and repair; spray equipment upkeep; innovative manufacturing techniques and more. New this year are sponsor exhibit tables set up at the plant. Attendees will also enjoy a luncheon of local Texas barbecue.

Details are all available on the website, but attendees should note that early bird registration runs from now until January 31 and special hotel reservation rates at the Sheraton based on availability can be obtained until March 1. ■

For information or to view the At-A-Glance schedule, go to www.POLYCONevent.com.

Fort Worth's historic stockyards

People who visit Fort Worth's Stockyard Historic District are greeted with several options for entertainment and dining from local Texas barbecue joints to honky-tonks to a stockyard museum. This year's ICPA attendees will gather in the area Wednesday night for an opening reception. Some members may already be in the area because several tours have been planned, including a viewing of the twice-a-day real cattle drive that goes through the area.

But what are the stockyards?

The stockyards were once marketing outlets for millions of cattle, hogs and sheep—the last stop on a long drive from ranches in the old West. Between 1866 and 1890, for example, more than four million head of cattle passed through the area, which gave it the nickname “Cowtown.” The arrival of the railroad in 1876 turned the city of Fort Worth into a major shipping point for all livestock so the



FORT WORTH CONVENTION CENTER

first of the stockyards (Union Stockyards) was constructed. Those marketing centers were bought for a whopping \$133,333.33 in 1893 by a Boston-based capitalist, who changed the name to Fort Worth Stockyards Company and approached his neighbors to get into the business of meatpacking. By 1900, the investors in the area had convinced several major meat processors (Armour & Co.; Swift & Co.) to build plants near the stockyards. Those two processors flipped a coin and Armour won the toss to build the first of the plants. In 1902 an exchange building went in and the area became known as “The Wall Street of the West.”

The stockyards have persisted in some form ever since, having suffered from several disastrous fires as well as drought and floods. The year 1944 was a peak year for operation; almost 5.3 million head of livestock were processed. Unfortunately, the industry crumbled after that peak as trucking changed how things were done and smaller operations sprang up all over the country. By 1985, stockyard sales bottomed out at about 57,181 animals.

However, by that time, the stockyard also had become a historical landmark. A museum was opened and tourism began to flourish.

Today, there's still a booming livestock business in the area, but there are just as many tourists who come for good eating, cowboy music and events.



Presenting yourself at a home show

BY GENILEE
PARENTE

BECAUSE SO MANY CAST POLYMER COMPANIES have at least some of their business in the residential building market, manufacturers use area home shows to get the word out about their products. But home shows are also about putting yourself before builders and about creating a general image of the cast polymer industry.

Setting up a booth at an event rich with potential customers is a great marketing tool. However, sending in your vendor registration fee is only the first step. There are guidelines that people who use trade shows on a regular basis will share that can help your company and whomever you've selected to attend that show succeed in turning the mass of potentials into real leads.

Here are tips gathered from a number of sources on what can help:

- **Plan for the show.** If you're spending your hard-earned cash on an exhibitor fee, know why you're there and plan for your event. How you do that planning may be determined by the "why." If you're there just for exposure, make sure the materials you bring are attention-getting and your goal is to create a professional image with those materials as well as the booth. If you chose the show to compete against other types of kitchen and bath surfaces, what you say in that booth should reflect the benefits of cast polymer. As part of the planning process, look at the exhibit hall and ask for a space that will give you maximum exposure and traffic.
- **Put on your best face.** When facing the masses of people flowing by your booth, you only have a few seconds to grab someone's attention and get them to stop. You need a space de-

signed to capture and draw them in. It may be worth a few extra dollars to hire a professional to create your booth. But as the owner or manager in charge, you should also put yourself in those meandering people's shoes for a few minutes, step back from your exhibit and see what they see. Slabs of pretty material may not grab their attention as effectively as a few choice words that are banner size. (Want a bathroom with beauty that won't fade? Want a kitchen surface that doesn't require constant maintenance? Ask us about it!) When manning the booth, you don't need to wear a suit and tie, but you can take advantage of what you do wear by having shirts or hats with your logo.

- **Populate the booth with the right people.** You may be the person who needs to be in your booth. You know your product and believe in it more than anyone else. However, if you're a wallflower, having a booth will do you little good. You need to select someone who's a natural talker. That person doesn't have to be a slick sales person, but he or she needs to enjoy socializing because that's what will put booth visitors at ease. Show attendees are there to have fun while thinking about their homes or their businesses.
- **Create an interactive environment.** The more you can find a way to connect, the better the chances of someone stopping at your booth. There are many ways to do this from dressing up a staff member and getting them to hand out a coupon or some other incentive for visiting your booth to setting up a looping photo slideshow or a video of your project work that may make people stop in their tracks to watch. The interaction also can be as simple as handing out a sheet of "test your knowledge of cast polymer" or more complicated such as setting up a live demonstration of how your product is made.
- **Let people know beforehand you'll be there.** Get the most out of your exhibitor fee by helping to publicize the event and the fact you'll be participating. Invite prospects and customers to meet you at the show and give them an incentive for doing so. This can help your image of a busy booth but it also maximizes the show's worth. Use your social media channels and website to tout the show—not just your particular booth, but the entire show and its worth.
- **Have something people will take away with them.** Even if they throw your brochure in the trash, you should ensure you have something to hand to people. That might be a giveaway such as a pen or a magnet, which involves some expense. But just the act of handing them something will at least ensure they stop long enough to receive it. And chances are, they'll stick it in a bag and look at it later.

- **Follow up, follow up, follow up.** You can have the most successful show ever in terms of how many people visit your booth and how top notch they are as potential customers. But if you rest on your laurels and drop the ball when you get back to the office, all the time you or your booth person spent is wasted. You need to create a system for ensuring that every person you put down as a possibility or who wanted more information is immediately contacted.

What not to do

There are some definite "no-no's" when it comes to manning a booth. These should be stressed to whatever employees or sales people have responsibility for shows—even those that just stop by for a quick chat with their fellow employees. Keep these in mind:

- **Put away the cell phone.** Many people are sick and tired of seeing people distracted by their electronic devices. You may need a tablet or even your phone if you use some kind of tracking software. But booth attendants should never be texting or talking on a cell phone—even during the quieter moments.
- **Avoid sitting down.** Most home shows have a place where exhibitors can go to rest and refresh. While you're manning a booth, don't sit on a chair or stool. Stand or pace nearby.
- **Don't have food or drinks in your booth.** Nothing looks sloppier than a person holding a bag of chips or a soda. You wouldn't allow eating or drinking in your showroom, so don't allow it in a booth.
- **Tell your friends to stay home.** While it's nice to get support from people you know, having acquaintances show up to give you support will only distract you from connecting with new, potential customers.

Have a good show

Spring is arriving soon and with it comes many opportunities for connecting to people through home shows. These shows are often heavily attended, which means much exposure for your company. However, one factor to always keep in mind is that it's not the number of people that your booth draws in that counts at these shows. It's what engages them when they are there and what impressions they take out the door with them. ■

GENILEE PARENTE is managing editor of **MasterCast™ Connection**. She'd like to hear from members about how they use home shows and other marketing tools to build up their business. Reach her at gsparente@verizon.net.

Understanding who owns or wants today's homes



SEVERAL REPORTS CAME OUT late in fall that reveal that, despite the fact the younger generation has had to deal with financial woes, they are starting to play a heavy role in the housing market. For those that make products sold into that market, that means the Millennial Generation and how it interacts with older generations is important in understanding where future business may be.

The millennial influence

A first-of-its kind survey by real estate company Zillow revealed that millennials influence the market in ways not yet measured. Zillow's report went so far as to say this generation is not only fueling the current housing market, it may also be changing that market. Zillow also reports on how millennials and other generations are looking to improve the homes they buy, and how heavily they rely on contractors to give them advice and help.

The generation that is ages 18 to 35 now make up half of today's home buyers, Zillow's report said. Although these people came of age during a huge recession, they still believe in the American dream and are using every available resource they can—scraping together downpayments from savings, gifts and

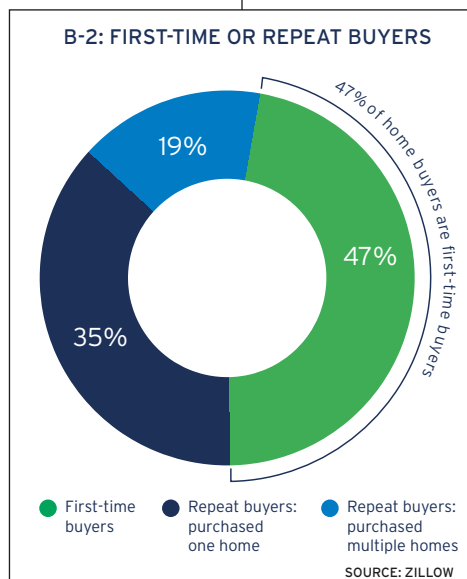
retirement funds—to buy bigger homes or to buy homes they can afford to fix up. They are waiting until they are a bit older than their grandparents were when they first purchased a house, but they're buying, and both millennials and younger Generation Xers are searching for bargains. In fact, the Zillow report found that the modern-day “starter home” is nearly as large as the median home size for move-up buyers, yet costs about 18% less.

Zillow talked to more than 13,000 homeowners, sellers, buyers and renters for its survey. Based on those responses, the company reported that the average buyer of a home today

is a college-educated person (75%) in their mid-to-late 30s or early 40s, who is married (67%) and on the hunt for a single-family home (83%). Millennials (18-34) make up 42% of those home buyers.

Meanwhile, sellers today are most often Generation Xers (38%) and most (63%) are listing a home for the first time. Those sellers are frequently trading for an upgrade, spending about 11% more and seeking about 100 more square feet.

Interestingly, more than half of all homeowners today purchased a property that needed updates and though most say they prefer to do the work them-



selves (62%), they also rely heavily on expertise for more extensive work.

What's typical

The typical home purchased today has about 1,900 square feet and features three bedrooms, 2.2 full baths and one partial bath, and has a price tag of about \$222,000, Zillow reported. The typical homeowner has a median age of 52, has a median income of \$62,500, is married (66%) and has a college degree (64%). Millennial homeowners are more diverse than all previous generations with 17% Latino or Hispanic (compared to about 4% of the oldest generation and 9% overall average).

More than half (53%) of homeowners today live in the first home they purchased. More than half of the homes owned were built in 1980 or earlier with just 12% built after 2005.

Renovations

Millennials are more likely than any other generation to buy a home that needs renovation—84% made minor renovations to their homes, and 67% made major renovations (compared to people who are over 65—68% made minor and 39% made major renovations). Overall, almost six in 10 buyers (57%) make major repairs to the properties they buy or own.

Meanwhile, the average homeowner reports making 6.7 improvements to what he or she owns. Common large improvements include a bathroom overhaul (30%), kitchen overhaul (22%), modifying their existing floor plan (16%) and finishing their basement (13%). Owners aged 65-75 are more likely to have completed a bathroom (36%) or kitchen overhaul (28%), whereas millennials are slightly more likely to have finished their basements (16%).

Of those who made bathroom improvements, about 42% of all homeowners made minor repairs and 30% made major renovations. The top reason by far for making the changes was to express personal style (66%), which is particularly true for millennials (78% made upgrades to express themselves).

Tell me what to do

Very few homeowners today look to a real estate agent or broker for advice on how to improve their home (9%) and only about 14% talk to a designer or architect. Most seek the advice of home improvement retailers (70%) and professional contractors (55%). Other sources are friends (52%), online resources (49%), and other media such as magazines, videos and direct mail.

THE TYPICAL HOMEOWNER HAS PLANS TO TACKLE AT LEAST THREE PROJECTS ON HIS OR HER HOME IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS.

When it comes to who actually makes the renovations, most (55%) rely on a contractor or professional, though there is much do-it-yourself (DIY) occurring as well.

In making repairs or renovations, the older a person is, the more likely they are to rely on professionals: The oldest generation is about split in half on DIY versus contractors whereas millennials are split 69% DIY to 31% contractor. Kitchen overhauls are done 53% of the time in entirety by a professional and bathrooms are 48% done by professionals.

Interestingly, the budgets for people who hire a professional are much more likely to get blown than DIY projects. Almost 40% come in over budget compared to just 21% for DIY.

The typical homeowner has plans to tackle at least three projects on his or her home in the next three years. The most common are painting (44%), upgraded floor (31%), then updating kitchen (26%). Millennials and their families are the most likely to have projects in the pipeline (27% plan on five or more projects); but they are also the most likely by far to do the project themselves.

A second report

An annual report by the National Association of Realtors (NAR) backed up some of what Zillow said about today's generations of buyers and sellers and also found that two key segments of buyers missing in action the last few years have rebounded: first-time home buyers and single women.

NAR's annual Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers found that first-time buyers rose to 35% of the market, which is the highest amount since 2013 and a revival from a 30-year low of 32% in 2015. Still, in the 35 years NAR has been gathering data, that number has averaged 40%.

NAR Chief Economist Lawrence Yun says the numbers this year reflect that "young adults are settling down and deciding to buy a home after what was likely a turbulent beginning to their adult life and career following the Great Recession."

Yun says that those under age 35 made up about 61% of first-time buyer transactions over the course of the year. Single female buyers are on the rise as is the age of first-time buyers—the median age of first-time buyers was 32, which matches the all-time high set in 2006.

While the increases in new home buyers is encouraging, the overall share of the market is still subpar, Yun said, partly because of the lack of affordable inventory, lower wages and student debt.

Still, "even with the affordability challenges many buyers face, the allure of homeownership is not lost among the younger generation," he added. ■



How to talk about pricing

without scaring people off

BY MEGHAN KEANEY ANDERSON

SEX. POLITICS. RELIGION. Now that those are out of the way, let's talk about another topic rarely broached at the marketing dinner table: Pricing. I know it's a scary topic for anyone who offers businesses or consumers products or services. You'd rather talk about what you make, how you can help potential customers, or frankly, anything else in the world. And compared to the excitement of attracting a potential new customer, pricing seems like such a killjoy.

Many company owners leave bringing up the topic to their sales force, preferring to be the "good cop" in the customer relationship. But pricing is just as important a concept to communicate as the features of your product or the benefits of your service. In fact, they go hand in hand.

So when is the right time to talk about pricing, and what's the right way to go about it? Read on for my tips.

Where does pricing fit?

Just as educational content is important at the top of the marketing funnel, useful pricing content that helps potential customers make a decision is critical as they work their way down the funnel toward a purchase. In the right context, pricing materials can be engaging.

A note about tone

To begin with, stop thinking of pricing as something you need to hide from the customer, and start thinking of it as something to bring up for the sake of the customer. Like any good inbound marketing tool, your pricing materials should be designed to

help prospective customers make the decision that's best for them. Provide them with the simplest explanation of your pricing, and then think about the related questions they would have at this juncture. In other words: don't sell—explain.

A note about timing

I'll provide some additional information about understanding how to time your pricing content later in this article, but in general, there are two moments when pricing is important to a prospective buyer:

- In the beginning, when they are just trying to figure out if your pricing is even in the ballpark of what they can afford.
- At the end, right before making a purchasing decision, when they are weighing the cost and benefit of buying.

Both of those moments are important, but they are important for different reasons. The first is an opportunity for leads to self-select whether they'd be a fit with what you offer or not. It's not a bad thing if they look at your pricing materials and rule themselves out; it can end up saving your company and sales team a tremendous amount of time and resources.

The second instance occurs when the lead is heavily weighing a purchasing decision and is figuring out the budget. In this instance, a prospect needs more details and a way to communicate the pricing to other decision-makers or budgetary authorities on their own team. Consider having a clear, easy-to-understand pricing page for the first scenario, and an addi-

tional document that provides more of a breakdown for later in the relationship.

Should you put pricing on your website?

Most kitchen and bath surfaces makers choose not to include pricing on their website, and instead require a potential customer to call for a quote. The reasoning behind this is understandable. For example, the company might not want to run the risk of turning off a potential buyer before the chance to demonstrate the value of the product/service has occurred. (This is particularly the case for companies that sell big-ticket products or services and have longer sales cycles.) Some companies also have a complex pricing model built on whether

the customer is commercial or consumer. These are both good reasons.

But as someone whose main desire is to market our own products and services, our job should be to make prospective customers' lives as easy as possible—to anticipate needs and make research go smoothly. Whether you like it or not, understanding costs is a fundamental piece of that research. Holding back on pricing information until a prospect talks to a sales rep is a little bit like not telling your new boyfriend you still live at home with your parents. He may be comfortable with seeing your dad in his bathrobe, but the bottom line is: If you withhold that critical information until he's already invested days and months, he'll feel misled.

Value: Evaluating the true cost of a product or service

By Linda Lullie Often, the perception of a product is formed as soon as people learn the price, like when they first see a product on the shelf of a store. While their final decision to buy may be based on price, it's more economical to base it on value, and that perception may differ for everyone. Value is defined as worth or importance; the adequate or satisfactory return on, or recompense for, something. Things have value, or are of value, or are valued. Price is different. Price is defined as the cost of something bought or sold; what a customer must pay for something. Value is more about what you're willing to pay based on your internal voice.

A price might be high, low or somewhere in between. What matters is whether or not that particular product or service is going to be valuable to prospective customers.

Business-to-business customers, for example, look at a product and ask themselves:

- Will this help me to make more money?
- Will this bring me more customers?
- Will this enhance my business?
- Will it make my business more viable in the marketplace?

Consumers are likely to also want to know:

- Will having this product make me more secure or happier?
- In a few years, would I be more likely to regret buying or not buying it?

For a company such as Inspired 2 Design to deliver value to its customers, we consider the "total market offering." This includes our reputation, our staff experience/knowledge, the product benefits, and technological characteristics as compared to alternative market offerings and prices. In this case, value can

be defined as the relationship of Inspired 2 Design's services to those of other companies/options for what someone believes is the same product.

The key to delivering high perceived value is attaching value to each offering, showing customers that what you are giving them is beyond expectation. (In other words, your product helps solve a problem, offers a solution, gives results and makes them happy). Therefore, quality comes into play when considering value for a price. A good example from what we offer is websites. To show a company such as those that belong to ICPA how important a site is, we would provide the following pitch:

Internet marketing is ultimately one of the most inexpensive forms of advertising when broken down by cost per impression. A website lets companies reach a wide and varied audience for a small fraction of traditional advertising. The nature of the medium allows consumers to research their options quickly, giving business owners a fast turnaround for conversions. Your website's content and design must communicate your message immediately; It must be relevant and attractive enough to entice your visitors to click or call. This makes your choice of design/development provider even more critical and increases the perceived value of the service that does the job well.

How do we add value in this case? By presenting ourselves as the provider of quality, service and experience with value and then tying it all in with authenticity. We offer clients a promise of those key elements, which allows us to take the high road.

Try that approach when considering your own products and how they should be priced. List the value that your customers perceive they get. That may help you decide whether a particular product can be priced high, mid or low in comparison to your competitors.

Editor's Note: Inspired 2 Design, LLC, which is helping ICPA with several design projects, has a blog that addresses some core issues of branding that may interest manufacturers. This recent example addressed the role pricing has on how people perceive a product.

LINDA LULLIE is co-owner of Inspired 2 Design (www.inspired2designllc.com), a full service graphic and website design firm. Reach her at linda@inspired2designllc.com.

That having been said, there are instances when a pricing page on your website doesn't work out. If your pricing really does depend on a case-by-case basis and requires an assessment, for example, a pricing page probably won't make sense. Still, consider giving website visitors ballpark figures or another way to get a sense of rates before making them take the time to call.

Six pricing best practices

Whether your prices are listed on a sheet of paper and changed frequently or posted on a page on your website, here are six best practices to keep in mind when creating a listing:

1) Don't overwhelm your viewers.

Customers come to your website, your physical location or a home show or other place where they compare products with one big question: "What does it cost?" Make sure your listed prices satiate that need first and foremost, and then provide supporting information afterwards. Keep price lists uncluttered so it's not difficult to find the figures they need. If your pricing is more complex, at least consider giving viewers a clear starting point for your pricing information. A quick example is this pricing page of ADT Home Security (www.adt.com).

2) Be very clear about the value they'll be getting for the price.

Pricing materials shouldn't read like an invoice. Make sure the value of your products/services is evident on your pricing pages and clearly aligned with your prices. For more advice on the buyer's perspective of value in pricing, I asked Patrick Campbell, CEO of Price Intelligently (www.priceintelligently.com), a price optimization company as well as a HubSpot customer. He explained the concept of value metrics.

"If you're selling eggs," he explained, "then you'll charge a customer for each egg, and you can even give them a deal to purchase one dozen or more. There's a clear exchange in value for the price. Even in complex products, there should be a clear definition of what additional value each increment in price gets you. Pricing in this manner assures you're charging the customer for the actual value you're providing."

3) If you have pricing levels, help them find the right fit.

Try to minimize indecision on your pricing lists and list of associated materials. If you provide different pricing packages, give your prospects hints about how to assess their own fit for each one. Highlighting your "best offer" is one thing, but giving viewers a set of questions or scenarios that will help them determine which package is best for their particular needs can be extremely helpful. HubSpot's own

pricing page has a 'Compare packages' drop-down menu (www.hubspot.com/pricing/marketing#?currency=USD) that helps differentiate our various packages from each other.

4) Address questions.

Remember, before they ever talk to you, prospective customers are doing plenty of research online. Why not take the opportunity to leverage search engine optimization and turn unanswered pricing questions into traffic and leads for your company? HubSpot user and partner Marcus Sheridan wrote a great blog post earlier this year about how he turned a common pricing query into a search magnet (www.socialmediaexaminer.com/5-reasons-your-content-marketing-must-address-price). In the pool industry at the time, Sheridan realized that many people were searching Google for information about fiberglass pool pricing. By writing an article entitled "How Much Does a Fiberglass Pool Cost?" he could attract searchers and channel them into scores of leads for his company. In fact, Marcus attributes \$1 million in swimming pool sales to that one pricing-focused article.

5) Reassure their decisions.

In pricing content, it never hurts to integrate social proof (for a good article on this, go to our blog at blog.hubspot.com and read: 10 Ways to Instantly Amplify the Social Proof of Your Marketing) to assure the buyer that he or she is making the best possible call. Don't overcrowd your core information, but find places to weave in content that show how purchasing a product or service pays off. Examples of social proof include:

- Names of other companies that have bought from you
- Results your company has achieved or return on investment data
- Hand-picked testimonials
- Social media or third-party site testimonials
- Customer case studies.

6) Make it easy to email and print.

This may seem like a minor detail, but purchasing decisions often involve more than one person, especially in a business-to-business setting. You can help your prospective customers by creating pricing information in a format that's easy to share, send around for review and print if need be.

Pricing is just as much a marketing tool as it is a sales discussion. Instead of shying away from creating content on pricing or avoiding the topic altogether, tackle the issues head on, and put prospective customers' needs first. ■

MEGHAN KEANEY ANDERSON is vice president of marketing at The HubSpot (www.hubspot.com), an inbound marketing consulting company. Reach her at [@meghkeaney](https://twitter.com/meghkeaney). This article was adapted from blog.hubspot.com.

POLYCON has its own website

Because of the significance of ICPA's premier annual show POLYCON, the event has its own website this year. The most up-to-date schedule, event registration, data on the specifics of the meeting and information on available sponsorships can be found at: www.POLYCONevent.com. POLYCON Texas 2017 is March 22-24 at the Sheraton Arlington Hotel, Arlington, TX with demonstrations at the Marshall-Gruber Company, 220 Airport Drive, Mansfield, TX (see pages 10 and 11).



ICPA membership growing strong

Following a membership campaign that began in August, ICPA reached new milestones in its formation with the addition of several new members. At this writing the membership is at 76 members. The association went over 50 for manufacturer members during the month of September, which is significant because it matched the requirement with ACMA to receive the next round of funding from ICPA reserves. This money will be invested to ensure ICPA will continue to grow, as well as strengthen the association and the industry. The ICPA membership is at the highest number it's been in years—a level attained just one year after the official association's tax-exempt status occurred.

ICPA also is now an international association with members in Canada, Mexico and Columbia, South America.

The membership rolls reflect the adopted logo of the association: "Moving Forward with Forward Thinking."

For a complete list of members, visit ICPA's website at www.TheICPA.com and look under "membership directory."

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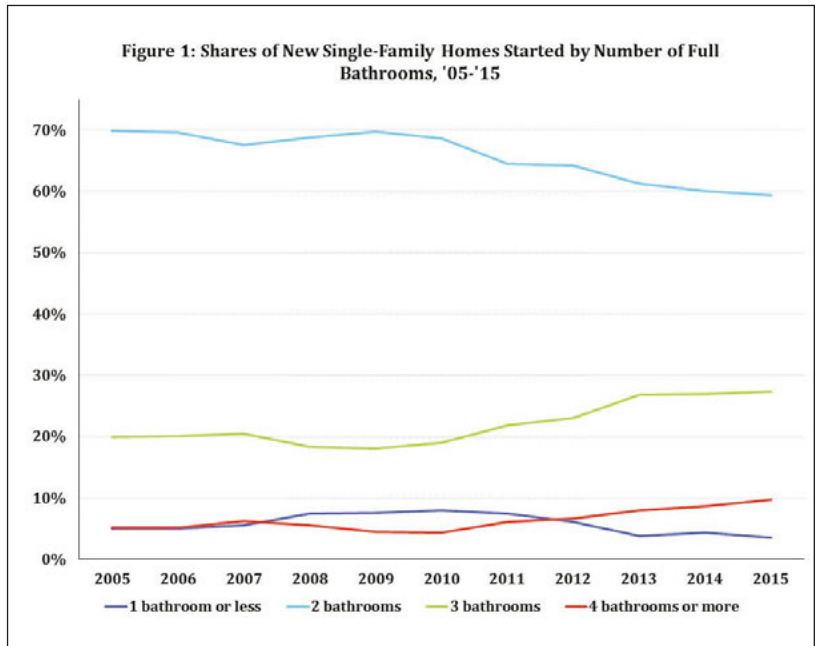
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OTHER NEWS OF NOTE

Are people building more bathrooms?

Builders seem to be putting in more bathrooms in recent years according to figures from the U.S. Census Bureau (2015's Survey of Construction). The share of new single-family homes in that survey that had one or less full bathrooms is about 4% compared to 10% that have four or more full bathrooms; 27% had three full baths; and 59% had two full baths. In 2005, houses with two baths were at 70% while those with one bath were about the same as those with four or more and those with three were at about 20%.

The National Association of Home Builder's Eye on Housing says figures from recent years may reflect a move by builders to focus on the higher-end, largest homes after the recession. It says, however, that figures this year (second quarter 2016) find that overall square footage of homes shows a reverse in size and that growth in smaller homes such as townhomes



SOURCE: NAHB AND 2015 SURVEY OF CONSTRUCTION

is occurring in response to first-time buyers returning to the market.

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Small businesses agree independence is worth it

Seventy percent of respondents to a recent survey thought that owning their own company was the best job they'd ever had despite the financial and personal hardships.

The survey was conducted by Endurance International Group, which talked to more than 2,850 small-business owners.

About half of the survey respondents (43%) said the most attractive aspects of this "job" were the freedom and flexibility and another 22% said that ownership was fulfilling their own dream.

Still, the respondents were realistic about what they faced: 35% said that they work more than full-time and 14% said they work 24/7.

By far, "me time" is the biggest concern in owning a business: 37% of respondents said having no differentiation between work and personal lives was a major sacrifice required and 35% said they had very little personal time.

Financial woes was also a significant concern: 37% said being completely financially invested in their business was



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a major worry and 32% reported that tough financial times is the most difficult part of owning a business. What's more, 64% said that if someone offered them a million dollars, they'd hand over the business.

Still, despite concerns, small-business owners were split on whether owning a small business was the hardest job they'd had: 44% said "yes" while 45% said "no."

Manufacturing good for graduation rates



Children of parents without college degrees are more likely to finish high school and university if they live in one of the nation's manufacturing centers, a Federal Reserve study shows.

The study by Stephan Whitaker, research economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, compared such students to those that live in areas of the country where there are a high level of college degrees.

Whitaker says that his research has found a "big disconnect" between where human capital is produced and where it's employed. This study was a way to look at how that reality affects high school and college.

Children in areas where degrees are more common and children in manufacturing centers whose parents didn't pursue college are about even on the rate of college graduates, but college-intensive centers of the country have lower rates of high school graduates. Non-degree areas without a high manufacturing base are lower in education attainment across the board, the study found. ■

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Our association's own magazine, *MasterCast Connection*, is filled with features, articles, manufacturer spotlights, and advertising opportunities for suppliers and distributors.



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