

CONNECTION

The best in kitchen and baths

Also:

- Operating with open book management
- How to create web presence
- Making your criticism count

REPORTS
FROM KBIS/
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ON THE COVER: The Kitchen and Bath Industry Show (KBIS), which took place in January, highlights the latest and greatest in kitchens and baths. This issue reports on trends uncovered at KBIS as well as those reported by other housing-related organizations (See "News to know"). In the kitchen, contemporary is taking over and people are asking for sustainable materials and energy efficiency. The kitchen on our cover took home the green design award from the 2017 National Kitchen and Bath Association Design Competition celebrated at KBIS.

Designer: Cassandra Nordell-MacLean, William Standen Co.,
Photo: Gerald Mabee

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Moving forward at a rapid clip



I'M EXCITED TO READ IN THIS ISSUE about one of our member companies—Superior Home Products—who is taking the plunge into a new way of thinking. Owner Chip Daggett has begun using a management technique outlined in the book *The Great Game of Business*. Developed by Jack Stack, it is the business philosophy of open-book management—educating employees exactly how much it costs to run a company.

Chip says it's too early to know how well the system is working, but it's this kind of progressive thinking that will move our industry forward into its next iteration. I wish him well in his endeavors and hope he'll provide us an update on how it goes.

In the meantime, our association is also taking new plunges, and we're starting to feel the effects already. I'm writing this as many of you are traveling to Dallas to attend our third POLYCON meeting, and we know we're breaking all sorts of records for attendance. We've been well ahead of the numbers from previous years all along, and Executive Director Jennifer Towner has done a terrific job of setting up a schedule that is packed with valuable information. Some of that information will appear in the next issue of MasterCast™ Connection. We'll also be posting materials from POLYCON on the POLYCON website at (<http://polyconevent.com/>) as well as the new Member Center section of the ICPA website (www.theicpa.com).

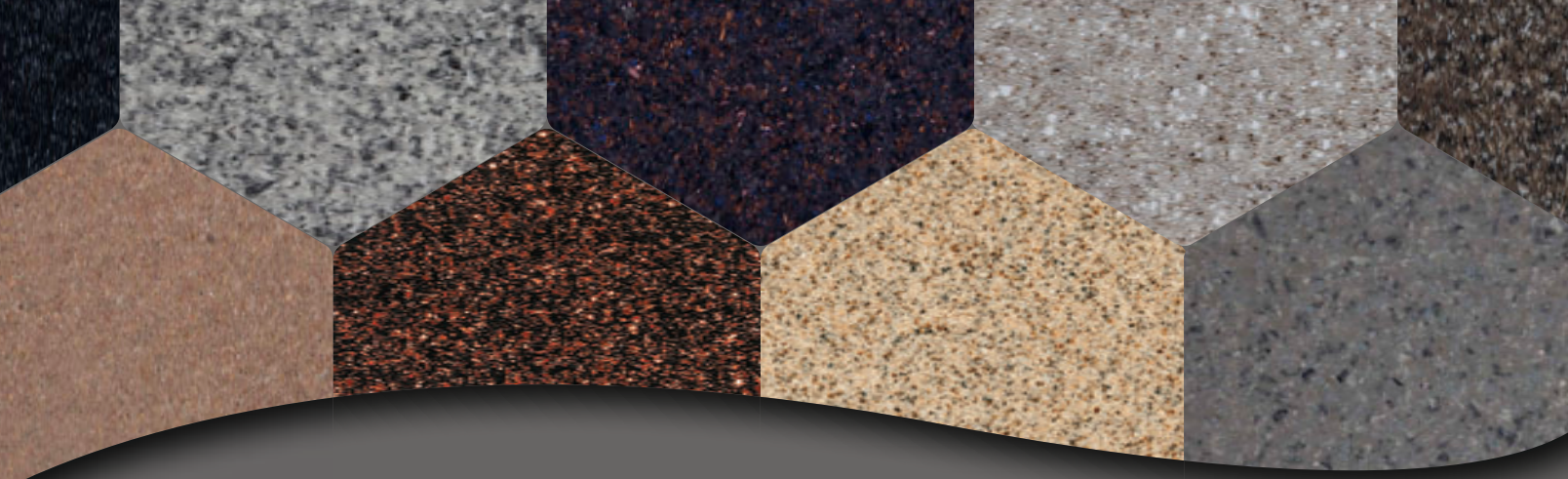
Just as exciting as these new developments, however, is our status in gaining members. We're now up to 83 members, including 57

manufacturers. Considering the fact we've only been dangling the carrot for just over a year (we received our nonprofit status in November 2015), that's pretty astounding. We're expanding not only in numbers across this nation, but across borders. We now have two Mexican and two Canadian members, as well as a member from Columbia and from Germany.

I can't stress enough how vital it is that each of you take on the responsibility for spreading the word about this association. Reach out to the companies you know are out there in need of connecting with ICPA. Tell them about what we've accomplished in such a short time as our new association was formed. But also tell them how our foundation goes back many decades—some of our members have been in this business all their lives. That's part of our strength: We have the knowledge and experience to help these potential new members face many of their issues including operational problems, regulatory challenges, technical needs and much more because most of us have been there.

This association is robust and solid both because we have that base of long-involved members and because we have members like Chip, and administrators and leaders like Jennifer and our board that see the future and know that the cast polymer industry will only get better as we move forward into a new world. ■

“ That's part of our strength: we have the knowledge and experience to help these potential new members face many of their issues



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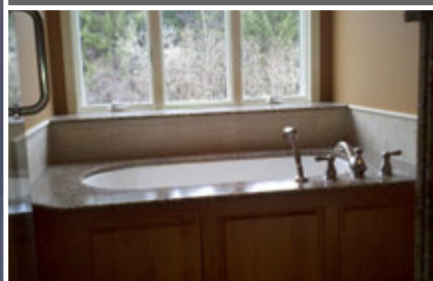
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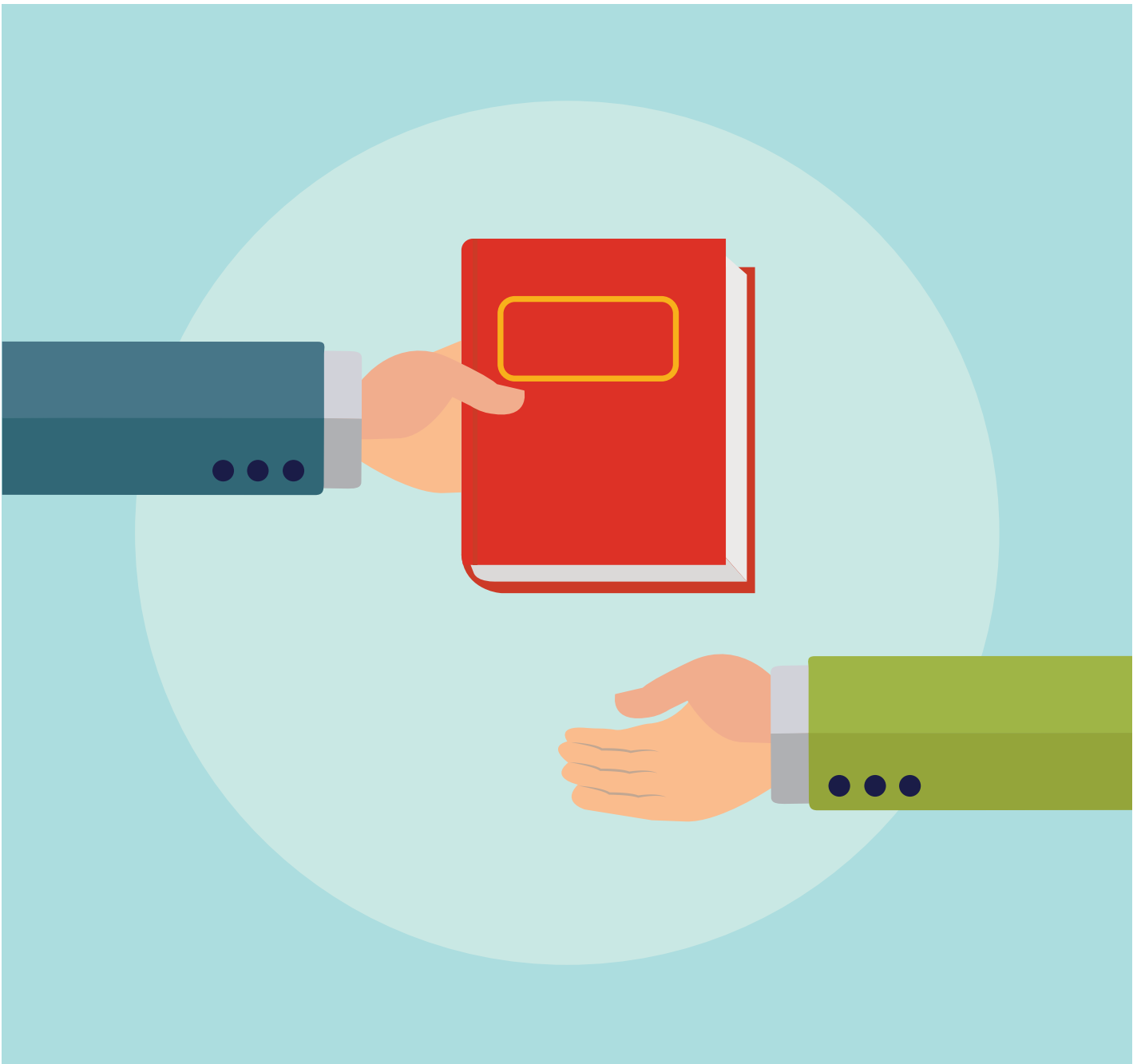
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Can the road to success be paved with open books?



BY GENILEE
PARENTE

AS WITH MANY OWNERS of manufacturing businesses, Chip Daggett, president of Superior Home Products, Wentzville, MO, knows his greatest resource is his own employees, and one of his greatest challenges is keeping those employees motivated and happy.

His approach for the last few years has been to show them exactly what stake they have in the business' outcome by opening the books, then challenging them to influence the bottom line directly.

"I believe that anytime you add a layer of transparency you benefit from the results. The unknown breeds discontent. By getting employees to buy into what's really happening, you give them the sense of purpose and being part of something bigger that many seek," he says.

The great game of business

Several years ago, Daggett was soul searching about how he could get more involvement from employees, how he could make their day-to-day experience with the company more enjoyable and how he could move everyone in the company forward together.

In 2014, his financial advisor suggested a book: *The Great Game of Business* by Jack Stack.

"I read the book several times, and many of the concepts really hit home. I was constantly looking for ways to increase employee wages and still be profitable. I wanted to find a way to use employees in the decision-making process, and I was tired of being the lone ranger in the quest for a better company," he said.

"I realized what I needed to do was ensure that everyone was working towards the same goal: the company's success. If I could show employees that this company doesn't just exist to see how much it can get out of them, I could get them to think more like an owner," he said.

The business concept behind *The Great Game of Business* is to give staff financial knowledge: to show them the real numbers that go into running a company so that they can see for themselves what really makes a business successful.

It's much like using a scoreboard in gaming, and Jack Stack has developed an entire program around the concept.

"Business is no different than fantasy football," Stack said in a recent YouTube interview. Three aspects are needed to make it meaningful: 1) rules to follow, 2) enough information so the person can follow the action and keep score, and 3) the person playing has to have a stake in the game. "The analogy of a game makes it [the whole process of learning numbers] less scary," Stack said in the interview.

The rules of the game are the company's goals and mis-

sions; the information is the finances of how the business operates—the scorecard; and the stake that persons playing the game have are bonuses and other incentives based on the scorecard.

The Great Game of Business process starts by defining a company's "critical numbers"—financial measurements that might have the greatest impact on the business, which could be sales levels, margins, gross profits, cash flow, etc., for the company. For Superior, the company decided to go for one main critical number: gross profits.

The scorecard then uses figures that affect the critical number or numbers—figures such as overhead, materials, production costs, etc.—to track the critical number or numbers on a regular basis.

Superior developed its critical number by doing a complete "360 review"—a business/company assessment of financials, management/operations, the current marketplace, staffing levels and more so that it could zero in on areas that should be the company's focus during the year. The company's management team then came up with what it calls "cost drivers" that affect the critical number and developed a scorecard based on those drivers. The management team also set an annual plan for achieving its goals, as well as monthly targets.

These first steps were all done in 2014/2015 leading up to a roll out to employees mid-year 2015. Meanwhile, a contest was held among employees to come up with a name for the program. "Superior's Road to Success" was the winning tag.

Currently, "Each department concentrates its efforts on how they can have the greatest impact on the critical number through their cost drivers" on the scorecard, Daggett explains.

That scorecard allows the staff to see exactly where its own department or division numbers are, which allows them to see how what they do affects the critical number. The cost driver scorecards are posted weekly, with the score firmed up quarterly when inventories are taken.

The score then translates into a bonus program for employees that exceed a baseline (a financial benchmark of a minimum threshold that establishes the financial security of the company, accounting for taxes, debt obligations, capital improvements and other adjustments to cash).

Where it starts

The whole process starts, however, with financial education—teaching employees the basics of what numbers go into operating a company. It then pivots on getting employees to buy into this new companywide culture change.

Superior began the educational process with managers and

supervisors, who spent several months reviewing and learning the basic financials (balance sheet, income statement, statement of cash flows) and how they pertain to the company. A simplified version of that educational process was then presented to employees showing where all the money goes, broken down by key components of the income statement.

“We used their daily jobs as a point of reference so they could see how what they did as individuals affected the company,” Daggett says.

The company also developed what it calls a “knowledge center” that provides written and other communications directly to employees through tools such as news flashes—short snippets explaining the specifics of Superior’s game plan.

To ensure that the whole process and the annual plan received employee input, the company conducted a survey for feedback before it ever began the rollout, and it continues to adjust according to what goes into a suggestion box as well as feedback at the regular meetings, which are called “huddles.” Scorecards are discussed at the huddles, which take place as a company once a month and more frequently for some departments who want to work on specific issues.

The whole process is an ongoing one that has been put into place gradually, and Daggett says it requires a lot of labor and resources.

“One of the challenges you feel right away is that such an extensive program can be a real time sink,” he says. “It requires time to develop, monitor, make changes, prepare for and hold meetings while trying to keep it fresh and fun,” he adds.

The Origin of The Great Game of Business (The Game)

In 1983 Jack Stack and 12 other managers scraped together \$100,000 in cash and borrowed \$8.9 million to come to the rescue of a failing division of International Harvester. Stack and his team began running that division in an entirely new fashion: by sharing financials. The result was an astonishing turnaround. Today, the division has evolved into a thriving company: SRC Holdings, which has more than 1,200 employees operating 12 business units across a variety of industries that produce more than \$300 million a year in annual sales.

The program itself became known as “The Great Game of Business” when Stack and his company developed a way, through the concept of gaming, to teach employees how to understand the meaning and importance of the numbers and how they affect the rules of the business and a company’s overall goals.

More information on the program and the concepts are available at www.greatgame.com.



But he’s hoping the process will prove worth it not just to the company, but to the individuals involved.

Putting it into practice

Daggett started the process of bringing supervisors and managers online with the concepts after reading Jack Stack’s book. Supervisors and employees worked together to develop a series of mini-games with specific problem-solving goals, such as reducing waste in production, decreasing errors in operations or sales, or keeping damage or mistakes to a certain low level.

These smaller games were designed to educate employees about the process of The Great Game and to reinforce positive behavior by addressing a specific company issue from the perspective of the longer-term of how it affects the company.

Even before the Great Game of Business, Superior Home Products held a companywide meeting each year to review results and performance. This year was the 17th such meeting. During the meeting the company addresses everything from sales and marketing, safety, insurance, operational performance and whether Superior has been profitable.





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Each department had a game name appropriate to their area of expertise such as “block busters” for marble pouring, “finish line” for marble finishing or “gentle handlers” for marble deliveries.

Scorecards then tracked periodic progress, “in much the same way as an inning tracks how a ball game is going,” Daggett explains.

To get more input into what other companies were doing, Daggett attended one of Jack Stack’s “Annual Gathering of Games” conferences, where companies in progress or in pursuit of putting the process into practice get together to share what they’re learning and doing.

The process at Superior continues to evolve as Daggett, his managers/supervisors and employees learn, and while feedback has been positive, the program is too new to be able to measure whether the results are solely due to employee’s efforts, Daggett says.

“This cultural change has been quite a journey and we’re still in the infancy stages of that journey,” he says.

However, one aspect of the program that Jack Stack, Chip Daggett and other leaders using the concepts agree upon is that putting it into place provides employees stability and a sense of job security that the economic crash of the last decade threatened.

“One thing our employees have told us is that they appreciate the fact we are sharing information with them they did not have before,” Daggett says.

But just as important is that employees are learning the practicalities that go along with numbers.

“Without knowing the specifics of what’s happening

A Superior place to work

Superior Home Products is a Missouri-based company that provides cultured granite and marble products, as well as mirrors and shower doors, closet shelving and remodeling services to the residential and commercial markets. The company has served the St. Louis metro area since 1984 and operates out of a 53,000-square-foot manufacturing and production plant and headquarters in Wentzville, MO.

Superior also has showrooms in the Brentwood (St. Louis), MO and Springfield, IL areas and works with most major builders in a growing metro market. It both manufactures and installs products.

Superior currently has 85 employees playing The Great Game of Business.

financially with a company, many employees will tend to fill in the blanks not only with fears about the stability of their jobs, but also misperceptions about how positive sales figures affect profits and cash,” he explains.

By showing them the real numbers and giving them a say in how those numbers are affected, “they have a much better understanding of the financial realities of running a business.”

He definitely thinks the program has accomplished one of his initial goals, which was to give company personnel a sense of involvement.

“Our hope is that this will result in less turnover, less stress on managers and supervisors, improved quality in what we do and, as a result, a better product and higher level of customer satisfaction,” he concludes. ■

GENILEE PARENTE is managing editor of MasterCast™ Connection. She welcomes story ideas on current business practices in the world of surfaces manufacturing as well as suggestions for ICPA companies to profile. Contact her at gsparente@verizon.net.

The management team at Superior now has a new tool in getting employees on board: The Great Game Business. Pictured here (left to right) are: Diane Taylor, office manager; Jim Ratley, field manager; Chip Daggett, president; Dan Ulrich, branch manager/Springfield, IL; Chris Anderson, controller; John Naumann, sales manager; Chris Ludwig, branch manager/Brentwood, MO; Steve Nienaber, operations manager.





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Building an effective web presence

BY LINDA LULLIE

MANY BUSINESSES ARE HESITANT to admit an effective web presence is something they need. That doesn't mean they're old-fashioned—most companies today know they need at least a website. However, they fight the need for a presence because owners and company executives in the cast polymer and other industries are busy—social media and online marketing is just one of too many duties. They're also often unclear, however, what an effective web presence really is, not to mention they have no idea how to go about creating it.

Simply put, an effective web presence means establishing and managing your brand online—it's basically a digital reputation.

The first questions that arise from this reality are: "How do I go about creating a web presence; and how can I ensure it's an effective use of time and resources?"

Website

The most obvious and basic place to start is with your website. Because this site is the place on the web where people go to learn more about your product or company, it's the foundation, the center, the "hub" of every web presence. A well-planned and executed website will be any company's most valuable online marketing asset.

However, Google the term: "What constitutes an effective website?" and you'll get nearly 600 million results! Can there really be that many answers to what makes a website effective? And if not... how do we narrow down whose answers are correct?

To me, the answer is simple: The key to an effective website is you. Today, any business can easily get all the tools they need to take control of the look, the features, the content, the call-to-action that a good website creates. And all of those tools are ways to customize the site to your business goals. This means the first step is to define what "effective" means to you and your company personally. What are your goals for the website; how do they align with your business goals; and how will you measure results?



Websites can achieve a number of things, including:

- Acting as an online brochure
- Educating potential clients
- Increasing brand awareness
- Establishing a company as an industry leader
- Acting as a portal for clients
- Driving new client leads
- Retaining or upselling existing clients
- Selling products



But before you say: I need all of the above, remember the adage: ‘Jack of all trades, master of none.’ Begin by selecting two or three main functions for your website or creating a list that is prioritized. By limiting the scope of what you hope to accomplish through your website, you can be more focused and effective.

If you simply have no idea where to begin, a consultation with a marketing professional can help you determine the best ways to get your message across. A professional marketer can show you how to be true to your brand, which may be as simple as selecting appropriate color palettes or more complicated such as how and where to direct calls to action, how to place different types of content. A professional can provide you input on some of the broader issues such as what wording is effective online versus in print. Such attention to detail may be something that you, as owner or manager, don’t have time to worry about; but details such as this can make a significant difference in how your company is perceived. (See “Choosing a company to help”)

A functional and effective website is the foundation of a complete web presence. But your online marketing doesn’t stop there. After this landing place is created, your next goal has to be to develop ways prospects can find your website. After all, your site is resting among tens of millions of other sites out there, and even though your audience is much narrower, getting your audience to your particular site is going to take effort and planning.

What can be done to build upon this website foundation, increase your visibility and improve traffic flow to your site? Read on.

Inbound links

One way to direct people towards your site is to gain control over what happens at online properties that will list your business. These are directories such as the Yellow Pages, Super Pages, Google My Business, the Better Business Bureau, even Wikipedia. Claiming your business listing or creating a new listing can help build credible inbound links to your website, which is a crucial part of many sites’ ranking algorithms (including Google). When you are asked to update your listing or create a new one, be sure to populate it with as much relevant information as you can. If a directory allows a logo upload, for example, make sure that happens. If you can post photos, add them. Define, then list, your strongest selling points—or define for each listing the single most significant benefit customers looking at that directory are likely to care about from that listing and be sure it’s noted. Most importantly, make sure details such as address, phone number, business hours, website and email address are all current. That may sound

like common sense, but it's surprising how many of us have outdated information floating around.

Online reviews

Another building block to a truly effective internet presence is reviews. Sites such as Google, Merchant Circle and Yelp can expand your web presence significantly and give search engines more to consider when evaluating the value of your site. Having a review when customers get to that listing will often push them towards contacting you first.

So how do you get customers to take the time to review your business? First of all... ask them. The best time to encourage a customer to make a review is at the close of a successful transaction. When you talk to them, thank them by email or by good old fashioned mail. Then ask them for that review. You also might want to provide a customer review card with invoices, receipts and packing materials. Be sure to have a standing link to sites where customers can make reviews on your own website and your social media profiles. The easier and faster it is to find and leave a review, the more likely your customers will be to complete the process.



IMAGE: INSPIRED 2 DESIGN

Choosing a company to help with web presence

If your company has a marketing department with designers, developers and technical support, consider yourself fortunate, but in the minority. In-house marketing has gone by the wayside for most companies. At the same time, everybody and their sister believes they are web designers today.

When you're faced with the task of creating an effective online presence and you need to start with the design of your website, outsourcing is often the viable solution. Taking the time to examine clues when choosing a designer or a full-service marketing firm will provide benefits that go beyond having the coolest website around. Some of the positive traits you want include:

- Start-to-finish project management operation
- Clear communication through all phases of a project
- Big picture performance and ongoing support

Full-service marketing companies also can go beyond the website to offer the design, development and technical services needed to create a fully rounded online presence. Full-service providers offer additional support with search engine marketing, blogging, email campaigns, social media management and other digital programs that drive visitors to that really cool website. Whether you start with the whole gambit or can only afford a few of those extras, be sure to ask what additional services are available because hopefully you can afford them as you feel you need them.

Narrowing down choices for companies to design and support your website starts by looking at portfolios. Established, well-rounded companies will have a comprehensive portfolio of work on their websites. Thoroughly review the portfolios and samples to find features similar to what you want. Also, keep in mind that while design style and taste is important, a well-rounded designer should be able to create

a variety of looks. Once you've found a few companies you like, examine them more closely. Here are few pieces of advice.

10 clues to evaluate vendors

Clue #1: If you're looking to hire a designer and discover he or she doesn't have a website... run in the opposite direction. There is no excuse for a marketing or design company today not to have its own online presence.

Clue #2: If many of the samples on a web designer's site say "Coming soon" or "Page not found," beware. It's likely they do not complete projects.

Clue #3: If a portfolio has samples, but they're all for the same campaign or company, be aware:

It's likely the samples came from design school, not real world business.

Clue #4: If the website or work samples have typos, broken links and outdated information, prepare for history repeating itself. And next time it may be on your dime.

Social media

As much as many business owners and managers hate the thought of social media, achieving a truly effective web presence is only accomplished when a business has some social media footprint. At the very least, top executives and management should have current profiles on LinkedIn, but you can also create a company page on that professional site. Then you can think about which of the other dozens of sites today might be effective for your particular business. Even if you don't see your business interacting daily on the most popular social sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube and Instagram, it's a good idea to set up a business profile and lay claim to your company's brand name (a.k.a. your "handle"), on each of these. Ideally, your handle should be the same as your brand name, your website URL, or as close to those as possible.

Engaging followers on social media can be a challenging task. But today's users expect the brands they follow to be social, conversational and transparent. Creativity is often the key because people want content that is useful, clever, entertaining and unique, and it's that kind of content that goes viral. Often, the goal of posting is to bring a response

such as a Like, a Comment and best of all: a Share. To get to that point, be sure to include images, video and other visual posts because statistically, they prove the most engaging.

Conclusion

Developing and maintaining an effective online presence is not the most difficult part of anyone's job, but it can be time consuming. It also requires a good deal of careful planning and concentrated effort on the part of different parties within the company. Start by assessing your current efforts and the manpower you have available to help you. If you can afford it, the next step may be to hire an outside expert to help in your journey. But even when you do have that professional behind you, the most important step is to recognize that today you have to bite the bullet and realize how much of the world depends on the internet to conduct business. How you are viewed on the web has the potential to determine your success. ■

LINDA LULLIE is co-owner of Inspired 2 Design (www.inspired2designllc.com), a full-service creative agency specializing in website design and hosting, search engine optimization, graphic design and printing, company identity/branding, and more. You can contact Lullie at linda@inspired2designllc.com.

Clue #5: If you're interviewing a designer or marketing individual and he or she doesn't ask these three key questions, expect troubles down the line. They should want to know: What does your company do? What do you hope to achieve? What is your deadline and your other constraints?

Clue #6: If you cannot reach a company by phone or if a company doesn't answer emails in a timely manner after initial contact, be assured: This is a foreshadowing of what's to come when your work project begins.

Clue #7: If you don't receive pricing and a contract in writing, you're not dealing with a professional. Verbal estimates are amateur, indicating the designer or marketing firm is as well.

Clue #8: If the price sounds too good to be true... it probably is. You can expect to either never reach completion of a final project or you'll get what you pay for—cheap. As with any project, it's good business to get quotes from several reputable

companies. What's more, if the company is web only, make sure it's not in another country, which makes communication difficult to impossible.

Clue #9: If you aren't asked to sign a contract... walk away. You need to have certain factors spelled out in writing such as payment terms, who owns what copyright, whether there are royalties or usage limits involved and what the ongoing costs will be. As with any part of your business, you shouldn't hire a contractor—even if it's just to give you a fresh look on your site—without written agreement on deliverables and ownership.

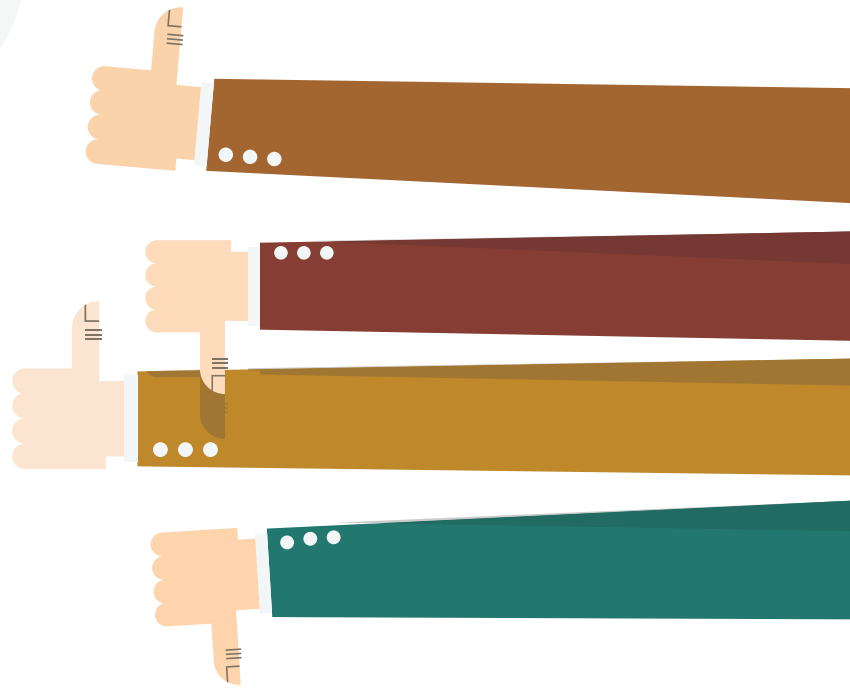
Clue #10: If you aren't asked for money up front, you're not dealing with the norm. Common practice for design firms or full-service marketing firms is to ask for a retainer or financial commitment. It gives your project the priority it needs. A deposit of 30-50% shouldn't scare you off if you've researched a firm and want them on your job.

A final thought

If you've gotten beyond those 10 points and you know you have the right firm, there's still a last step: check references. Get a minimum of three client references, and ask those companies:

- Were deadlines met?
- Was the company flexible?
- Did they make suggestions?
- What were their strengths?
- What were their weaknesses?
- Would you hire them again?

There are tons of reputable, talented and affordable companies out there. The care you take at the beginning of your selection process can pay big when you receive a finished project that's everything you expected (and hopefully more)—it's within budget, it's on time, and most importantly, it's effective at meeting your online marketing goals.



Giving constructive criticism: Six steps that can help

BY CELESTINE CHUA

WHETHER YOU'RE IN AN OFFICE/PLANT ENVIRONMENT

or working on personal relationships, sharing and receiving feedback is critical to improving what happens. You should not hold back your thoughts when you have solid ideas on how someone can improve; however, there are ways to share criticism constructively. This is also provided a person has asked for feedback—unsolicited criticism often comes across as imposing your opinions, especially if you repeatedly tell someone what to do without asking for his or her insight. Still, business professionals and managers have many situations that call for them to give staff and coworkers good feedback.

Here are six things you can do to make sure that feedback works effectively:

Here are six things you can do to make sure that feedback works effectively:

1. Use the feedback sandwich method

The feedback sandwich method is often used in Toastmasters events and in corporate meetings. I call the ingredients in my sandwich PIP, which stands for Positive-Improvement-Positive. With PIP, your feedback process is broken down into three segments:

You start off by focusing on strengths—what you like

about whatever is in question, be that an event or something a person has done.

Then, you provide the criticism—the things you don't like and areas you think need to be improved.

Finally, you round off the feedback with 1) a reiteration of the positive comments you gave at the beginning and 2) the positive results that can be expected if a person acts on the area of criticism.

PIP is called a feedback sandwich because you wedge the criticism between an opening and an ending—like a burger patty would be wedged between two buns.

Here's an example:

You need to provide the person in charge of your website feedback on what he or she has created. Here's how PIP might be used:

First layer is "P" for Positive:

"I love the overall layout and how user-friendly our site is. The menu is easily accessible. The overall design is nice and pleasing to the eye. It's consistent with our branding and I found the intro you created gave me a comprehensive overview of what we do ..."

Second layer, “I” for Improve:

“...However, I thought two things could be better. First, there is a lot of content in the sidebar that clutters up the user experience. Perhaps if the sidebar content was narrowed down to key things, it would make it easier to navigate. Second, the font size is too small. I found it hard to read and had to keep squinting.”

Last layer, “P” for Positive:

“Overall, this is good work. I love what you’ve done with the design, layout and intro. I think if the sidebar clutter is removed and the font size is increased, it’d create a fantastic experience for any visitor.”

The feedback sandwich is a good framework for constructive criticism because by starting off with the positive comments, you let the receiver know you are on his/her side, and you are not there to attack. You also recognize what the receiver is doing right, rather than only talking about the issue areas.

That last positive “P” helps the critique end on a high note rather than leaving a sour taste. It also reminds those being criticized they are accomplishing good things and reinforces the benefits of acting on a critique.

The feedback sandwich method is most appropriate when giving criticisms to people you don’t know well. Try giving such a critique to the manager of the plant who’s been there longer than you and whose family is part of your social circle and you may come across as aggressive or rude because you jump right into a critique. Also, some people dislike using the feedback sandwich because they think it’s silly to praise for the sake of praise. However, the point is not to butter people up. People in general are too quick to criticize and judge, which downplays what’s done right and what effort goes into the work. I see the feedback sandwich as a great way to 1) practice emotional generosity, which is sometimes in short supply in the workplace—every single one of us needs our hard work recognized, 2) help a person learn what he/she is doing well, while 3) using this as the foundation to share what can be improved.

2. Focus on the situation, not the person

A constructive way to criticize is to focus on the situation, not the person.

Here’s an example of how that would work if an employee needed feedback on a sales presentation:

What not to say: “You’re really boring. You kept going on and on about a certain point even though we were running behind time; it made me want to fall asleep!”

You may have the good intention of helping the person improve his or her performance with clients, but this is an overly critical and hurtful way to do it. It becomes a personal attack and makes it seem like the person has a problem.

You need to come up with a good “I” to follow that first “P” in PIP. Something like:

“I thought some of the points in the presentation could be delivered in a more concise manner. The allotted time is 30 minutes, but we went over that time by about 10 minutes or one-third of the intended time. Since there are five points we want to stress in the presentation, maybe we could allocate five minutes per point, which would take up 25 minutes, and then have 5 minutes left for a general closing. This would create a well-paced presentation.”

By treating the situation like that, you detach it from the person.

A second example that comes up frequently is giving feedback on a person’s character traits. In the workplace, that might be necessary when an employee can’t seem to get along with his or her coworkers.

The wrong way to talk is this: “You’re always too negative. It’s draining to be around you and it makes your coworkers uncomfortable.” Just as with the example above, this type of feedback is a personal attack and does not tell a person what he or she can do, which makes the criticism unconstructive.

Good feedback might start with something positive about the person such as that he or she shows promise in their position. You might continue onto a critique with:

“...However, there are times when what you say is taken personally because others find the comments demeaning. For example, when you poke fun at employees who are slower than you on the plant floor, they sometimes take offense since they don’t have your years of experience or they haven’t yet received the training you’ve had. They tend to take it personally.”

While it’s tricky to give constructive criticism when it comes to someone’s personality, it can be accomplished successfully by separating the person’s actions (in this case: what they say to those with less knowledge) from the person himself/herself. It might be a natural trait of the person you’re criticizing to joke around, for example, but you may need to point out to that person that jokes need context to be taken without offense. Separating the action from the person makes it easier to critique a behavior without offending the person.

Some simple steps for applying this tip include:

- First, detach the situation from the person. Take the person out of the equation and focus on the behavior/action/situation/issue at hand.
- Make your comments on those areas at hand, not the person. For example, “you’re too lazy to wear your protective gear” is better put as: “you’re not up to safety specs.” Instead of “you’re always late with everything” say: “your report was not handed in on time.”
- Avoid comments that attach phrases such as: “I’m sick and tired of...” or “You’re stupid/negative/lazy/disorganized.”
- Don’t use an active voice. An example of active voice is: “You gave a bad presentation.” If you say “The presentation was not up to snuff,” it becomes passive. Notice the passive voice shifts attention away from the person and brings it to the subject matter.
- Rather than go on and on about how bad a situation is, share how it affects the business place. This shifts the focus away from the person and onto the plant or office, which lets the person take a step back to evaluate and gives him or her insight as to why you’re addressing an issue in the first place: because it’s bad for the company or the bottom line.

3. Be specific with your feedback

The most constructive kind of feedback is specific. The more specific someone is when commenting, the more actionable the process becomes. Here is an example of vague versus specific feedback. In this case, you’ve asked someone from your design center to write for your blog. They want to know what they should write.

A vague answer would be: “I’d love it if you’d write an article for our blog on good design in bathrooms.”

A more specific comment would be: “Could you use your design background and your knowledge of our product to write a story about the benefits of cast polymer over tile?”

The first comment would result in a generic article that wouldn’t do you much good as a company. The second makes your blog a sales tool.

Here is an example that more closely aligns with criticism. In this case, you’ve asked the person to put together a report.

A vague comment is: “This is a good effort on the report but I don’t like it. I think there is room for improvement.” While it’s one of the most-oft uttered phrases from supervisors, “I don’t like it” means nothing. Unless objective criteria is used, it’s hard for a person to decipher what the problem is.

A specific comment might be: “This is a good effort but

there are things that could be improved—namely, 1) the formatting and 2) the final recommendations. The formatting is not standardized so it will hard for others to come along and use this as an example. As far as the final recommendations, the ideas are good but too brief especially ideas #1 and #3. Management needs more data to make their assessment.” This is positive feedback that is specific and therefore actionable. It tells the receiver the key problem areas, why they are problem areas and specific examples where they appear.

Here’s how to make your feedback specific and hence actionable:

- Focus more on objective points than subjective opinions. Just saying “I don’t like it” is not helpful. On the other hand, stating the specific things you do not like is helpful.
- Break your feedback down into key points. Don’t give your feedback as one big lump. Break it down into various key points, then give your feedback point by point.
- Give specific examples of each point. There is no need to highlight every single example you can think of: just point out one or two key examples. The intention here is to 1) bring the person’s awareness to things that he/she may be oblivious about and 2) illustrate what you mean.

4. Comment on what can be acted upon

The whole point of giving feedback is to help the person improve.

Hence, you need to talk about things that the person can do something about, rather than things outside of his/her control. Critiquing on things outside his or her control just makes the person feel bad. While you may want to make general points he or she can’t control just because what’s happening is crucial to the situation, you can balance the process out by talking about things within the person’s control.

Let’s go back to that sales presentation. An employee has asked you to listen to their presentation and give feedback. Actionable critiques might be comments regarding how well the person has covered what he or she needs to cover, how well the person’s voice carries when giving the presentation, whether the person utters too many “ums” or uses their hands in an effective way. On the other hand, talking about how high or squeaky the person’s voice is, while it might be true, may not offer much in the way of value. A person can’t help how high his or her voice is so a squeaky voice should not be the center of your criticism.

Here's an example from outside the office. A business associate signs a lease for 12 months for a bath shop that is not in a prime location. He then asks for advice on how to increase his market share.

Saying things like “change your location” is probably not going to help since he's already signed a lease. Even comments such as “the name Bath Heaven sounds silly” or “you should have hired a better interior designer for your displays,” are not helpful. Of more value to your professional friend might be: “Invite people on Facebook to an open house at your new location” or “give time-sensitive promotional discounts” or “place advertisements in lifestyle magazines.”

Knowing what's actionable and unactionable requires you to be empathetic. Understand the person's situation and his/her objectives, then provide your critique based on that.

5. Give recommendations on how to improve

Probably the most important step in a critique is giving recommendations on what the person can do to improve.

For one thing, your recommendations will tie up your critique in a nice bow. Everyone has a different perspective, which means every critique can be interpreted in a different way. Recommendations give the person a clear idea of what you have in mind. Recommendations also provide a strong call-to-action—a sort of checklist of “to do” items. They help the person act on what you say and not procrastinate.

Again, it's critical to be specific with your suggestions. It's also important to briefly explain the rationale behind the recommendation.

Let's return to the presentation scenario one last time.

A weak recommendation is: “The presentation is too long. Make it shorter.” This isn't very helpful because reducing the presentation time can be done via many ways—cutting down on the number of points, removing examples, talking faster and so on. What exactly do you mean?

A better recommendation is: “Instead of two or three examples per point, which detracts from the main message, limit each point to one example. This way, the presentation is more succinct and impactful.” This is a valuable recommendation that is specific and for which you've also provided rationale.

6. Don't make assumptions

My final tip for constructive criticism is not to make assump-

Further Reading

Check out the following related content:

- Facing Negative Criticism? 5 Tips to Deal with Criticism [Video at <https://personalexcellence.co/blog/negative-criticism/>].
- 8 Helpful Ways To Deal With Critical People [<https://personalexcellence.co/blog/critical-people/>]
- 8 Tips to Tackle Naysayers [<https://personalexcellence.co/blog/naysayers/>]

tions. When providing criticism, do so within what you know as fact about the person and the subject. Assumptions do you no good; not only does it make the person look bad, it also makes you look bad—especially when your assumption turns out to be wrong.

Here are two examples to highlight the difference between assumption and valuable comment:

A public speech:

“The speech was mediocre because the speaker appeared nervous and was not able to lead the audience.” (This is a criticism that doesn't assume).

“The speaker never had any public speaking experience.” (This is an assumption and is not necessarily true. Seasoned public speakers can be nervous especially in a new environment. To assume that someone doesn't have public speaking experience just because he/she appears nervous is pompous and would be insulting as a criticism.)

Someone's behavior:

“The new colleague seems anxious when around male co-workers. She keeps fidgeting and she's not able to articulate herself well.” (This is a simple comment or observation of behaviors)

“This person is afraid of men.” (Assumption. This is not necessarily true. Anxiety around the opposite gender can happen to anyone and nervousness has nothing to do with fear. It's not fair to the person to assume she can't deal with the opposite sex at all.)

Conclusion

Giving criticism is not a difficult task: We are called upon to give feedback and some of us do it just because it's in our nature. Giving constructive criticism, on the other hand, is not as easy. It takes visualizing what you want to accomplish in giving your feedback. It also often requires some patience, especially when you're dealing with someone whose problems seem silly or illogical. However, as a business professional or a boss, developing a skill in this area can be invaluable to good employee relationships. ■

CELESTINE CHUA runs one of the largest personal development sites on the Internet (www.personalexcellence.ca). After graduating from a top business school in Asia (NUS Business School) she quit a corporate job with a Fortune 500 company to devote herself to working with individuals, business schools, the government and corporations. She's a frequent speaker and her site, which started in 2008, now draws a million views a month from 200 countries.

Membership growth continues its healthy pace

As of March 2017, the member base for ICPA grew to 83, which is a healthy gain over the course of the association's first year and a half of existence.

Executive Director Jennifer Towner said that several recent events show promise for even more growth.

"We've truly become an international association," Towner said. Added to the ranks of U.S. companies are German company Gebrüder Dorfner GmbH & Co. Kaolin-und Kristallquarzsand-Werke KG; Columbian company Andercol; Mexican companies Arstar, S.A. DE C.V. and Modular Vanity Tops; and Canadian companies Award Marble and Mr. Marble.

The other development she noted is that former members, some of which have been gone a long time, are coming back into the ranks.

"I just had a company that left in 2007 that has rejoined ICPA," Towner said. "That kind of development is a heart-

ening response to our efforts to make this organization the kind of resource that companies in the cast polymer industry rely upon to make their businesses grow," she added.

ICPA goes social—time to connect

Although the website (www.theicpa.com) will remain one of the most important tools for connecting members with their association, there are several other channels that back up that site. But the association needs help from members. Connect with ICPA through:

- **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/196727340343053/>
- **LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/international-cast-polymer-association>
- And **Twitter:** @the_icpa

Don't forget to Like, Share and Comment on what's there!

Member Center section about to go live on website

By the end of April, ICPA members will be able to access a tremendously valuable new place on the website: a members-only section. Members will get passwords they can use to access the new location.

The site will be a place where technical documents, training videos, manuals, materials from meetings and much more can be downloaded.

ICPA Executive Director Jennifer Towner also reminded members that they should be downloading and posting the updated ICPA logo on their website to show the association's strength. The member logo can be downloaded from the member-center page on the ICPA website, <http://theicpa.com/member-center/>.

OTHER
NEWS
OF NOTE

Americans love their kitchens/baths

Kitchens and bathrooms remain the heart and soul of today's homes, according to research by the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA).

NKBA released a report at this year's Kitchen and Bath Industry Show (KBIS) that said today's industry is worth \$134 billion in this nation. Of that amount, \$85 billion goes into kitchen and bath remodels. The other \$48.6 billion was new construction, the research showed.

It showed that each year about one in 10 households re-



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model the kitchen—more than 10.2 million kitchens. Meanwhile, about 14.2 million bathrooms (about 13% of all households) get a new face each year.

As far as what they spend for those facelifts, nearly half (48%) of households budgeted \$15,000 or more for their kitchen jobs; while one-in-five Americans (21%) spent \$7,500 or more to remodel a master bathroom.

Other insights from the report were:

- Budgets vary widely but lean towards more partial upgrades than complete remodels. For example, 63% of respondents spent less than \$5,000 on their kitchen remodeling or replacement project. Also, nearly four-in-ten respondents (38%) budgeted less than \$2,500 for their bathroom remodeling or replacement project.
- Younger homeowners are more inclined to do it themselves than hire an expert.

The NKBA study was based on an online survey that netted about 1,078 responses from homeowners, builders,

remodelers and general contractors.

The research report—the first of its kind in a decade—is called: “Estimated Market Value for the Kitchen & Bath Remodeling and New Residential Construction Markets.” For information, go to www.nkba.org.

Trends identified in annual NKBA report

Traditional kitchens and baths have succumbed in popularity to transitional and contemporary designs, according to the 2017 Kitchen & Bath Design Trends Report, which NKBA releases each year at KBIS. That trend has been coming for a number of years, but this is the first year that contemporary outpaced traditional to become the second most popular North American design.

Emerging styles in kitchens include industrial and “mid-century modern” (the 1950s retro look) as well as coastal and mountain variations of contemporary. In bathrooms, the shaker style is gaining ground on traditional, while mid-century modern and Asian Fusion are emerging tastes.

Some other trends reported this year include:

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- Both rooms are seeing white and gray continue to dominate as colors. However, blue is an emerging trend.
- In the bathroom, floating vanities and open shelving have become popular. Ceramic tile flooring remains in vogue, but an emerging new flooring is high-quality vinyl.
- A trend to mixing materials in the kitchen continues to gain ground. Designers are mixing up wood with metal and creating two-toned kitchens.
- Undermount bathroom sinks are still the most sought-after type while pedestals and vessel sinks are losing ground. Trough sinks are emerging as popular.
- Incorporating technology into the design of these two utilitarian rooms has become increasingly important with requests from homeowners for features such as places to charge electronics.
- Granite surfaces are losing ground in the kitchen; while quartz remains the most popular countertop material.

Granite/engineered quartz even in popularity

Granite gained a little ground in the kitchen industry, but stands neck and neck with engineered quartz as the most popular countertop material for kitchen renovations, according to the 2017 U.S. Houzz Kitchen Trends Study. Granite held 41% of the market, up 4% from the last survey while engineered quartz is preferred by 40%.

Overall, kitchen renovation spending increased in 2016 with nearly one in 10 homeowners spending more than \$100,000 compared to last year's 7%. About 20% spent \$50,000 to \$100,000 (compared to last year's 23%).

As far as what features they are replacing or upgrading, the top category is countertops: 95% of the homeowners who are working on, have plans to work on or have completed renovations during 2016-17 are replacing countertops. The second most popular replacement is backsplashes at 90%.

The number of people hiring professionals to do the job increased to 88% for the current study (compared to 87% and 80% for the previous two).

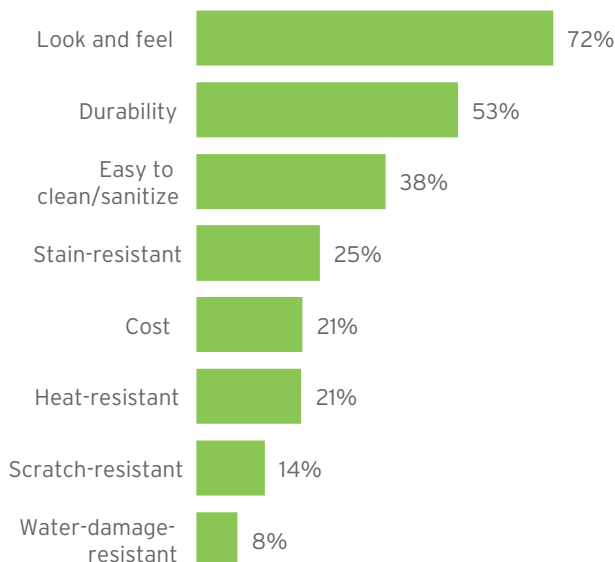
Like with the annual NKBA trends study, the Houzz study found the most popular style now is contemporary, which has 22% of the market (up by 3 percentage points). Meanwhile, one of the main styles being replaced is traditional.

NAM releases report on regulatory restrictions

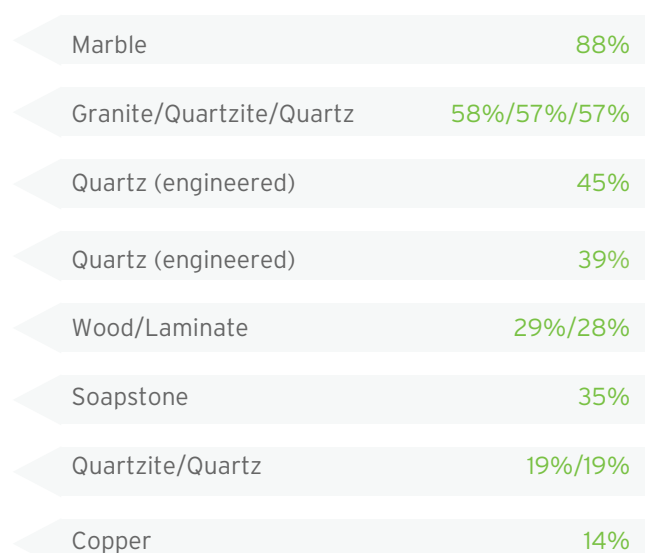
Manufacturers currently face 297,696 restrictions on operations that come from federal regulations, the National Association of Manufacturers said in January.

In light of a new Administration, NAM decided to look at the current industrial system in the U.S. and released, "Holding Us Back: Regulations of the U.S. Manufacturing Sector," which is based on extensive interviews as well as a NAM membership survey.

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Other significant findings included:

- Eighty-seven percent of manufacturers surveyed say that if compliance costs were reduced permanently and significantly, they would invest the savings on hiring, increased salaries and wages, more research and development or capital replacement.
- Ninety-four percent of manufacturers surveyed say the regulatory burden has gotten higher in the last five years, and 72% say “significantly higher.”
- Small and medium-sized manufacturers, which comprise more than 90% of the NAM’s membership, often bear the heaviest regulatory burden.

More information is available at www.nam.org.

Home buyers want smaller homes, but more efficiency

For the first time since 2009, the average size of newly built homes decreased to 2,634 square feet in 2016 from 2,689 square feet in 2015, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.



One of the bathroom trends noted at KBIS is floating vanities. This one helped Lori Carroll & Associates bring home first place in the powder room category. Co-designer: Debra Gelety. Photo: Jon Mancuso

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Census data and the results of a National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) survey were released during the association's International Builders Show (IBS) in January.

The decrease in size and less emphasis on certain luxury amenities marks the end of an era and, "I expect the size of homes to continue to decline as demand increases from first-time buyers," said Rose Quint, NAHB assistant vice president for survey research.

Still, there are amenities homebuyers want, including separate laundry rooms—a trend across all income levels, NAHB's research shows.

Some of the other trends were:

- More buyers want energy efficiency from their homes.
- Other popular amenities today are patios, exterior lighting and a full bath on the main level of the home.
- Losing ground are amenities such as cork flooring, solar and geothermal energy, pet-washing stations, outdoor kitchens and sunrooms.

Meanwhile, research by Better Homes and Gardens also discussed at this year's IBS shows that what the magazine calls First Millennials (22-39 years old and buying their first home) are seeking older housing stock and fixing it up themselves when they can.

This generation has been greatly influenced by home improvement reality shows and how-to videos on social media, and 88% of them are "very interested" in learning about home improvement and repair.

Housing market should reach higher ground in 2017

The growing economy, solid employment gains and rising household formations shine a positive light on single-family residential production for the coming year, according to economists speaking at IBS.

Still, NAHB's Chief Economist Robert Dietz also warned that builders in many markets face supply side constraints, as well as shortages in labor and lending. Dietz said 64% of builders nationwide report low or very-low lot supplies while unfilled jobs in the construction sector are higher than during the building boom.

In a sign that millennials are playing a bigger role in the residential market, Dietz noted that townhome construction, which can be a useful bridge for millennials to transition to homeownership, is showing impressive growth and now

constitutes 12% of all single-family starts.

NAHB is projecting 1.16 million total housing starts in 2016, up 4.9% from the previous year's total of 1.11 million units.

Single-family production is expected to rise 10% in 2017 to 855,000 units and increase an additional 12% to 961,000 next year.

Meanwhile, residential remodeling activity is expected to register a 1% gain this year over 2016.

Times are good for remodeling business

The attitudes and pocketbooks of people and firms that specialize in renovations and remodels indicate that 2016 was a good year and 2017 will be even better, according to the 2017 Houzz State of the Industry report.

Six out of seven of the groups (which range from designers to contractors to specialty companies) queried for the report expect to see annual growth revenues in 2017 beat 2016 by 10-11.6%. Most of those also expect profit growth.

One in three of the companies queried said that 2016 was the best year in a decade. The only factors hurting the bottom line last year were labor and material costs.

The annual survey is based on the views of architects, designers, general contractors, design-build firms, and specialty firms for building or renovation, landscaping and decorating.

In other good news about remodeling, a study by Harvard shows that homeowners will spend more to improve their homes this year, up 6.7% over the last study to reach \$317 billion. The Joint Center for Housing Studies says the strength comes partly because home prices continue to climb, which encourages remodeling investment. ■

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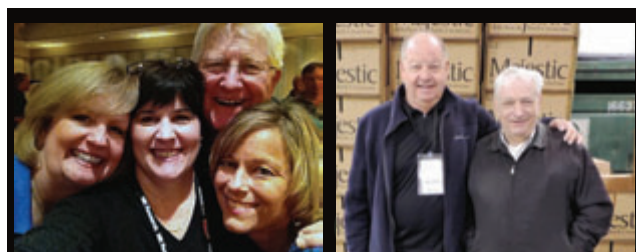
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Working with Composites One is a unique partnership with our **PEOPLE**. From regional customer service reps and technical sales teams, to local support teams at over 35 distribution centers in the U.S. and throughout Canada, we'll make sure you find the cast polymer and solid surface products you need, and receive them when you need them. As your partner, we'll give you access to emerging market expertise and process application know-how, and do what it takes to help grow your business. You'll also receive the unparalleled support, value-added services and comprehensive regulatory assistance that only a market leader can provide.

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