

CAST POLYMER

Spring 2018

CONNECTION



Simplicity dominates today's trends

- Reports from KBIS
- Designers' predictions for 2018
- Changing tastes

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How homeowners shop

A PEEK AT
POLYCON
2018



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ON THE COVER: White is still the top choice for people remodeling their kitchens, but other colors are used for effect. Blue is one of the most frequently requested. This kitchen won a regional award from the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. Contractor: DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen, Ann Arbor, MI.

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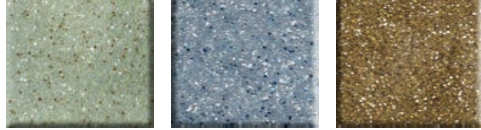
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PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Studying what customers want



I WAS EXCITED TO HEAR THAT WE HAD SEVERAL MEMBERS WHO ATTENDED THE KITCHEN AND BATH INDUSTRY SHOW (KBIS) as well as manufacturers and suppliers who exhibited at this giant event. These are people that have recognized what we all must acknowledge, which is: if we're going to sell the best products, we need to know what today's tastes are. We need to study what's "in" with homeowners, with

designers and with commercial establishments. Then we need to fit what we discover into the realities of our operations.

This issue is devoted to trends. It looks both at what happened at KBIS and what today's design world is saying to help us pinpoint the most important question we face: What do today's customers want? Colors, designs, materials used in kitchens and baths change constantly, and keeping up with what's happening is an ongoing challenge.

At the same time, I would caution that, while it's okay to make money selling products that exploit fads, we have to be careful to recognize them as fads and not exhaust our resources chasing what might be temporary. We must have the insight to look down the road at what trends are likely to stay around and give us lucrative returns in the long term.

The key to all this is information and this issue gives us a good starting point. It's also why increasingly, the leaders in this industry are investing in events such as KBIS and our upcoming POLYCON. If we are going to focus

on delivering what customers want, we need the most up-to-date information we can get, and one of the best ways to keep up is industry conferences.

Those of us that will be at POLYCON will be getting our information firsthand not just from our speakers, but from each other. This meeting gives us a chance to recognize together what trends and industry developments are likely to make a difference in our futures. We'll be looking not only at what types of surfaces

our customers are demanding today, but also what general trends affect our businesses in areas such as human resources, plant efficiencies, best practices, outside pressures such as regulatory issues and so much more.

You can get a feel for what's happening at POLYCON Chicago 2018 on page 15 of this issue. I'm hoping that most of our readers have already signed up to attend, and I'm looking forward to being there at the Eaglewood Resort to meet them and talk about what's happening. ■

Luke Haas
ICPA President

“WE HAVE TO HAVE THE INSIGHT TO LOOK DOWN THE ROAD AT WHAT TRENDS ARE LIKELY TO STAY AROUND AND GIVE US LUCRATIVE RETURNS IN THE LONG TERM.”

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Kitchen, bath and surfaces trends for 2018: Keeping things simple



Contemporary is popular for all room sizes. This kitchen won a National Kitchen and Bath Association 2018 Design Award: First Place for Small Kitchen. Designer: Martin de Sousa. Photographer: Vincent Lions Photography

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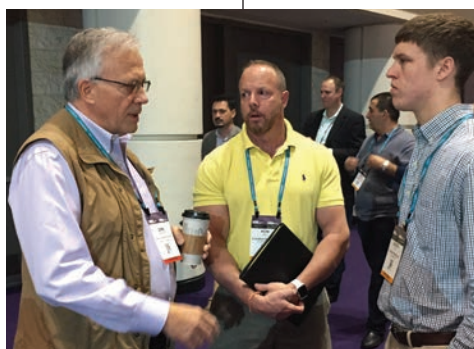
AS 2017 TURNED INTO 2018, the predictions for what's coming down the pike began, filling up blogs and articles with forecasts of what will be popular in homes and buildings in the years to come.

This buzz is greatly helped along each year by shows that occur in the U.S. in January. What's said and seen at those shows lays the groundwork for planning what's to come next.

Two of the shows that have the most in common with ICPA members are The Kitchen and Bath Industry Show (KBIS—National Kitchen and Bath Association) and the International Builders Show (IBS—National Association of Home Builders). The two are held concurrently as Construction Week. This year's event was Jan. 9 to 11 in Orlando, and well over 80,000 people attended sessions and visited the 2 million square feet of exhibits. A third event is not connected directly to kitchens and baths, but as houses adopt more smart technology, it has increasingly featured products

and trends that will affect anyone who follows what happens in the home, including in kitchens and baths. The Consumer Electronics Show (CES—Consumer Technology Association), which occurred Jan. 9 to 12 in Las Vegas, drew more than 170,000 attendees and about 4,000 exhibits.

Cast Polymer Connection has been tracking what's been said on the web about 2018 and the future, and what happened at those shows. We also asked members of ICPA who were at KBIS to tell us about their experience and what they saw.



(From left) ICPA Secretary/Treasurer Dirk DeVuyst, IMI, talks with Ken and Derek Hill of Syn-Mar Products, another ICPA member. Photo by Chris Hurdleston

ICPA members at KBIS

Many of the people who attended KBIS this year said that in kitchens and baths, simplicity and modernistic styles are in, punctuated by pops of spot color, duo-toned looks and new types of visually pleasing patterns in everything.

Dirk DeVuyst, president and CEO of International Marble Industries, said that one of the themes he noted as walked the floor at KBIS was minimalism.

For example, “I observed a lot of European-style vanity top offerings with white colors, trench drains, separate or no backsplashes. The modern look seemed to be a big part of the displays.”

Chris Hurdleston, sales manager—Eastern U.S. & Canada, ACS International Products, LP, who also was in Orlando, agreed that, “European minimalist design was everywhere at this show.” He predicted the look will influence the U.S. markets in the years to come.

As far as color, “off white, grays and beiges dominated the displays,” Hurdleston commented. Gray, which has been increasing in popularity over the last few years, will remain in vogue for a few more years, he said, but is already losing some ground to other neutral colors, in particular beige and tan.

“They say this development is a reflection of the economy getting better. It’s moving away from gray to include other colors,” he said.

As far as surface products, Hurdleston said neutral grays with beige undertones were widely seen at

The sleek modern look is tops for both remodeling and new homes. Top right: National Association of the Remodeling Industry regional winner for “Residential Bath \$50,000-\$75,000.” Contractor: Nar Fine Carpentry. Below: First Place—Large Kitchen award winner in the 2018 National Kitchen and Bath Association Design Awards. Designers: Sandra and Scott Gjesdahl; Photographer: Reid Rolls Photography



the show, including many products by porcelain manufacturers. In fact, he said he saw more porcelain at this show than he’s seen in the past and that much of it was coming from European manufacturers.

He noted, however, that while “It’s nice-looking stuff, it’s tough to fabricate and it’s expensive.”

Another KBIS attendee, Tim Price, vice president, The R.J. Marshall Company, agreed that “grays and beige were everywhere this year.” He also noted that another major trend he noticed on the floor was more texture in all types of products offered. In surface products, he saw more flowing effects created by veining and swirls. An example of that could be seen in the exhibit booth of another ICPA member, Clarke Products, which featured wall panel looks that had dimensional patterns and movement, such as a wave-like vertical shower panel.

Elsewhere on the floor show, Price said, “I noticed more ‘organic’ materials and wood appearing in surfaces than I’ve seen in the past.”

ICPA member U.S. Marble was also an exhibitor at KBIS this year, and Pat Sak, general manager, said the company will be returning next year when Construction Week is in Las



Pat Sak, U.S. Marble, shows off one of the beautiful custom-made vanities his company displayed at KBIS. Photo by Dirk DeVuyst.

Vegas. “The show was a tremendous success for the company and helped us launch our brand refresh after 50 years in the business,” he said. U.S. Marble offers custom vanity tops as well as shower panels and shower bases.

Sak said KBIS attendees were particularly fascinated with wall panels because of the time saved on installation as well as maintaining tile and grout. Sak said attendees also were amazed at “what surfaces manufacturers like our company can produce in a cast panel these days.” Along with its other products, U.S. Marble featured a newly designed engineered marble shiplap panel, its subway panel shower line and three new patterned designs: hexagons, Arabesque and fish scales.

“The people that stopped by our booth kept touching the panels. They couldn’t believe how beautiful and durable the one-piece solutions were,” Sak said.

What others say

The observations ICMA members brought back from KBIS have been widely backed up in New Year’s trends stories, blogs and other coverage of the home shows.

As DeVuyst mentioned, simplistic, modernistic styles seem to be taking over today’s design world. Real estate company Trulia has an annual design panel that analyzes and releases trends in remodeling for the coming year. For 2018, the panel identified minimalism as a main request coming from homeowners. Trulia says consumers are looking for clean lines, modern fixtures, sleek architectural surfaces and hidden storage (smooth lines on cabinetry).

Many experts say the trend is influenced by the increased desire for neater and simpler life solutions. In January, Houzz released results of a survey that queried homeowners who

NKBA assesses styles and tastes

In its 2018 Design Trends Study, an annual assessment of professionals from the U.S. and Canada, the National Kitchen and Bath Association affirmed what many designers and kitchen/bath experts said about tastes going forward.

“Clean, minimalist and modern with a touch of luxury,” was the official label the association used in introducing a section of the study on tastes.

One trend that has been “coming for years” is that traditional styling in kitchens has officially been ousted from the top slot. Farmhouse kitchens are now in the top spot (79%) for trendy/very trendy with transitional and contemporary coming in next (77% and 73%). Transitional and contemporary also got top rankings in bathrooms (74% and 60%) while traditional came in third place (53%).

Some other significant findings this year included:

- Quartz is by far the preferred choice for countertops. In kitchens, 94% of respondents said it was trendy while in baths, 91% reported it was tops. Granite and marble took second and third in both rooms.
- For sink choices, undermount in the kitchen (92%) and in the bath (87%) were significantly more popular than other choices. Next up in the kitchen were single-bowl and farmhouse (both at 81%) while in the bath they were integrated sinks (46%), vessel sinks (43%) and trough sinks (42%). The predominant material choice for sinks in kitchens is stainless steel (84%) and bathrooms is porcelain (80%).
- The study found that in the U.S., homeowners are much more likely to integrate technology into the kitchen than into the bath where technology is just now starting to show itself. However, in both rooms, by far the most popular technology is flat-screen televisions.
- Freestyle bathtubs continue as a favorite with 87% of study respondents citing them as popular.

As far as emerging trends, in the bathroom, NKBA said textured wall tile as a focal point is growing, as is smart toilets and connectivity, live-edge slab countertops and edge-lit acrylic countertops. In kitchens, the emerging trends include a combination of rose gold or gold and white, more colors everywhere, smart technology, and “wellness and freshness” technology in appliances.



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intend to remodel their kitchens in the next year about what they want. This year's survey found that respondents were obsessed with decluttering counters and hiding stuff away—75% were remodeling for that reason—and 63% of people that intend to remodel are looking at prioritizing storage over all other functions of the kitchen. Those were the top two reasons for remodeling.

Experts also give credit for adoption of the modern look to the popularity of open floor plans.

A recent article in the Washington Post about what the millennial generation wants in homes revealed that simplicity was tops on the list because millennials, which favor the open look, want the rooms visible to guests to look organized and neat. In the kitchen, for example, they want functional items hidden away such as electrical and USB outlets under the cabinetry so they don't show, and wireless speakers and other features so there are no dangling cords.

Some of the kitchen and bath products on display at KBIS reflected this trend towards neatness. New stainless finishes for appliances and hardware that don't show fingerprints were everywhere at the show as were sinks, faucets and appliances that blend into the walls and sleeker cabinetry that doesn't have hard-to-clean molding.

Another example of this trend came from Houzz's recent predictions on what will be popular in cabinetry: The company said meshed doors are replacing the glass doors and open shelving popular the last few years because mesh softens the effects of what can be seen behind those doors.

Trends in color and patterns

As ICMA members observed at KBIS, grays and neutral colors are a major part of kitchens and baths today. That doesn't mean that white, which according to Houzz is still the most popular choice when remodeling kitchens, is not around. It's just losing ground as a color choice to earthier tones, off-whites and beiges/browns. Houzz designers called this phenomenon "white-kitchen fatigue."

Grays and beiges are a result of that fatigue, but so are other colors. In the kitchen, for example, muted blues have started to creep onto walls, cabinets and surfaces. Houzz said blue is currently one of the most requested colors today in the kitchen because of its ambiance of "softer and friendlier," and that many kitchen cabinets in the near future will be blue. Paint company Sherwin Williams picked a color called "oceanside" for its 2018 color of the year, which means blue also may be showing up more in general designs for the home.

The other development in color noted by many blog tours of KBIS and IBS is pops of color. At the end of 2017, Pantone

announced that its color of the year was a surprising ultra-violet—a shade of purple. The company says the color reflects people's current interest in "new technologies and the greater galaxy" as well as spiritual reflection. While a bit of that color showed up at KBIS, other colors that serve as contrasts to muted shades were featured in displays more frequently such as navy blue and sage in the bathroom to balance the popular grays and beiges, and black appliances and surfaces and wilder shades

Clarke Products featured this unusual wave pattern for showers. Photo by Tim Price.





Minimalism was everywhere at KBIS.
Photo by Dirk DeVuyst

of countertop appliances in the kitchen to balance white cabinetry.

Houzz's cabinetry predictions for the future say that, beyond the blue mentioned earlier, the popular colors will be jewel tones: emerald green, amethyst and sapphire. Meanwhile, Cambria's 2018 surfaces trends report mentioned indigo, emerald green and deep red as colors that will be increasingly used.

Another way color seems to be entering homes today is through LED lights. Show attendees' blogs frequently mentioned these lights in bathrooms for effects such as turning a simple shower into "purple rain," in gas fireplaces for ambiance, and in kitchens and baths run by smart technology to provide color and atmosphere.

New types of patterns were everywhere at KBIS—on the floors, walls, countertops, backsplashes and in the newer types of panels mentioned by ICPA members.

According to the Trulia design panel, the classic subway tile of recent years is falling in popularity to be replaced by less standard patterns including geometric patterns, 3D-effect tiling and "organic natural stone," which is multiple lines of patterned tile that mimic natural stone formations.

Blogs written from the KBIS floor mentioned hexagons, triangles and wedges, ornamental shapes such as U.S. Marble's Arabesque and unusual patterns such as mid-century (those seen everywhere in the 1950s).

Kitchen surfaces materials

One of the most commonly used phrases regarding surfaces from show attendees as well as people forecasting what's to come in surface choices is that quartz is now king. It took that crown from granite several years ago, and designers say the reason is that quartz is both practical and beautiful.

From KBIS, ACS's Hurdleston noted that: "The overall theme in surfaces was engineered quartz, especially an influx of new manufacturers from China."

This broader market may mean prices of engineered

quartz will be coming down soon, he noted, which, "We witnessed with solid surfaces and cultured marble in the past." But it also will help fuel demand.

Most forecasts for the coming year also cited quartz as the number one choice.

In a yearly analysis of what people are seeking in kitchens, design/build firm Sebring said that quartz has taken over from natural stone and cement because it's considered the most hygienic surface while offering many new and innovative finishes. The firm cited two looks that are currently popular: honed and leathery. The honed finish is matt with very little gloss while the leather look is a soft sheen that is less glossy than a polished slab. The leather finish is popular because it retains the stone's natural color giving it a more sophisticated look while offering the benefit of hiding fingerprints and water spots, which should appeal to those who demand the clean look. Sebring's analysis on surfaces also reiterated what Price saw at KBIS: Today's surface products are seeing new character that moves the eye along. "Say goodbye to the round particulates of countertops past and hello to realistic veining," Sebring noted.

The Washington Post's analysis of millennial tastes reveals why quartz has become popular among that generation: Because the process recycles material, young people consider it environmentally friendly; because it's easy to maintain, quartz fits their lifestyle.

Price's note on increased use of wood is also a development cited frequently in forecasts and reports on what's currently popular. Millennials like it because it feels natural and they like the character marks, the Washington Post reports.

Wood was also mentioned frequently in KBIS/IBS blogs as a material that has gone beyond use on the floor to include surfaces and accenting. It is increasingly mixed with stone, tile and other surfaces for a layered look and used along with painted surfaces for two-toned cabinetry that's now popular.

How surfaces are used in rooms is also mentioned as a development to watch. A recent trends article in D Home magazine said that waterfall countertops—where the material used for horizontal surfaces continues down the side of the counter to the floor—is "poised to make a splash for the new year."

Connectivity and the future

The other development mentioned most often in coverage of KBIS/IBS was kitchen and baths that are becoming smart. Smart technology in those two rooms was also a major part of the CES show this year.

While ICPA members don't deal with this technology in their everyday operations, anyone whose business is kitch-

Kohler showcases new technologies



In what may be a first for ICPA, one of its members was named a CES 2018 Innovation Award Honoree: Kohler took home an award for its Verdera Voice Lighted Mirror.

The mirror is the first announced bathroom mirror that has Amazon Alexa voice capabilities built into the product. That means a person whose house is connected can stand at the mirror in the morning and ask for a certain tune to be played, inquire how bad traffic might be on the way to work, check the weather for purposes of what to wear, then ask the mirror itself to turn the lights up or down for better viewing while shaving and primping.

The product is designed specifically for bathroom use with speakers housed in hermetically sealed casing to maximize sound quality, a motion-activated wayfinding nightlight for safety and highly efficient LED lighting for makeup and grooming purposes.

CES entries are judged on engineering, aesthetics and design qualities as well as traits such as intended use, user value and uniqueness.

The company also featured other high technology kitchen and bath products at January's shows. One of the most talked about toilets, for example was the Numi, a high-end Kohler product that can connect with the Verdera mirror and other Alexa tools. The toilet has a voice-activated heated seat and foot warmer, warm water cleansing, hot air drying and other convenience and comfort features.

Kohler is developing a whole series of kitchen and bath products that will operate through connected systems. You can see the line at www.us.kohler.com/us/smarthome/content/smarthome.htm.

ens and baths will eventually need to plan for what's happening; and what's happening is moving along rapidly. A very good indication of that is that Samsung Electronics, which has not attended KBIS in seven years, had one of the biggest booths this year, where it featured an entire line of smart appliances.

Numerous manufacturers were at all three shows touting home products that talk to each other, listen to commands from consumers, allow remote operation of features, allow storage of consumer data for help in running the home and make life in that home more comfortable. A brief summary of some of what to expect in kitchens and baths (based on discussions and exhibits at the show) includes:

- Tankless water heaters that can be turned off remotely through voice activation systems.
- Faucet systems that allow dispensing by remote voice control and can provide the exact amount of water a consumer wants poured into a glass or cooking vessel and warmed to a certain temperature.
- Smart home water monitors that can detect leaks in real time, provide reports on water usage and water habits through software.
- Ovens with smartphone capability for controlling timers and temperatures as well as wi-fi connectivity for recipe searches.
- Ovens and microwaves that have scan capability so that instructions for how to cook what's in the package can be sent to appliances from bar codes on purchased food containers.
- Smart showers or sinks that automatically know a preferred temperature and can turn on a favorite tune while a person bathes.

Conclusion

Trying to predict what will happen with new technology and processes for making products, or with consumer tastes and designer preferences is a monumental task: It's like trying to gaze into a crystal ball that begins each year cloudier than the last because more options have become available. That's why going to shows such as KBIS/IBS and ICPA's upcoming POLYCON is important. Good business people are those that can absorb the many developments and sift through them to find the trends that will help them make the right choices in what they offer. ■

Genilee Swope Parente is executive editor of Cast Polymer Connection. Send her your ideas for stories at gsparente@verizon.net.



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How to hook homeowners:

BY TODD
BAIRSTOW

WHEN HOMEOWNERS OR CONTRACTORS HAVE NEED OF A PRODUCT FOR THE HOME, 80-90% begin the search for a provider on the Internet. Braving the wilds of the web, they'll click and click, scroll and scroll, evaluating the appeal of a company and its competition to find the best provider for their job.

But between the time they start searching and the time they pick up the phone to call, these home product shoppers can engage in a complex set of online behaviors. Understanding those behaviors can be key in getting them to act.

Usually, behaviors fall into five distinct personality types. Each personality goes through a different process before making a purchasing decision.

Knowing how to appeal to these personalities is the first step in making sure they pick up the phone. Their online behavior can generate fantastic leads for companies that know how to approach each type.

Knowing how to appeal to these personalities is the first step in making sure they pick up the phone. Their online behavior can generate fantastic leads for companies that know how to approach each type.

The Straight Arrow

Straight Arrows are favorite customers for companies in any home product or home renovation industry. They know what they want and they're ready to buy. They're strong decision-makers and are guided by intuition. Most of them make fast choices.

Typically, time is the most valuable commodity for Straight Arrows. Both members of a couple that owns a home, for example, may work full-time jobs, and their children are equally busy with extra-curricular activities. With contractors, they have a million irons in the fire and hundreds of decisions to make each day. This means these busy people literally don't have the time for a lengthy consultation. They want a friction-free process, and they want it now. Straight Arrows make decisions quickly—even for higher ticket projects.

It may not be the case that they need the projects done immediately; it's that they don't have weeks to audition three or four providers before making a choice. Straight Arrows are trying to cut the process down ahead of time by zeroing in on a quality provider first, not play a host of companies against one another.

For Straight Arrows, the process needs to be as hassle-free as possible. When they're on a website, they'll look for contact information and a web form to see how simple it is to work with that company.

In appealing to this audience, make it as easy and immediate as possible. When the phone rings, answer it. When someone submits a form on the site, call the person back right away.



Recognize personality types

The easier it is, the more likely Straight Arrows are to buy what's for sale. The bonus with this group is that they aren't looking out for every last nickel. Often Straight Arrows are more interested in speed and convenience than the lowest possible price.

The Reputation Detective

When a Reputation Detective comes across a website, the first thing they do is Google the company name. They will visit sites such as Yelp, Angie's List and the Better Business Bureau or seek customer reviews elsewhere to look at overall ratings. They're looking for feedback from customers good or bad.

The Reputation Detective's main objective is to understand what the experience will be like if they choose a particular company. They want to know what to expect. They also want to be sure they are going to hire a provider who will solve their problems competently and completely.

As with Straight Arrows, they aren't as concerned with getting the best price. They're okay with spending, as long as they're convinced they won't be scammed or be left with a job half done. If it's a contractor shopping for a home product provider, they may be looking to offer their customers quality.

To the Reputation Detective, trust is the most important aspect of finding someone. To engage this personality, a web-

site should show that the company is not a fly-by-night operation. Ways to do that include prominently featuring industry affiliations, certifications and testimonials. These customers want to know a company will be around in five years, still providing top-notch service.

The Product Geek

The Product Geek relishes the opportunity to learn. When they need a new kitchen or bath remodel, for example, they'll dig up as much information as possible. They likely have a never-ending parade of browser tabs open, comparing surfaces, brands and warranties.

Basically, they want to know the products as well as the company's own sales representatives. The way to satisfy their data needs is by offering as much information as possible on the website or in other ways. Product specifications such as energy efficiency, durability, recycle content and maintenance requirements are all important details to the Product Geek. The idea is to keep the geeks on the company site as long as possible so they're more likely to pick up the phone or submit a contact form. It also requires a sales rep force primed and ready to talk shop when the phone rings.

There is another benefit to adding the information the Product Geek craves to a website beyond making it easier

for this type to get what they need. Such data also can improve the company's search engine rankings.

We all know the Internet is full of poor information, misinformation and errant legacy information that can confuse homeowners and others. Those companies that can be the beacon of information in a confusing online world are the ones that will appeal.

The Price Monster

Generally, many companies believe it's a bummer when prospects think about price point first. This is partly because bargain hunters are difficult to set appointments with, difficult to sell to and difficult to close. But, even in a strong economy, Price Monsters are everywhere, so companies should be prepared.

When this personality comes across a website, they are only looking for dollar signs. They're the ones searching with terms such as "cheap" and "affordable." And while that comes off as price-obsessive, they're actually more interested in the amount of money they'll save by choosing you.

The challenge with Price Monsters doesn't come from products or sales techniques, but from Google and finding a way to express value. When homeowners search for physical products, retail listings will display high on the search results page. That means they'll have first-hand knowledge of how much a square foot might be for certain surfaces at a home store or what a bathroom vanity might cost at the local superstore.

Of course, Price Monsters aren't taking into account the installation, craftsmanship and design involved in building a quality system. It's up to the company trying to appeal to them to communicate that low-priced products usually deliver low-quality results. Instead of focusing on price, companies need to stress value.

A home products company can do that a couple different ways. First, they can stress the value of a visit. Although some buyers will demand pricing over the phone, there's real value in an in-person consultation, and it's up to the home product seller to convince homeowners or contractors of that reality. That doesn't mean ballpark figures can't be given; but companies that provide such information need to wait to be asked. Many jobs can't accurately be priced until a technician is on site; homeowners and contractors can grasp that concept. Once in the home or meeting face to face, a company's expertise comes across and whoever is pricing can properly assess the situation and give more accurate cost estimates.

WELL-WIRED PEOPLE ALSO WILL CHECK OUT A COMPANY'S SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE AND MIGHT EVEN TRY TO ENGAGE. THEY'RE ACTIVE FACEBOOK AND TWITTER USERS, AND THEY'LL EVALUATE A COMPANY BASED ON ITS POSTS.

Second, use your website to make strong offers. Those offers might include a coupon, a posted discount or a carry-over from offline advertising or direct mail marketing. These hooks will grab Price Monsters and get them to call. Remember, offering these discounts will not get them to buy: It's just a way to get a lead.

The Well-Wired

Well-Wired homeowners or contractors are the fastest growing group of personality. They do their fair share of online research, but they approach it a different way. When they come across a company, they'll go straight to their social networks and poll their friends and followers.

It usually looks something like this: A homeowner or peer contractor gets on Facebook or Twitter and writes, "Have any of you ever used XYZ for kitchen installs?" People will respond with comments such as—"I've heard good things" or "My brother used them, their system works great" or "We've used their product and have great results."

This sells well because Well-Wired shoppers want real-time feedback from people they know and trust.

Well-Wired people also will check out a company's social media presence and might even try to engage. They're active Facebook and Twitter users, and they'll evaluate a company based on its posts. This group is hard to reach unless you're active on these platforms of communication. They want to have something in common with the businesses they choose.

Well-Wired homeowners are typically younger. However, as time moves on, they will become a higher percentage of lead types. Because of this, it's a good idea to get started on using social media to target prospective customers. Keep those feeds fresh, positive and active.

Give them what they want

The great thing about marketing to homeowners and project contractors is that they've already made the decision on some level to improve their homes, put in new rooms or work on a project. The key to getting good leads is to give potential customers what they want so they can make the right choice—a choice that should be your product! ■

TODD BAIRSTOW founded Keyword Connects in 2005. The company generates leads for clients on a 100% performance basis to dealers and franchisees across the country. Bairstow was a speaker at the recent Kitchen and Bath International Show in Orlando (see page 15) and has spoken at many other contractor events. For additional information, visit keywordconnects.com.



POLYCON travels to Chicago for “Building a Solid Future Together”

POLYCON 2018 is breaking records for attendance and participation, which isn't surprising given the steam generated year over year as the show enters its fourth year of existence. This year's event is April 18 to 20 at the Eaglewood Resort & Spa, Itasca, IL.

At press time, more people had signed up to attend than have ever signed up at this point, according to Jennifer Towner, ICPA executive director.

“There were also more exhibitors committed early to our event, and I think it's outstanding that we have four companies that have agreed to be platinum sponsors. That not only saves the association money, it also shows the commitment suppliers have to our organization.”

Also, “Our theme for POLYCON is always, Building a Solid Future Together. In keeping with that, the programming and activities planned for this year's event will focus on building our industry and our association's futures,” she said.

Why attend POLYCON Chicago 2018?

POLYCON brings members together once a year for an enjoyable and educational networking event. The event is designed to update them on what's happening in the cast polymer industry, on Capitol Hill, and within other companies.



The schedule is designed to provide opportunities to share knowledge, see the latest innovations in supplies and techniques, and let the older generation and the younger generation interact to build a strong future for the industry.

It's also designed to provide inspiration and a renewed energy for attendees and give them a different perspective on the best ways to run their operations and make their businesses successful.

Attendees have a jam-packed schedule while they are in the Chicago area, but planners have tried to ensure plenty of time for networking and fun. Here's what's happening:

Day One: Getting caught up

Check-in begins at 1 p.m., then attendees have several options for how to spend the afternoon. Many will choose to take advantage of the fact that the conference is held at a world-class golf resort. But if the weather doesn't cooperate, there is Top Golf in the Wood Dale area. Other options for activities close to the resort on Wednesday will be available as well, including tours of local establishments: Church Street Brewing Company (www.churchstreetbrew.com) or the Lynfred Winery (www.lynfredwinery.com). And of course there are numerous activities in downtown Chicago. See the web-

site www.POLYCONevent.com for details and suggestions.

Attendees will then meet up as a group for the first time at a two-hour Welcome Reception sponsored by Composites One in the Prairie River Club and patio at the resort. Attendees are on their own for that night's dinner. Check in continues until 9 p.m. that night. There are two restaurants in the Eaglewood Resort, and the POLYCON website will have a listing of other dining options close by.

Day Two: Exhibits and sessions

Late arrival check-in is available in the morning, but most attendees will want to be in the exhibit area as soon as possible because tables are set up for suppliers to exchange information with attendees. Interplastic Corporation has made sure breakfast is available so that attendees can nibble as they visit.

The exhibit floor opens at 7:30 a.m. and continues throughout the day during coffee breaks, lunch and in between sessions.

The official welcome begins at 9:10 a.m. in the area where



Sessions tend to get crowded with attendees eager for information on how to run their businesses.

most sessions are held, which is Red Oak Ballroom A. Towner will bring people up-to-date on POLYCON plans followed by an annual member update by ICPA President Luke Haas and updates on membership by Committee Chair Sean Jacobs and Finances by ICPA Secretary/Treasurer Dirk DeVuyst.

The next update is a crucial one for ICPA members, who will hear from John Schweitzer, long-respected follower of what's happening with cast polymer. He will give a regulatory overview. Schweitzer is senior adviser to the president of

Good things to know

If you are flying to the event, O'Hare Airport is closest to the Eaglewood Resort. There is no shuttle from the hotel, but a cab or Uber ride will cost about \$50.

Bring some good shoes. The Eaglewood Resort is a large venue and very spread out. Hotel rooms can be a bit of a long walk from the conference center so plan accordingly for Thursday's packed schedule—it may be hard to run back to the room for something forgotten.

Pack a light sweater for night. The average temperature in Itasca, IL is rated as "cool, but not cold" from most weather sites with average temps between 21 for a low and 84 for a high. That means mid-60s during the daytime, so you'll likely be fine with short sleeves outside, but want longer sleeves and a light coat or sweater for the nighttime activities.

When you're ready for a bite to eat, the resort has several levels of dining options—from a fancier restaurant that has themed buffets offering international fare and an interactive show kitchen to informal dining at a smaller place to a market place where visitors can pick up a sandwich or quick meal or order from the room and have it delivered.

When you want some fun, don't stop with golf. Besides a full course, Eaglewood has a luxurious spa that offers a line of pampering services. It also offers a bowling alley and game room with billiards and darts. The Spa and Keglers Bar and Bowling Alley is in a separate building across the parking lot from the conference center.

As far as off-site activities, you're not far from the Itasca Village, which has small shops, offering everything from jewelry to flowers to golf clubs and the Long Grove community known for antiques, lunch and shopping. Just a few miles south are Woodfield Mall, one of the country's largest indoor shopping malls and a second nearby mall, Stratford Square Mall, which is a more intimate shopping/dining experience. The Dupage County Convention and Visitors Bureau has an excellent and informative website, www.DiscoverDupage.com, with detailed information on local restaurants and activities near the resort. For those with more time, the city of Chicago offers about 370 well-known landmarks, 45 historic districts, a ton of shopping in the Central Business District downtown and over 200 theaters. See some suggestions on the POLYCON website at www.POLYCONevent.com. Another good source for planning what to do is www.choosechicago.com.



the American Composites Manufacturers Association.

Also during the morning, the four platinum sponsors (Polynt-Reichhold, Composites One, The R.J. Marshall Company/Marshall Gruber and Interplastic) will present information on the latest products available to ICPA members.

A buffet lunch is sponsored by one of those sponsors, The R.J. Marshall Company/Marshall Gruber, in the resort's more formal Burnham's Restaurant.

That afternoon, the learning continues through a series of breakout sessions and roundtable discussions designed to allow attendees to choose up to four events to attend, depending on interest. Breaks are provided thanks to Interplastics.

Some of the topics include:

- Introduction to lean manufacturing
- Advanced course on lean manufacturing
- Planning and implementation of automation in the plant
- After the fire—What needs to be in place for business continuity in times of disaster.
- Plant compliance and regulatory issues
- Low viscosity resins and lightweight fillers
- Developing a brand and marketing via websites.

After the sessions and the exhibit hall closes, Polynt/Reichhold is sponsoring a cocktail reception on the Lobby Terrace of the resort's Ogden's Restaurant.

Dinner is Thursday evening at 7 p.m. in the Linden Ballroom overlooking the golf course and includes the presentation of the Industry Awards and Recognition.

Something added this year is a post-dinner party: ICPA is sponsoring a networking event in the resort's Kegler's Bar, which features a bowling alley, pool tables and lounge area offering plenty of opportunity for on-resort fun with friends and acquaintances.

Demos are one of the most popular parts of POLYCON.



Chicago's History

Although Chicago's history is most often linked with the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 that killed 200 people and destroyed more than 3 square miles of structures, the city has a long, rich history. A few highlights:

- Chicago's very first settler was an African American businessman from Haiti—Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, who settled there with his Indian bride.
- It was incorporated as a city in 1837, got its first skyscraper in 1885, and is given credit for coming up with the term "jazz" in 1914.
- In 1900 Chicago completed a massive engineering project that reversed the flow of the Chicago River so that it emptied into the Mississippi River.
- The first televised U.S. presidential debate (John Kennedy and Richard Nixon) was held in Chicago's CBS Studios in 1960.

Day Three: Hands-on learning

On Friday morning, attendees will travel to the Marble Works Plant in South Elgin, IL to see the in-plant demos that have become one of the most popular features of POLYCON. The demos will go on throughout the morning, stopping for a Chicago-themed lunch and concluding with Q&A sessions at the demonstration stations.

The types of demos that are planned include methods for mold repair, gel coat repair, spray techniques and much more.

New this year at the plant demonstrations is a compliance scavenger hunt. Because OSHA compliance is a big issue, Kelly DeBusk, owner of Composites Compliance along with Marble Works owner Tom Wienkowski, will purposely place violations throughout the plant. Attendees will be asked to try to identify all the violations they can find. ■

Five steps to deal with difficult employees

BY DAVID G. JAVITCH

IT SEEMS SOME PEOPLE ARE JUST BORN TO BE DIFFICULT. We have all worked with them, and most of us dislike them. Difficult people are easy to recognize—they show up late, leave early, don't turn their work in on time and have an excuse for every failing.

Wait, there's more. These difficult people harass you and others, ask too many self-explanatory questions, neglect details, distract you and repeatedly challenge you and others. Even worse, when they interact with customers, vendors and people lower than them on the corporate hierarchy, they can be grouchy, impolite, condescending, uninformed, misleading, inappropriate or simply wrong. Do you know anyone like this?

Naturally, no one wants to work with difficult people. When dealing with problematic employees, productivity decreases, frustrations rise, morale goes down, and customers and vendors get upset. Here's five tips on how to handle them.

1. Don't ignore the problem.

Assuming that the employee provides value to the company and possesses redeeming qualities, there are ways to deal with difficulties. Most often, managers will simply ignore problematic staffers. Managers who live by this rule hope the problem will just go away; that these people will somehow turn themselves around or stop being troublesome. Ignoring the situation is the wrong solution to what could likely become a progressive problem.

2. Intervene as soon as possible.

It is important to take action as soon as the negative behavior pattern becomes evident—when left untouched, this problem will only escalate.

Occasionally, a difficult employee has no idea that his or her behavior is a problem or that others react negatively to actions.

This is because most people tend to put up with the annoying behavior and “go along to get along.”

At the same time, some employees just consider it a “job frustration.”

Just like some managers, employees want to be liked by colleagues and subordinates and are therefore reluctant to speak up when a problem arises.

Ultimately it is the manager's

responsibility to take the appropriate action to correct the problem. Whether the concern exists due to the employee's lack of knowledge of the issue, lack of feedback or projecting the difficulty onto someone else, the manager has the responsibility of addressing and turning around the predicament. The manager needs to gather information from other employees to discern the extent of the problem and personally observe the problem employee interacting with customers or vendors.

3. Research the problem personally.

Armed with accurate data and examples, the manager needs to then take this person into a conference room or office—away from others—and calmly address the issue.

To begin, the manager needs to ask if he or she knows of any ongoing issues to determine the awareness of the problems.

If the employee is “unaware,” the manager needs to describe the unacceptable behavior. The employee might interrupt to disagree or deny the existence of any issues. Nevertheless, the manager needs to continue by giving clear examples of the unwanted behavior.

The manager also needs to allow the employee to respond to the allegations. If the difficult employee refuses to believe that



the problems exist despite the evidence, the most the manager can hope for is an intellectual acceptance of the possibility that something is wrong.

4. Help the problematic employee to get back on track.

Once the employee begins to understand that these negative behaviors are real and experienced by others in the organization, the manager or someone from human resources should begin to coach the difficult employee in displaying more acceptable and appropriate behaviors. The employee needs time and practice in “trying on” new, more suitable behaviors. Human resources and/or the manager need to provide specific feedback to this employee on the success or failure of his or her efforts in minimizing the negative actions and implementing ones that are more positive.

5. If all else fails, termination may be necessary.

If the employee continues to deny inappropriate behavior and refuses to try to improve the situation, the manager

needs to place this person on the fast track towards termination. Often this involves recording well-documented verbal and then written feedback about the behavior. Strictly following company protocol, there should be a period for the employee to address the questionable behavior. If this trial period does not result in improved behavior, then the employee needs to be terminated.

Most employees will recognize the negative behavior and will at least attempt to turn it around. This is especially true during tough economic times when unemployment is high and finding a new job is difficult. In any case, the manager needs to follow company guidelines in recognizing the unacceptable behavior, providing direct feedback, providing input to try to turn it around and ultimately taking action in a timely manner.

Not doing so is a disservice to the problematic employee, other employees and the success of the organization. ■

DAVID G. JAVITCH, PH.D., is an organizational psychologist and president of Javitch Associates, an organizational consulting firm in Newton, MA. This article first appeared on <https://www.entrepreneur.com>. You can reach Javitch at djavitch@javitch.com.

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Note the association's new address

ICPA has a new address. The association moved this past fall to Louisville, KY. That city is where Executive Director Jennifer Towner lives, so the association decided ICPA's address should be located there as well.

"I'm excited to be in this area of the country because it brings me closer to many of our manufacturer members in that region," Towner said.

ICPA's new address is 4949 Old Brownsboro Road, Suite 232, Louisville, KY 40222. The office phone number remains the same: 470-219-8139. Towner requested that members make sure the address change is made in their contact bases.

Keep current on ICPA and POLYCON

The POLYCON website is being updated constantly during the time leading up to the event so be sure to check frequently to find out what's new. The site is at www.POLYCON-event.com. Among the information visitors will find is who is speaking, the schedule of events for the conference, how to make travel arrangements and what to do in Chicago.

Members can also keep up to date with what's happening at ICPA through the association's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/groups/196727340343053, which also will update as the dates for POLYCON draw near. Executive Director Jennifer Towner has encouraged members to post on that page and to comment. By doing those two things, the association is gaining a broader social media audience.

The association website, TheICPA.com, is still the main communication tool to keep members in touch with what is going on in the association and the industry. The website provides international exposure through public membership listings as well as advertising opportunities. For ICPA members, it provides up-to-date technical and regulatory documents, legislative information, educational papers and videos, and more.

An ICPA Group Forum site using the bbPress software has been created and final adjustments are being made to make it as user friendly and effective as possible. ICPA members will be receiving an invitation to join the group. Members do not need to accept the invite if they feel it would not be valuable for them, but once signed up for this group, members subscribe to topics in the forum they choose based on interest. Examples would be mold repair troubleshooting, regulatory and compliance issues, buying and selling plant equipment, and industry announcements. Any time an individual posts a communication on the topic it will be sent directly by email to those who

subscribe to the topic. This group will be for ICPA members only and should be an excellent way to communicate about issues most important to the industry and the association.

All posts will be monitored, and the forum will not be used for hiring. Instructions will be sent to members when they receive the invitation to join the group.

Welcome new ICPA members

The ICPA received two new manufacturer members to the association recently. Their full contact information is in the member listing on the ICPA website. They are:

- **SFI, Inc.**, located in Sparta, WI. The company's website is www.sinksbysfi.com and Scott Pirnstill from SFI, Inc. will be attending POLYCON in April.
- **Virginia Marble Manufacturers, Inc.**, located in Kenbridge, VA. The company website is www.virginiamarble.com. The company's new general manager, Mark Buss, will be attending POLYCON.

Please take time to welcome these two members.

Membership dues at half price

Because the ICPA year is now half over, dues fell to 50% for the remainder of the fiscal year. Now is a good time to encourage companies that are not members to see what membership can do for a cast polymer company. As a member, companies and their representatives receive a discounted registration rate for POLYCON. For information on dues rates and membership, go to theicpa.com/join-today/.

Get active today

ICPA members received a memo in March along with a video asking them to think about serving in a leadership role in the association. The video contained clips of current ICPA Board members speaking about how being involved in leading an association has helped them both professionally and personally.

During this month, the ICPA Board will be accepting nominations from those interested in serving the next two years either as a Board or committee member. The Board will vote on the candidates placed in nomination and an announcement will be made at POLYCON as to who the new Board members will be beginning in July 2018 for the 2018-2019 membership year.

Please contact Jennifer Towner at Jennifer@TheICPA.com for more information.

OTHER NEWS OF NOTE

More kitchen remodels occurring for 2018

Houzz's most recent annual remodeling survey found that 12% more homeowners will be changing the style of their kitchens in 2018 than what happened in 2017 (87% in 2018; 75% in 2017).

The most popular new styles are transitional (25%) and contemporary (17%), styles that are particularly popular in urban and suburban areas but not as popular in rural areas.

As far as kitchen layouts, half of all people remodeling are changing how the room looks overall with L-shape the most popular look (35%), surpassing U-shape (32%), a trend that has been developing over the last three years. Nearly two in five homeowners are adding kitchen islands.

Costs of kitchen renovations vary widely based on scope and location, but the average spend for a large kitchen (200 square feet) is \$42,000 while the average spend for smaller sizes is about \$25,800.

Engineered quartz is now the most popular countertop material (43%), overtaking granite (34%).

These figures came from the "U.S. Kitchen Trends Study," an online survey fielded to U.S. Houzz users between September and October of 2017.

Kitchen and bath market climbs to \$147 billion

The market for kitchen and bath products rose to \$147.3 billion in sales, according to the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA). That tops the last figures gathered by the association during the groundbreaking first Size of Market Study and Outlook, when NKBA reported a market of \$134.1 billion.

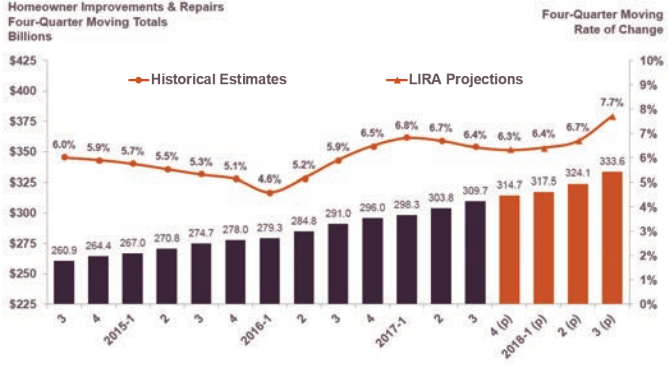
The study looks at eight kitchen products and 11 bath products. (This does not include design or costs of labor or installation.) Surfaces and cabinets are studied for both rooms and in the bathroom, showers, vanities, sinks and bathtubs are also included as well as other products.

The study also projected growth in this sector would continue for 2017 and 2018, with the size of the market expected to rise more than 10% to \$163 billion in 2017, and another 9.3% in 2018 to reach \$178 billion.

Remodeling continues strong growth

Experts expect the remodeling industry to do well this year. According to the Remodeling Futures Program at the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, growth in residential improvement and repair expenditures is anticipated to accelerate through the third quarter of 2018.

Leading indicator of remodeling activity



Source: Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies

According to the center's Leading Indicator of Remodeling Activity (LIRA), annual gains in home renovation and repair spending will increase from 6.3% in the fourth quarter of 2017 to 7.7% by the third quarter of next year.

The center gives credit to recent strengthening of the U.S. economy, tight for-sale housing inventories, and healthy home equity gains. It also warned that the natural disasters of 2017 may mean the figures will be higher than forecast.

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People leave jobs because of bosses

People don't quit their jobs just because they hate what they are doing; more frequently, they hate who they are working for, according to a Gallup poll of a million people. The poll found that 75% of workers who voluntarily left their jobs did so because of their bosses and not the position itself: Bad bosses were the No. 1 cause of unhappiness at work.

Gallup monitors employee sentiment on a regular basis. The 2017 State of the American Workplace report from Gallup concluded workers currently have little faith in their leaders. For example, it found that:

- Only 22% of employees strongly agree the leadership of their organization has a clear direction for the organization.
- Just 15% of employees feel strongly that leaders make them enthusiastic about the future.
- Only 13% of employees say top managers communicate effectively with the rest of the organization.

Also, when it comes to what types of employees are engaged (Gallup defines engaged employees as those who are involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace), manufacturing does not fare well.

The report said employees in manufacturing jobs are the least engaged of the industries monitored and that an "alarming number" are actively disengaged.

"The traditional management mentality in this industry tends to put process ahead of people, possibly accounting for some of the engagement obstacles," Gallup's report says.

What's more, only six in 10 report that they know what's expected of them.

Meanwhile, Gallup reports that in any industry, small companies fare much better in getting their employees engaged in what they do. Companies with less than 25 employees far outpace organizations of any size, besting their engagement by a difference of eight to 12 percentage points.

From 2012 to 2016, the engagement of small companies grew by five percentage points, while the engagement of other companies barely budged or even diminished.

Renters taking over largest cities

Over the last decade, the growth in the rental population in the U.S. has outpaced homeownership growth in most of the top U.S. markets, according to a new study by RentCafé, an apartment search website.

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that from 2006 to 2016, nearly a quarter of the 100 largest U.S. cities shifted

from owner to renter majority. Renters took over in 22 cities, increasing the total number of renter-dominated markets to 42. Gilbert, AZ held the highest percentage increase in renter share with 53.4% of the population. The growth of the population in that city doubled over that timeframe.

The study also showed not all hope is lost for the homeownership population. A closer look at the data shows that while the homeownership share of the population lost ground during the recession years, it began growing again as the renter population began shrinking in 2014.

RentCafé's analysis pointed out that the total U.S. population has increased by about 23.7 million people during the past decade, but this growth is not evenly distributed between the two occupancy categories. The number of renters has increased by more than 23 million, and that of homeowners by less than 700,000.

Home builders concerned about labor and materials

The two top concerns among builders in the housing industry today are the cost/availability of labor and building material prices, according to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). NAHB includes a set of questions in its monthly NAHB/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index that focuses on what problems builders faced in 2017 and expect to face in 2018.

Finding skilled workers and being able to pay them was a concern for 82% of builders in 2017 and 84% predict it will be a top concern in 2018. Meanwhile, 77% of builders were worried about how much materials cost in 2017 and 84% worry about it for 2018 and beyond. Other concerns were issues such as cost and availability of lots (close to 60% for each year), inaccurate appraisals, federal environmental regulations, local policies, obtaining permits and more. ■

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See us at POLYCON 2018 in Itasca, IL, April 18-20.
Join us at the welcome reception on April 18, sponsored by Composites One.