

CAST POLYMER

Winter 2019

# CONNECTION



## Showroom selling

Creating touch and feel for customers

ALSO:

- How to get praise for your company
- Profile on The Bath Collection

**A RAMPED UP DEMO PROGRAM**

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Cover: Not all ICPA members have showrooms, but those that do, find them an excellent tool. These display areas provide customers a way to see what options they have and experience the beauty of cast polymer up close. **Cast Polymer Connection** talked to five ICPA members about what their showrooms do, how they are set up and how they've changed over the years. The kitchen vignette featured on our cover is one of several that Monroe Industries, Avon, NY uses in its showroom. Photo by Bonnie Webster.

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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

# Let's all take a breath



**COLDER WEATHER IS MOVING IN**, bringing a festive focus to our members and their loved ones as they prepare for the holiday season. At the same time, the end of the year means companies are focusing on assessing whether they've achieved the best possible business results and looking at what may happen in the coming year.

These two realities are intertwined: family and finding time to enjoy the exploits, trials and tribulations of others is as important in our workplaces as it is in our homes. Our staff and our customers have their own holiday challenges and joys, but both are vital to our business success so we should remember we're all in this together.

As we face the hectic pace of this season, which brings additional stress points to our businesses, employees and customers, we need to take a few minutes to listen to other people. We need to take a deep breath and stay focused on the positives in our lives as well as in our businesses.

As we leave 2019 and enter 2020, your association is actively focused on a number of initiatives, foremost of which are industry marketing tools and issues, and technical education. In that respect, we have been fielding surveys to listen to your input on what is most important (See ICPA News to Know, page 23).

As far as technical education, don't miss this month's article on POLYTECH, our new demonstration program at POLYCON (see page 12). This is a great way to expand the capabilities of your businesses. We've taken what's been popular in the past and greatly expanded it for this year's POLYCON, which is April 15-17 at the Grand Summit Hotel Re-

sort, Park City, UT. Planning for the rest of the educational schedule is well underway, and we're also finalizing several facility visits and gearing up for major networking opportunities. Every year this conference gets more exciting and beneficial to members, and

we look forward to sharing more details as the meeting approaches. Meanwhile, it's time to start planning because registration begins Dec. 2. One of the best ways to keep up to date on POLYCON is by visiting the event website for the latest info ([polyconevent.com](http://polyconevent.com)).

This month's **Cast Polymer Connection** also travels to Florida's eastern central coastline to visit The Bath Collection, another of our association's fami-

ly-run businesses. We also bring you insight into what other companies are doing as far as showrooms to drive additional attention and volume to their businesses. We present tips on product and company reviews, which today can really make or break your businesses.

Please reach out to us with questions and observations on how we can serve our membership better. See you in April in Park City, Utah! In the meantime, enjoy your own families and the spirit of the holiday season. ■

**Mark Buss**

Virginia Marble Manufacturers, Inc.

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ASSOCIATION IS  
ACTIVELY FOCUSED  
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# The Bath Collection:

## A strong company springs from challenging circumstances

BY GENILEE  
SWOPE PARENTE

**IN 2007, THE BATH COLLECTION IN VERO BEACH, FL OPENED ITS DOORS FOR BUSINESS.** The birth

of the company was a bold move for founder Chad Hamilton for two reasons: 1) Chad had wanted to go into the bath business for himself for some time, but he needed to find a way to do so without competing against his own father's company, Maxrodon Marble, which had been around since 1971, and 2) The building industry was in the midst of the major recession.

Chad, and later his wife Nicole, worked together to find a solution that wouldn't interfere with the family business. Then Chad simply thumbed his nose at the economic challenge of the times and in January of that year, the company was born.

"At the time we opened for business, I was reminded of other great businesses that started during a recession and thrived," Chad recalls.

One of those was shipping company United Parcel Service, which two teenagers in Seattle formed during The Panic of 1907, the first worldwide financial crisis. From that humble beginning, the company went on to become mega-giant shipping company UPS, which now has a global reach.

"When you open a business during hard times like that, you learn from the start where you must cut corners and how to be competitive in a small, challenged market," Chad says.

You also learn to wear many hats at once, a trait Nicole says is Chad's strength and a reason for the company's success.

"Chad worked with his dad at Maxrodon for years before he started The Bath Collection so he knows every aspect of the business," Nicole says. "Without his knowledge of the shop and how it works, the field and what's needed, the customers and what they require, we would



The Bath Collection got its start through another cultured marble company (Maxrodon Marble), which was updated and modernized to meet today's needs.

not thrive as we are today," she adds.

## Generational changes

The way the Hamiltons made it work is that, instead of opening a brand new business, The Bath Collection began as a spinoff of Maxrodon Marble. Today, Maxrodon is the cultured marble division of the company.

Maxrodon's history starts with three men: Bob Maxwell (a plumber), Cal Whiddon and Charles Roberts. Chad's father Paul Hamilton saw the opportunity the company they created offered and took over ownership shortly after it opened. He eventually turned it into a business offering cultured marble products.

Chad's first memory of being in the Maxrodon shop was at age 8, so as he got older and developed a desire to have his own business, bath products were a natural fit.

However, "Chad is a bit sentimental about his heritage, and he couldn't imagine stepping in on a business that was born before he was," Nicole explains. The couple thought about trying a new geographic location. Instead, Chad saw a niche in the shower enclosure, mirrors and shelving part of the business, which became The Bath Collection. Eventually, the marble business and The Bath Collection were wed and Maxrodon became a division of the overall company.

Chad and Nicole (who married in 2014) took over managing the day-to-day operations in 2017, though Paul is still active and owns the building where The Bath Collection and its showroom/plant facilities reside.

Chad's role is anything that has to do with managing the manufacturing arm, which means he measures, trains, works in the plant and occasionally installs the products himself.

"His eye to detail and design when he's out in the field helps our customers feel they are in good hands," Nicole says. Nicole, who also has her own tax preparation franchise, oversees office operations, marketing, sales and accounting at The Bath Collection.

When the couple took over running the whole company, their main strategy was to bring the cast polymer business back to life and "give it that competitive edge that cultured marble needs today," Chad says, by learning more modern ways of doing things. "With design always changing, we knew



The Hamilton family includes Chad and Nicole Hamilton (left and third from left), their two small boys, Carson (standing) and Owen (in Chad's arms) and Chad's daughter Grace (right), who is now the company's social media/website guru.

we needed to update the look of cultured marble and show off the beautiful shower enclosures and other products we can produce," Chad says.

One of the first steps the couple took was to order new kinds of products and molds including a wave bowl sink and a subway tile mold. Chad also contacted a few owners of closed cultured marble companies and added their updated equipment and a few unique molds.

"We minimized color choices to give us a simpler,

cleaner product, added some solid colors and the concrete look and other popular options. Our showroom features the subway tile panels with and without tile inserts, as well as a wall-to-wall countertop with a large skirt to show consumers you don't need a cabinet for our surfaces products; it's all customizable," Chad says.

Meanwhile, The Bath Collection also features glass shower enclosures, mirrors, vented wood and wire shelving, and closet systems, which remain an important part of being able to offer customers what they need for the bathroom of their dreams.

## Facilities, customers, staff

The Bath Collection has a 7,000-square-foot plant for making its products as well as a 1,200-square-foot showroom (see "When showing off is a good thing" on page 8). Plans for the immediate future include adding an area dedicated to shipping, which will be especially important when the company fulfills a plan to find more ways to offer products directly to end users, including via the company website.

The company has a diverse range of customers from commercial facilities to consumers who walk into the showroom.

"We cater to all clientele," Chad says. "You see our products in fire stations, churches, retirement homes. We were part of a major renovation of the Indian River Medical Center in Cleveland, OH; our shower bases are in more than 100 visitors' rooms there to date," Chad says.

The company also works with contractors and developers on residential home projects as well as the multiple-story oceanfront condos so popular in Florida.

"We believe our windowsills stand up well to the test of salt air and time," Chad says.

The showroom brings homeowners directly into the facility, a part of the business that Chad believes will be an area of growth going forward.

"I think our business is evolving as a new generation of homeowners learns just how versatile and beautiful cultured marble products are," Chad says. "They will want to come directly to us in some cases," he says.

With the 48 years of experience that Paul, then Chad have had in the cultured marble business, the company has a solid reputation in the building community and does business in a tri-county area. Most of the marketing that created that reputation has been through word of mouth.

"Referrals go a long way in a smaller community," Chad explains. "We depend on the good customer service practices we've developed including follow-up on all estimates we provide, even those that are rejected," he says. "This follow-up lets us know what improvements we can make with the next potential client."

Although word of mouth has served the company well so far, The Bath Collection is looking at more modern tools to spread the message of its quality, including social media and its own website. These efforts are being helped along by a third generation: Chad's daughter Grace, who is a student at North Carolina State. She has become the company's online consultant, helping them develop a top-notch website and keeping up with social media.

The rest of the staff currently consists of a sales/office staff of two, a manufacturing team of four and an installation team of two crews. Like with the entire cast polymer industry as well as many factory-based companies, the Hamiltons say one of their main challenges today is finding and keeping good employees who can develop the right skills to create the required quality products. The situation was particularly tricky at the time the Hamiltons took over operations because staff members were retirement age. The crews who put the product in place have tile installation backgrounds, and they are trained in cultured marble installation by Chad.

### ICPA involvement

Nicole says she's hoping involvement in associations such as ICPA can help with the skills issue, as well as many other



The Bath Collection's windowsills are popular with the seaside condominium builders who need a material that can stand up against seawater challenges.

areas. "Trained staff would help any of the companies in our business become better at techniques and safer in their work methods—more competitive," she points out. "We'd love to see training videos offered through the ICPA website or other sites eventually," she says.

The Bath Collection is a fairly new member of the association, and the story of how the company became involved is one of research, a little bit of luck and another member willing to share their knowledge.

"We were taking a trip to visit Grace in North Carolina. Nicole had been doing some research on how other cultured marble businesses operate and came across Majestic Kitchen & Bath Creations in Raleigh," Chad explains.

Nicole contacted them and found an enthusiastic new professional contact.

"Not only did they show us their fantastic showroom, but they also took us through their manufacturing plant. They gave us so much terrific knowledge and part of that was: we needed to join ICPA, and we needed to attend POLYCON," Nicole says.

The couple is planning a trip to Utah in 2020 for POLYCON Park City, Utah and looking forward to learning more about how other companies operate.

### The strength of knowledge

Every company in the cultured marble industry has its strengths, whether those strengths are size, community reach, knowledgeable managers, established reputation, a long history or youthful ideas.

The Bath Collection has a little bit of most of that. But Nicole says that the company's greatest strength is the man who oversees the company: Chad.

"He truly cares about every job we take on and has a breadth of knowledge that only years in the profession and experience with every aspect of the job can provide. With today's requirements in the shop, you can't just hire the labor you need right off the street—you have to be able to develop your team's skills. We are lucky to have evolved as we did with a father, then a son who is continuing to learn and grow," she says. ■

**GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE** is executive editor of **Cast Polymer Connection**. She welcomes ideas on other ICPA member companies to profile. She can be reached at [gsparente@verizon.net](mailto:gsparente@verizon.net).

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Visitors walk through entire kitchens when they visit Majestic's showrooms.

# When showing off is a very good thing

BY GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE

FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS YEAR, one of the sessions at the technical demonstrations during POLYCON Park City Utah (see page 12) is focused on showroom selling. ReBecca Erdmann, owner of Sand & Swirl, Ogden, UT, has graciously agreed to share some of her secrets. There's a good reason why this session promises to be a packed one: changes made in the way the company uses and presents itself to customers during the showroom process have resulted a closing rate for that company's showroom of an astonishing 95%.

Not all ICPA members have showrooms—many focus on a business model that uses other sales channels. But those that do use displays of their products in a location separated in some way from where the product is made say these tools are increasingly vital in reaching an audience that wants to

touch, feel and see what cast polymer surfaces are.

“Our first showroom, which was 900 square feet, started in 2008 as a place where people went to pick colors,” Erdmann explains. “It's now a 2,400-square-foot building separate from our plant that we completed in 2018. And it has been Step One of our sales process since 2012,” she adds.

“With so much accessibility to buying online, consumers still want the assurance of what they are purchasing,” adds Scott A. Byers, president and CEO of Majestic Kitchen & Bath Creations, which has locations in the Carolinas.

“Customers want to be able to ask questions, feel the product and learn the care of that product. Their showroom visit and the product education gained in that visit supplement the web experience with a more one-on-one experience,” he adds.



## Why companies have showrooms

For Sand & Swirl, the showroom venture is fairly new, an effort that has grown and expanded as the company changed focus and modernized its marketing tools.

But some in the cast polymer business have had these rooms for many years, though the display areas have greatly evolved with the industry. Synmar, Jonesboro, GA, which has been in business since 1978, opened its original showroom in 1986. It was expanded to twice the size in 1993 and been completely remodeled several times since.

It's now 3,000 square feet of space and available to online customers via a google virtual tour [[www.synmarandcastech.com/visit-our-showroom/](http://www.synmarandcastech.com/visit-our-showroom/)].

"Today's customers expect to be able to see displays and the options available to them," Kimberly Peek, general manager, explains. "We feel it's extremely important to have a nice showroom to reveal the product design options, textures and colors," she adds.

The showroom at Monroe Industries, Inc., Avon, NY is 20 years old, born when the company built its current manufacturing facility. The company itself is second generation, started by John Webster's father and mother and now owned and run by John and Bonnie Webster.

According to Bonnie, the showroom has become a vital connection between Monroe and its customers, who are contractors that send end users to the showroom to pick out products, as well as designers, suppliers, builders and walk-in residential customers shopping for their own projects. Because so many of the people are buying for their home, the displays are changed constantly as trends and tastes change.

"You wouldn't want to walk into a shoe store and see the same shoes you saw during your last visit six months ago," Bonnie Webster says. "My customers generally come back every eight to ten years, so I had better have our displays and products changed to reflect that reality," she says.

Although The Bath Collection, Vero Beach, FL, opened its doors in 2007, the company is a spinoff of an older, established company (Maxrodon Marble, which was started by the current owner's father in 1971. See page 4). The newer-generation owners Chad and Nicole Hamilton have made the 1,200-square-foot showroom area a vital part of the marketing plan, maximizing the space and modernizing the displays to appeal to the local contractors and homeowners who walk through the doors. The showroom also was a major part of a rebranding effort begun a few years ago and culminating with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in October of this year, when its tri-state contractors, tiler installers and design customers were invited into the company to see the



Setting the mood often requires props and lighting as evidenced in this Synmar kitchen.

many changes that have been made.

"Buying or remodeling a home or a commercial business is a huge expense. Any homeowner or builder spending that kind of money wants to be well-informed of their options," Nicole Hamilton points out.

Majestic Kitchen & Bath Creations, which has six showrooms in North and South Carolina, says that these display sites have always been a critical part of its marketing, sales and resource program, but that the purpose has changed over the years.

"Originally it was to view and see materials. However, today many folks are already aware of material types and colors prior to visiting our showroom," says Byers. "Now, our showrooms are about engaging our expertise and resource professionals; what might work best given the projected use and other details that might be considered to enhance the design or functionality," he adds.

## What's shown, when and how

What a company puts in its showroom depends on who is walking through the door.

For Synmar, whose customers range from local contractors to national builders, remodelers to custom builders to consumers, the range of what's shown is wide. The showroom has full displays of custom kitchen countertops, custom bathtubs, custom shower displays, full tub displays, full vanity top displays, full kitchen countertop displays and displays of options in colors, finishes and more.

"Our customers come here to see variety and want to choose as they go. They are very impressed with the displays and the options shown, and they let us know that," Peek says.

Synmar chooses what to display by group decision, involving all management, sales and office personnel, who give



Sand & Swirl created this outstanding way to show off its own logo.

their opinions and thoughts on what customers and today's homeowners want. The showroom is open for walk-in customers during the week and for appointments on Saturdays. All the office personnel work in the showroom.

The Bath Collection offers shelving on top of bath products so the showroom has wood and metal options on display as well as shower enclosures, mirrors, plumbing fixtures, tubs, shower bases, wall panels, countertops and window sills, a popular product as a cast polymer option in an area of the country dealing with saltwater challenges.

The company keeps the showroom up to date by paying attention to what other companies put on display and listening to customers talk about what they want.

"We currently have 12 different countertops on three racks, an idea we got from visiting with Majestic Kitchen & Bath Creations a year ago," Nicole Hamilton says.

The showroom is staffed by office personnel, who conduct estimating, answer design questions and prepare invoices. Walk-ins are a large part of who visits so the rooms have showroom hours and are also available by appointment.

Webster calls herself the "queen bee" of the Monroe Industries showroom because she is the go-to person for coming up with ideas, which she gets from many sources including Pinterest. She runs her ideas by co-owner John Webster and when those two agree "we move forward with a change." Monroe has three kitchens, eight full showers, two tub units and several areas where color samples are displayed. She also uses different textures and colors in different displays so people can see their options.

"Our installations in the showroom display how nicely composites can be done," Webster says. "Not seeing inside

corner trim and wide silicone joints really sets the product apart from other home product showrooms," she says.

Also in the showroom, "we offer personalized color consultations to give the homeowner the feel they are making the right color combination selections," she says. Monroe has both regular hours and appointment times.

The goal of the showroom at Sand & Swirl is to allow a comfortable place for customers, which are largely general contractors, remodeling contractor clients and homeowners, to shop.

"We are pleasant, not pushy. People buy emotionally and we want to get them excited about what is possible with our product, breaking any stigma that exists about the term, 'cultured marble'," Erdmann says.

Customers are often asked to bring general dimensions of their project with them, then staff guide them through the sales process "by active listening, asking questions, assisting them in picking colors and options. We also provide first initial budgetary estimates to qualify them as a customer, a process that has helped our closing rate," Erdmann says.

The displays are different shower, tub and vanity configurations along with various options in color and style, and the layout and colors on display are decided upon as a staff team effort.

Majestic's showrooms include many displays of the different selections of granite, quartz, marble, glass, mirrors, cultured marble, sinks and other bath accessories as well as vignettes set up where customers can see how the company fabricates the product and try some of the options they have such as how a shower door operates.

"What goes into a Majestic showroom is determined by

feedback from our sales team on what customers say they want to see more of, along with results we've tracked from what we fabricate and trends analyses," Byers says.

"Our procurement and fabrication teams work very closely with our sales team to assure what we have displayed is current, trending and updated," he adds.

### Location considerations

Of the companies interviewed for this article, Sand & Swirl and Majestic have showrooms that are standalone, while the others have display areas at the same location as their plants.

Erdmann says the choice for Sand and Swirl was made because of past negative experiences with consumers smelling the process. She also says one of the company's favorite parts of its showroom is the comfortable waiting area, which has couches, an activity center for children and a television playing Disney channels.

Majestic's Youngsville showroom is located at headquarters and the company's lead fabrication facility while the others are spread throughout the triangle area of Raleigh, Greensboro and Apex as well as the coastal areas of Wilmington and Charleston. One of the company's goals today is to implement new visual technologies into those locations.

"We currently offer digital pairing after we measure for stone countertops. This is where a customer can view their countertop before it's cut and installed," Byers says.

The company is working toward allowing that viewing even earlier in the process so that customers can see the product in place while making selections, he adds.

"We follow the housing market to see where some of the leading national builders are going so we can service their customers along with remodelers and people who may be relocating and want to update their new homes," Byers says.

The Bath Collection, whose showroom is located at the manufacturing facility to help with overhead costs and to offer convenience for customers who want to pick up the product and install it themselves, says it is currently considering a standalone, but as an additional location in a nearby town "to get us more business in the future," Nicole Hamilton says.

Synmar's customer base is broad and includes large and small homebuilders, remodelers, retail customers, cabinet suppliers and several major retailers. Because of this, visitors include individual homeowners, builders, remodelers, and Home Depot and Lowes associates, who come for training programs. The company also uses the opportunity that having a showroom attached to the manufacturing facility provides to show customers how the products are made



Kitchen vignettes in Monroe's showroom bring the beauty of cast polymer to life and show how well it works with other materials such as wood cabinetry.

through shop tours. Synmar is also considering the possibility of opening a second showroom in another area as both a new sales channel and to offer some customers added convenience, Peek says.

No matter where the display area is located, however, showroom proponents say a big part of why they are needed today is for education of the public.

"People shopping today love to price out products online," Bonnie Webster explains. "Some will then come in and ask why I'm more expensive. It's kind of like doing a google search on symptoms of a health issue then going in to see the doctor," she says.

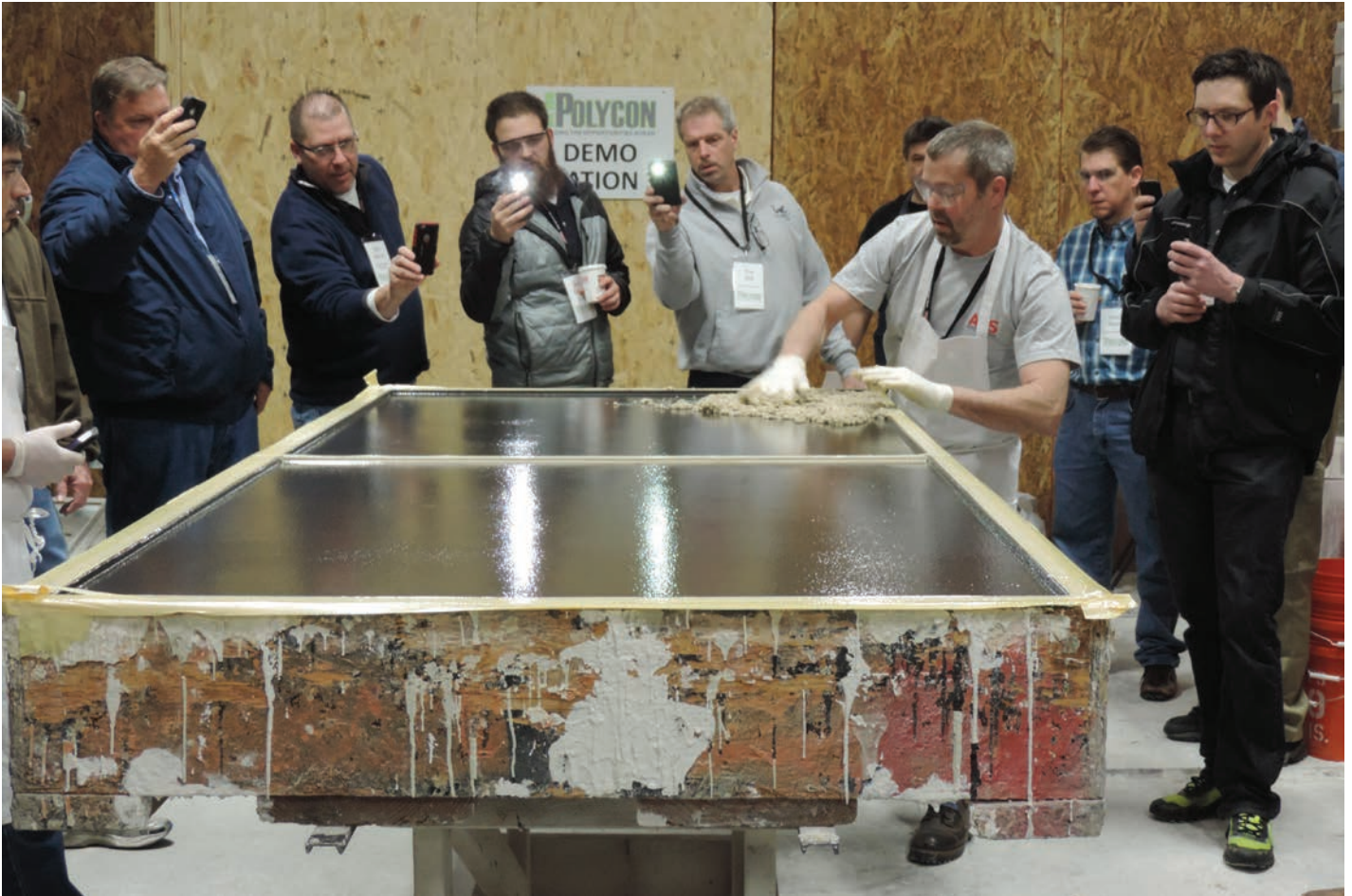
But in today's world, that's needed, she adds.

"The internet is helpful when clients come in with pictures of what they like and a basic knowledge of the materials. That's when we have the opportunity to tell them what this product can do and show them how beautiful the results can be," she says. ■

**GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE** is managing editor of Cast Polymer Connection. She encourages ICPA members to send in their story ideas to [gsparente@verizon.net](mailto:gsparente@verizon.net).



# POLYCON Park City Utah 2020 will include special technical program



A common sight at POLYCON demos are cell phones, which help to record the hands-on learning experience.

**WHEN ICPA WAS FORMING ITS OWN ORGANIZATION** more than five years ago and began holding POLYCONs, one of the features that participants were most excited about was the return of technical demonstrations.

“Plant demonstrations have been a legacy in our organization dating back to the CMI [Cultured Marble Institute—ICPA’s predecessor group] regional meetings,” says Larry Branan, R.J. Marshall Company, who has organized many of those demonstrations. “They are an opportunity for manufacturers, new or experienced, to learn new processes and/or products. The open forum style gives participants the chance to exchange knowledge and experience.” For suppliers, the demos allow a channel for them to work with manufacturers to troubleshoot, train and introduce products, Branan adds.

That’s why the demos have returned to the front and cen-

ter of POLYCON meetings. From the time of the first POLYCON in 2015, these demonstrations have grown both in popularity and in content. This year, planners have taken the momentum gained each year and created a unique program called POLYTECH Training that will take place over two days: Wednesday, April 15 from noon to 4 p.m. and Friday, April 17 from 9 a.m. to noon. Because the meeting this year is in Park City, UT, Sand & Swirl, Ogden, UT and Tyvarian, Linden, UT (co-hosted by Whitewater Kitchen and Bath), have generously opened their plants to host POLYTECH Training. Transportation to both events will be available for POLYCON participants.

For those who’ve attended many past events, the new format adds another level of excitement.

“It’s important we take the time to see what’s new, to see more effective and positive ways to accomplish things,” says

John Webster, Monroe Industries. “Plant demonstrations allow attendees to learn new techniques, get fresh ideas, network and gain more expertise in manufacturing,” he adds. As far as those who give their time to provide those demos, “Having industry experts take their valuable time in putting on plant demonstrations shows the commitment these individuals have to our industry,” he adds.

“Plant demonstrations show you firsthand how new products are made,” says Dirk DeVuyst, International Marble Institute. “Keeping your eyes open provides you many tips on how to use mold prep products better, how to improve your safety programs and how to accelerate or decelerate your cure process. A straw on the top of the polycollar; hot glue to affix the bowl to the table; these are all little tips and tricks that improve your operation,” he says.

At the same time, “There is no sales literature being given out here. Instead, you see a show of craftsmanship that cannot be found on YouTube or in sales leaflets,” he adds.

Because of the open forum, these plant demos also are where new ideas are born, according to Darren Suggs, Marble Masters of Middle Georgia, Inc. “It’s amazing how fellow manufacturers who put their heads together can come up with some great improvements!” For example, a rotating (flip over) solid surface slab cart he came up with “was from several of us trying to figure out how to make a heavy lifting, 2-man job, into an easy, 1-person job,” he says.

This sharing of information is a vital part of today’s association, members stress.

“This is part of the lean manufacturing process,” Suggs points out. “You either improve or you die. Some competitors from the past never shared their ideas or learned from others. They are no longer around,” he adds.

Here’s a sample of what’s already planned, and much more is on the way:

## The 2020 demos

### **Cultured Granite Veining: Jake Smith, Sand & Swirl, Inc.**

Smith will present an introduction to veined granite by demonstrating how to use synthetic granite granules as an ingredient to a marble mix to create a new and unique appearance.

### **Tub and Shower Installation: Corey Erdmann, Sand & Swirl, Inc.**

Sand & Swirl will share its instructional demonstration on tub and shower installation. Erdmann will report on what he’s learned in his many years of experience measuring walls and installing tubs and shower pans.



## Why up-close learning works

Psychologists, human resources professionals, hiring consultants and others who deal with the human brain and how we learn agree that seeing a task in action has many benefits over learning by sitting down and perusing a manual. Research on classroom methods shows that learners retain about 5% of material presented through lectures and only 10% of what they learn by reading while they retain about 30% of what they learn by demonstration and up to 75% of what they learn when hands-on participation is added to the mix (National Training Laboratory, Institute of Applied Behavioral Science Learning Pyramid).

But why does learning by seeing or doing work so well? Here’s what sources say:

- **It helps people connect with what they do every day.** Real-world, practical learning methods focus directly on what people do every day, which makes learning more relevant, one of the reasons people retain what they learn.
- **It links theory with practice.** Reading about procedures from a book, a training manual or an instruction sheet shows the learner what’s supposed to happen, but seeing it in action brings each step into clear focus, which links what is scheduled to happen with specific stages of how to get there.
- **It allows immediate feedback.** When a person learns by watching a demonstration, they usually have the opportunity to ask questions as the task is done, instead of having to wait until the end of a speech or flipping back through the beginning of reading material to try to find answers on his or her own.
- **It brings some points home.** Even if a person believes they already know how something is done, seeing it in a demonstration almost always provides additional tips towards doing it a better, safer or more efficient way.
- **It teaches you what to teach others.** One of the reasons plant owners need to know the best methods of making cast polymer products is they need to pass that knowledge along to the leaders in their companies. By seeing someone demonstrate methods, owners are building a base for making quality products that they can then spread to other parts of their operations.



Attendees get to see equipment up close and learn tips on how it works.

**Spray Granite Technique: Steven Dolgner and Christopher Patten, Elite Marble Co.**

These two presenters will give information such as what to do if the cup gun is too small for the job or if pump and pressure pot systems are too much and more. They will demonstrate their spray granite method using a drywall hopper gun, also called a texture spray gun.

**Building a Production Tile Mold: Frank Vetrano, Agco Marble**

One of the most innovative production managers in the cast polymer industry, Frank Vetrano, will present a popular instructional demonstration that will help attendees learn how to quickly create unique tile molds. Vetrano will share his technique for creating a single production tile mold.

**Gel Coat Patching and Repair: Jake Smith, Sand & Swirl, Inc.**

In this instructional presentation, Smith will share his experience and demonstrate the technique used at Sand & Swirl to patch and repair gel coat imperfections.

**Ventilation System Review: Kelly DeBusk, Composites Compliance LLC**

DeBusk will talk about how vital a good dust extraction system is, what issues are involved, how to troubleshoot older systems, what to look for when in need of a new system and more.

**Showroom Selling using Sandler's Selling System: ReBecca Erdmann, Sand & Swirl, Inc.**

Erdmann explains the Sandler's Selling System and shares her experience and knowledge of how to apply that system to showroom sales, a move that increased her company's

showroom sales closings to 95%.

**Robotics Open Forum: ICPA President Mark Buss, Virginia Marble Manufacturers, Inc.**

Buss has invited any company that has considered automating processes to share concerns and knowledge. He will share his own research and experience on robotic equipment available to the cast polymer industry.

**Multi-Color Gel Coat Spray Equipment: Bill Rich, MVP**

Rich will show the newly installed multi-color gel coat spray unit at Sand and Swirl.

**Autocaster Review: Whitewater and Marshall-Gruber**

These two companies will demonstrate operation, maintenance and repair of automated casting systems and help participants troubleshoot questions.

**Mold Preparation and Maintenance: Whitewater**

Whitewater Kitchen and Bath will share its procedures on how to prepare and maintain molds.

**The Tyvarian Process: Tyvarian**

This popular process incorporates high definition images into the cultured marble process. The company will show how it's done and what unique finishes can be created.

**Automation Open Forum**

Attendees will address questions such as when the time is ripe for a company to automate and which types can meet what production needs.

## And more

Also, as part of this year's demonstration, ICPA members will present a number of educational videos their companies have made or that they use. A sample of what's planned includes:

- Virginia Marble's highly requested instructional video on spray granite vanities with the solid color gel-coated bowl process.
- R.J. Marshall Company's instructional video on "How to spray granite using a standard cup gun sprayer."
- Polynt-Reichhold's popular video from CCPU on "How to set up a good gel coat spray pattern" and "How to spray gel coat."

## Taking it home

There is another reason why the demonstrations are so popular in today's manufacturing world: they provide a shot in the arm for people in the industry who come away with this new knowledge as well as a way to fill in the skills gap that troubles so many plant owners today.

"Seeing and learning new things leads to renewed inspiration for all of us," John Webster says. "You'll want to share this renewed enthusiasm with your own staff, as well as your peers." ■



## Other facts about learning

*From the National Training Laboratory, Institute of Applied Behavioral Science Learning Pyramid:*

Teaching others is at the top of ways to retain knowledge. People retain nearly 90% of what they have learned by teaching others.

*From "10 facts about learning retention you'll wish you could forget," Infrastructure learning consultants:*

- After one hour, people retain less than half of the information presented.
- After one day, people forget more than 70% of what was taught.
- After six days, that number has climbed to 75%.
- Corporations spend over \$70 billion per year on training.

*From the Association for Career and Technical Education:*

81% of high school dropouts say that real-world learning opportunities such as technical courses would have kept them in school.

Speakers include experts who give tips on techniques and answer questions from those in attendance.

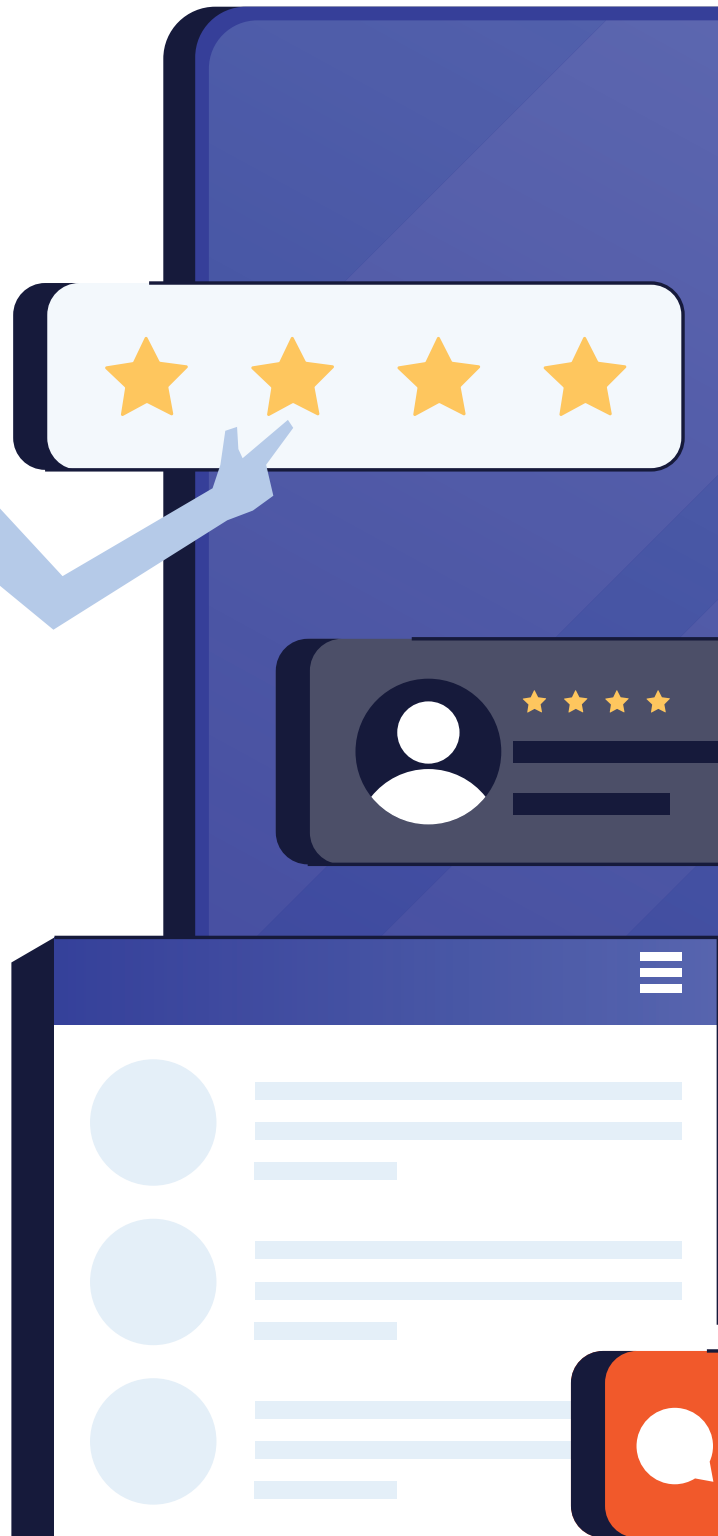
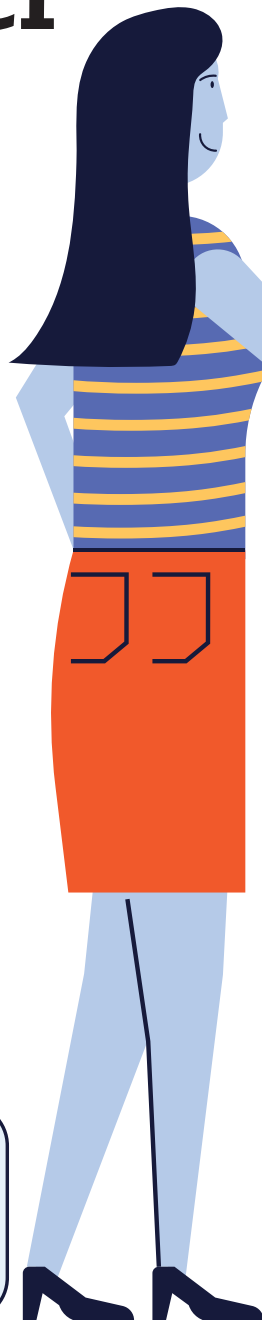


# Reviews and comments: gaining customer praises

BY GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE

WHEN THE INTERNET CAME ON THE SCENE 30 YEARS AGO, the way people conduct business began to change. The days when people walked into a store and sought out a knowledgeable associate to teach them what they needed to know to buy just the right widget faded away.

Unfortunately, a very big reason why this no longer happens is people don't believe businesses tell them the truth anymore. According to research firm HubSpot, 55% of people today no longer trust the companies they buy from

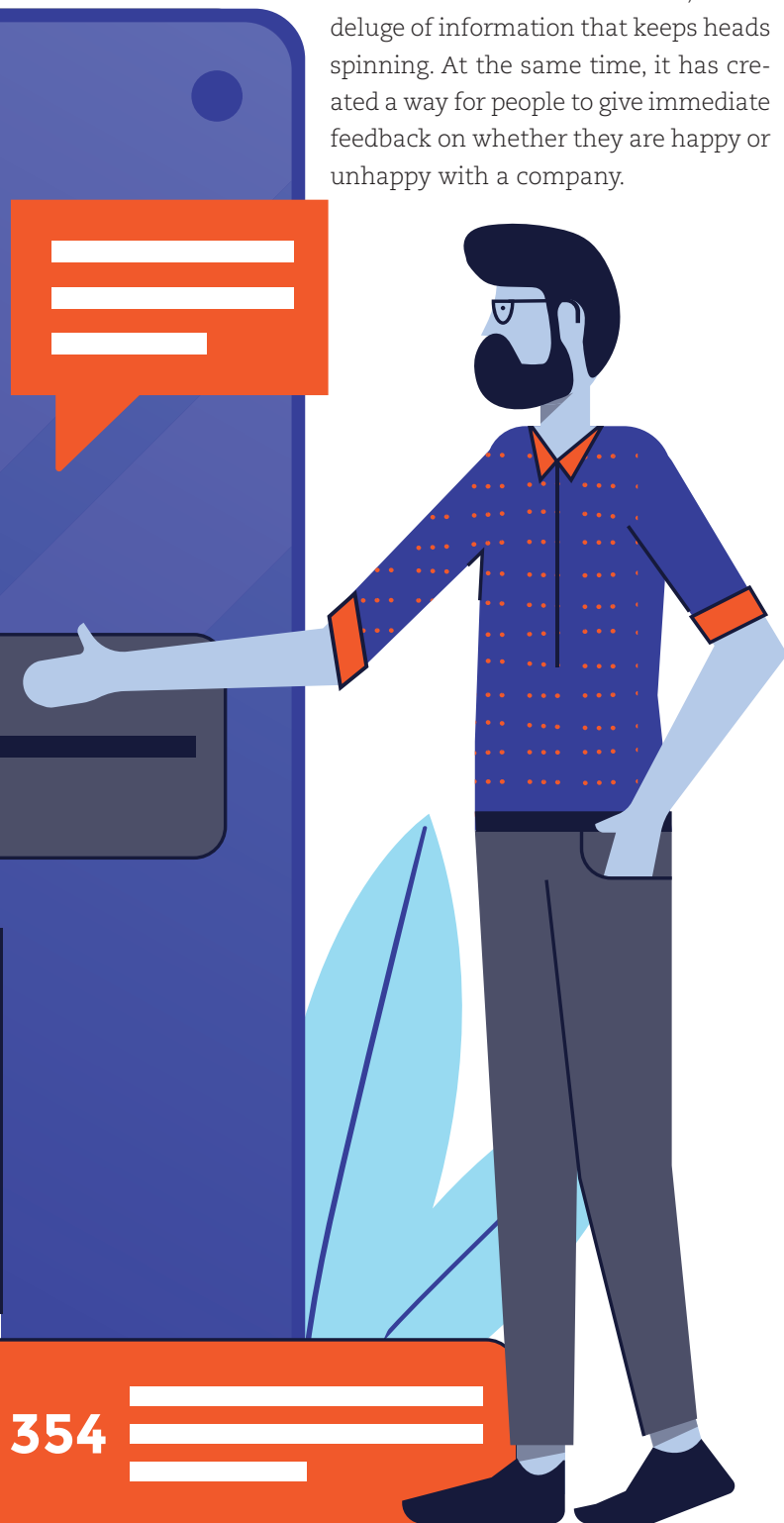




as much as they used to; 65% do not trust company press releases; 69% do not trust ads; and 71% do not fall for sponsored ads on social networks.

Who do they go to for advice today? HubSpot says 81% trust their friends and their family over businesses.

Part of the reason is that, while the internet brought new channels of sales, it also brought concerns over privacy, misinformation and confusion, and a deluge of information that keeps heads spinning. At the same time, it has created a way for people to give immediate feedback on whether they are happy or unhappy with a company.



Cast polymer businesses have talked about the importance of good customer relations, the personal touch, the need to tout their products' quality almost as long as the industry has been around. But today, they also need to find a way to get the people they serve to sing their praises both on social media and through in-person or written comments.

### What do they seek?

While those of us advanced in age might recall fondly the old ways of "shopping," the reality is that the way people find products today is to solicit advice from friends, family, neighbors and others on the pros and cons of certain types, then cruise the internet seeking products with the properties they've put on their shopping list as needs.

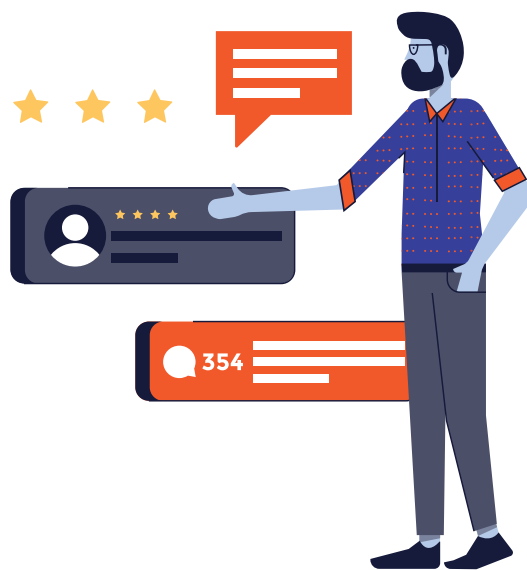
One of the main reasons they'll go a step further and walk into a store or contact a specific company is online reviews. Some companies groan at this idea, convinced that people only leave reviews if they're unhappy. But research does not support that assumption. HubSpot reports that the good/bad experience is just about even. Almost half (49%) of all consumers said they leave reviews. Of that amount, 51% share bad experiences while 49% share good experiences.

So what makes them happy or mad? One major factor that makes reviews happen, especially in industries related to construction, home products, installations and dealing with third party distribution is customer service and response time. A second HubSpot study found that 90% of people expect to hear back within 30 minutes on any support questions they throw out while 82% of them say they want that quick response on any marketing or sales questions. A study assessing customer service expectations done last year by Dimensional Research backs up that finding: 89% of respondents wanted a quick response to any customer service request. The dimension study also reported a number of other fascinating facts about what customers expect or what they use to get answers today. For example:

- 98% of people have used FAQs, a help center or other self-service online resources.
- 65% of respondents expected customer service to be faster now than it was five years ago.
- 97% of people say that a bad customer service experience changed their buying practices while 87% say good customer service changed their buying behavior.

Of those who changed behavior because of good experiences, 67% recommended the product to others, which is another reason reviews are so important. Some recommen-

“PROVIDE A LINK FROM YOUR WEBSITE TO [FACEBOOK AND GOOGLE], FOLLOW UP WITH CUSTOMERS REGULARLY VIA EMAIL AND LINK TO REVIEW SITES, THEN BE SURE TO TOOT YOUR OWN HORN, THAT IS, PROMOTE THE GOOD REVIEWS YOU’VE ALREADY RECEIVED.”



dations come in the form of word of mouth to family and friends, but in today’s digital world, customers increasingly use online reviews to ascertain a product’s or company’s reputation. Research firm BrightLocal conducted a study that found that 85% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations and 73% of them trust a business more after reading positive reviews.

Another, less realized or understood benefit of online reviews is search engine ranking. It’s obvious when using Google search, for example, that the company rewards business listings that have more reviews and more stars than those with no reviews or less-than-stellar rankings. Also, the web pages of companies with more stars cling to the top of the Google local map listing or general search listings. Facebook has also become a source consumers consult before making a purchase, especially a pricey one. They’ll often post comments about what they are buying and what the result of the purchase is, and a friend will share those comments.

For all these reasons and no matter the channel, getting customers to view you favorably is a vital part of doing business today.

### How to get praise

Here’s a list of suggestions for gathering positive comments. It’s compiled from web articles from consultants and marketing experts such as ICPA’s own Linda Lullie, Inspired 2 Design, whose company manages some of the association’s social media efforts:

**Seek out websites where reviews are posted.** The world’s largest search engine Google, for example, offers all companies Google My Business, a free tool to create buzz and awareness across various Google platforms, including those popular “search” and “map” functions. This can be important in reaching mobile phone users, who increasingly use their

smartphones to find local businesses. The service is free and reviews are part of the profile a company creates. Those reviews also show up when a business is part of a Google search.

Another free listing is Yelp for Business Owners, which provides a fairly easy way for customers to leave reviews and for companies to respond to those reviews. A business Facebook page allows potential customers to learn about a company without ever leaving their own social networks. Creating a Facebook business page is free and many people are comfortable leaving comments on Facebook. Reviews are also popular on other websites including Yahoo (local listings), Foursquare, Merchant Circle, Angie’s List, Trust Pilot, LinkedIn and NextDoor (a hyper-local neighborhood-based site. Specific communities can be found at [www.nextdoor.com](http://www.nextdoor.com)).

Also, by registering with the Better Business Bureau, companies gain credibility as well as a highly trusted source of customer reviews.

Inspired 2 Design recommends focusing on one or two review options to direct clients to; Facebook and Google are chief among them, Lullie says. “Provide a link from your website to both places, follow up with customers regularly via email and link to review sites, then be sure to toot your own horn, that is, promote the good reviews you’ve already received,” she adds.

**Monitor what’s said and respond whenever you can.** Whether it’s a formal review, a comment left on a third-party site, or an email singing praises, someone within the business needs to monitor what’s happening and respond when possible. That includes both a thumbs-up for good reviews and responses to bad reviews. Although it’s tough to hear negative comments, responding to an unhappy customer builds trust when companies have answers for what went wrong. The key issue with responding to bad reviews is: never be defensive. Those doing the responding need to



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Typical Physical Properties	Prolite 15	Prolite 25	Prolite 35	Prolite 50	Prolite 50FGA	Prolite FR50
Resin % required in matrix*	23 - 24	27 - 28	32 - 33	42 - 43	45 - 46	47 - 48
Loose bulk density (lbs./cu.ft.)	65	58	46	29	29	28
Specific gravity	2.3	1.8	1.5	1.0	1.0	1.0
Free moisture content	< 0.4%	< 0.4%	< 0.4%	< 0.4%	< 0.4%	< 0.4%

\*Resin % recommendations are based on an 800-1000 cps casting resin at 70° F.

*"We Seek To Make Our Customers Successful"*



MAKE IT EASY FOR POTENTIAL REVIEWERS. DON'T ASK FOR LENGTHY PRAISES, EVEN FROM PEOPLE YOU KNOW FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT YOUR COMPANY. INSTEAD, MAKE IT AN INTEGRATED, EASY PROCESS THAT ALLOWS THEM ONLINE TO CLICK THROUGH TO PLACES FOR REVIEWS ON YELP, FACEBOOK AND MORE.

offer resolutions, not excuses for what happened. Harvard Business Review released findings last year of a study on reviews that concluded that companies that find a way to respond to bad customer reviews get better overall ratings for the company. Responding to all reviews, even if it's just a simple "Thank You" grants the company more exposure.

As far as paying attention to what's being said, "One great way to monitor your online presence is through Google Alerts. This free service will send you an email each time your search term or phrase shows up on Google," Lullie said. The alerts show results from blogs, news, videos, websites, and more based on the parameters set.

For example, at Inspired 2 Design, the company uses these alerts "to notify us when our company name is used. We also have one set up for each of our names [company executives] and a few of our product names," she says. "It's an awesome tool!" Lullie adds.

**Make it easy for potential reviewers.** Don't ask for lengthy praises, even from people you know feel strongly about your company. Instead, make it an integrated, easy process that allows them online to click through to places for reviews on Yelp, Facebook and more. If you're asking for reviews by email, keep your own asking short and sweet. Don't make suggestions on what they should say.

**Ask at the right time.** One good way to do this, whether it's in person, by email or through the web, is by asking an open-ended question first. Are you finding it easy to clean your new counter? How was your interaction with our customer support people? How's that product working out? Such questions may help you gauge whether to follow through with a request for a specific review.

Also, look for positive moments along a customer's way: right after they've had the product installed or after they've recommended your company to someone else is a great time to seek out a review.

Meanwhile, employees who deal with the public should be trained to look for those positive moments and jump on them. If the persons working the showroom or that installed the product are aware of the importance of asking for a review, they'll know to ask when the customer appears happy.

Never be afraid to just ask. Business owners today may be able to appeal to customers just based on the fact that most people know how important a good write-up or comment is to a company. A statement understood by many people in today's retail and distribution industries is: "Help us spread the word about how good our product is."

Because people today increasingly rely on customer comments when browsing, they know why you're asking for those comments.

**Keep the momentum going.** When you get a positive comment or review, find as many ways as you can to share that positivity with others. A simple way to do that is to highlight the review or comment on your own website or social media channels. Sharing on Facebook is an uncomplicated click-through; businesses are increasingly posting favorable quotes from customers as quotes on Instagram. A significant step in this good-vibes continuation process is to find ways to thank anyone who does provide positive feedback.

Leaving comments and reviews takes time, but customers are much more likely to repeat or expand the process if you've told them you appreciate the effort.

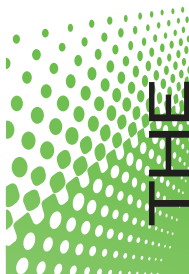
According to Lullie, no matter where the comments come from, companies can assure positive feedback by focusing on customer service and quality.

"Customers who enjoyed a first-class experience with your company are more likely to write positive reviews. Make asking for a rating a part of your sales cycle," she said.

**GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE** is executive editor of **Cast Polymer Connection**. She can be reached at [gsparente@verizon.net](mailto:gsparente@verizon.net).

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## Make plans now for POLYCON 2020 Park City, Utah

Following a record-breaking POLYCON in Kansas City last year, the association is now gearing up for an expanded program and even more attendees and sponsorship opportunities for the next event: POLYCON 2020 Park City, Utah. The event will be April 15-17 at the Grand Summit Hotel Resort, which is about 35 miles from Salt Lake City's airport.



Registration began December 2 and will be discounted throughout that month. Sponsors are already committed to several special events. Platinum sponsors include Composites One, which will host a Welcome Reception Wednesday evening at the resort, R.J. Marshall and Marshall Gruber, which will host a luncheon on Thursday and Interplastic, which will host the Thursday evening reception before the gala dinner.

Registration began December 2 and will be discounted throughout that month. Sponsors are already committed to several special events. Platinum sponsors include Composites One, which will host a Welcome Reception Wednesday evening at the resort, R.J. Marshall and Marshall Gruber, which will host a luncheon on Thursday and Interplastic, which will host the Thursday evening reception before the gala dinner.

Exhibit hours have been expanded this year, and exhibitors are invited to set up earlier so that the exhibit floor can be part of Wednesday night's welcome reception as well as Thursday's all-day educational program, which will be in Kokopelli Ballrooms on the hotel's first floor.

In addition, the plant demonstrations have become part of a new program called POLYTECH Training (see page 12), which will be held on two days: Wednesday and Friday. Hosting Wednesday is Sand & Swirl in Ogden, UT while Friday's demonstrations will be at Tyvarian, Lindon, UT. Commercial

bus transportation is available to attendees for both those events.

Keep up to date on the program and other POLYCON news at [www.POLYCONevent.com](http://www.POLYCONevent.com).

### An update on tariffs

In the last issue of **Cast Polymer Connection**, President Mark Buss provided information on the challenges on tariffs, especially for ICPA members that also sell stone products.

In October, the U.S. government issued preliminary rulings on countervailing duties (CVD) tariffs on quartz products from India and Turkey. In the case of India, the preliminary CVD was set between 1.57% and 4.32% (depending on the specific exporter of record). On November 18, the government declared they made a mistake and the rate on Indian quartz would now be 83.79%.

The final ruling for Turkey and India on CVD was held in abeyance until a final anti-dumping duty (ADD) is determined, which is expected to be in December of this year. According to Buss, this has created confusion.

In terms of already imposed Chinese duties on all types of non-quartz stone, which are currently at 25%, "we are awaiting the final China-USA trade deal. It was mentioned in early November that currently imposed duties could be removed as part of a large deal, but nothing is finalized," Buss explained.



## ICPA to launch new marketing campaign next year

ICPA is coming up with new ways to market the cast polymer industry based on results of a recent marketing survey of members. About 45% of members participated in the survey, which is being used to create specific steps in the marketing campaign. The survey queried members on what works and doesn't work for them in promoting cast polymer products.

The new effort is under the direction of a marketing committee headed by Mark Buss, ICPA president. That committee is now developing goals and strategies for the campaign, which will be launched early next year.



## Help update your listing

ICPA is in the process of creating an expanded website with materials that will help market the industry's products and more information on individual members.

The association has put out a call for members to send more information on their companies and products as well as logos, social media links and other data to provide a more thorough member directory.

A link on the association website ([www.theicpa.com](http://www.theicpa.com)) has been provided to explain how to get this information to ICPA. Samples of how the new directory will look are included on the site.



OTHER NEWS OF NOTE

## Millennials want separate features

The most desired bathroom feature among Millennial home buyers is both a shower stall and a tub in the master bathroom, according to a recent report by the Na-

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tional Association of Home Builders (NAHB). Results from the report, "What Home Buyers Really Want (2019 Edition)" show that 76% of Millennial home buyers want these two features separated.

The report is based on a survey that queries prospective and recent home buyers. Respondents were asked to rate over 175 features (including bathroom features) on a four-tier scale of essential/must have, desirable, indifferent and do not want. Breaking down the total share who want both a shower stall and a tub shows 42% consider the feature desirable and 34% consider it essential.

The next set of bathroom requirements for Millennials are larger bathrooms to accommodate certain amenities. For example, the second most popular bathroom feature is a double vanity (75%), followed by a linen closet in the master bath (73%), a whirlpool tub (70%) and a private toilet compartment in the master bath (68%). A dressing/make-up area and a white toilet, tub and sink are also important with 67% of respondents rating these features desirable or essential.

A majority of Millennials also want a granite vanity (64%).



## Members to attend KBIS, the largest of its kind

The 2020 Kitchen and Bath Industry Show, the largest North American trade destination for kitchen and bath industry professionals, is January 21-23. The show is co-located with another giant home show: the International Builders' Show. The events are held at the Las Vegas Convention Center.

The two shows take up more than one million square feet of exhibit space, showcasing more than 2,000 design and construction brands and attracting more than 95,000 industry professionals. KBIS by itself is held in three exhibit halls featuring more than 600 exhibitors. KBIS is owned by the National Kitchen and Bath Association. Attendance was up more than 30% at last year's show so even more attendees are expected this year.

ICPA's Executive Director Jennifer Towner, **Cast Polymer Connection's** Executive Editor Genilee Swope Parente and several ICPA member companies will be in attendance tracking general trends in the kitchen and bath industry and talking to potential members and supporters.

ICPA members attending KBIS 2020 will be gathering for a networking event on Wednesday, Jan. 22 4-6 p.m. at The Renaissance hotel bar next to the convention center.

For more information on the show, go to [www.kbis.com](http://www.kbis.com). ICPA members attending should contact Jennifer Towner and let her know so that she can arrange the Wednesday networking get-together. Contact her at [jennifer@theicpa.com](mailto:jennifer@theicpa.com). Genilee Parente would also like to hear from any members attending what they see in terms of trends. Contact her at [gsparente@verizon.net](mailto:gsparente@verizon.net).

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## Homeowners seek tech in bathrooms

According to recent research from the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA), 60% of homeowners want technology in their master bathrooms. These findings are part of the NKBA Bathroom Technology and Awareness and Usage Report, commissioned by NKBA in collaboration with CEDIA [the Custom Electronics Design and Installation Association].

Tops on the list of what homeowners want are smart showers, heated floors, centralized and motion-control lighting, leak detection devices connected to mobile apps, sound systems and connectivity.

The study was commissioned to better understand awareness and usage of bathroom technology and compare it with what professional designers and whole-home technology integrators' think consumers know and desire.

While 60% of consumers felt technology was essential in the master bathroom, 60% of designers and 68% of technology pros do not, demonstrating a significant gap between consumer knowledge compared to trade professional awareness of consumer knowledge and use, the survey found.

Homeowners are savvy about their desire for smart plumbing devices like automatic temperature adjustment (69%), hands-free or touch-free faucets (64%), water leak alerts to mobile devices (63%), hands-free/touch-free toilet (63%) and tubs/showers that can be adjusted remotely from mobile devices (56%). Lighting controls from one location (60%) and motion-sensor lighting (59%) are also top items for homeowners.

At the same time, despite integrators actively promoting structured wiring, remote locks and video monitoring, few homeowners have experience with these products.

For more information, go to [www.nkba.org](http://www.nkba.org)

## Home Builder Confidence Hits 20-Month High

Builder confidence in the market for newly-built single-family homes rose three points to 71 in October, according to the National Association of Home Builders/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index. This means sentiment levels are at their highest point since February 2018.

"The housing rebound that began in the spring [2019] continues, supported by low mortgage rates, solid job growth and a reduction in new home inventory," said NAHB Chairman Greg Ugalde, a home builder and developer from Torrington, CT.

"The second half of 2019 has seen steady gains in single-family construction, and this is mirrored by the gradual uptick in builder sentiment over the past few months," said NAHB Chief Economist Robert Dietz. "However, builders continue to remain cautious due to ongoing supply side constraints and concerns about a slowing economy."

Derived from a monthly survey that NAHB has been conducting for 30 years, the NAHB/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index gauges builder perceptions of current single-family home sales and sales expectations. The survey also asks builders to rate traffic of prospective buyers. Scores for each component are then used to calculate a seasonally adjusted index where any number over 50 indicates that more builders view conditions as good than poor.

All the HMI indices posted gains in October. The HMI index gauging current sales conditions increased three points to 78, the component measuring sales expectations in the next six months jumped six points to 76 and the measurement charting traffic of prospective buyers rose four points to 54. ■

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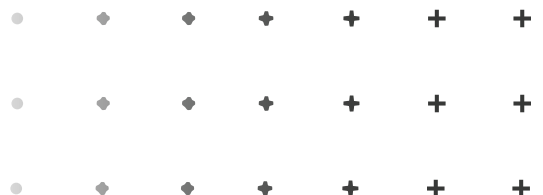
  
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