

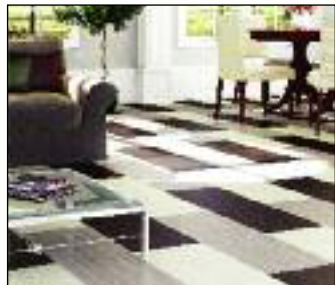
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SPOTLIGHT



Glass-backed revolution

Fiberglass-backed sheet vinyl is the unsung hero of the resilient flooring category. In fact, the sub-category has taken over as the dominant player over felt, research shows.

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Scan this QR code with your smartphone to link to our featured site.

COVERINGS PREVIEW



This year's show promises even more excitement with new and improved features.

LARGER FORMATS, IMPROVED VISUALS DICTATE TRENDS

By Lindsay Baillie

Coverings, touted as the largest tile and stone exhibition in North America, returns to Orlando with new features and a robust education program. Slated for April 4-7 at the Orange County Convention Center, the show promises to deliver something for everyone.

Some of the main points of interest for attendees include the show's three pavilions—Spain, Italy and North America—a roster of impressive educational conference sessions, the new Installation Design Showcase and, of course, a bevy of new products on the show floor.

Coverage begins on page 10.

Hardwood: State of the industry

Housing sector, engineered sales drive revenues

By Reginald Tucker

By most accounts, 2016 was a respectable year for North American hardwood flooring manufacturers. Anecdotal information combined with preliminary estimates show the category grew between 5.5% to 6% in 2016, with volume increasing roughly 5%. That would put sales at the first point of distribution somewhere between \$2.17 billion and \$2.2 billion in sales with volume in the range of 860-880 million square feet.

While manufacturer estimates vary widely, suppliers are in general agreement on several points: Strong end-use sectors combined with high-performing

sub-categories and innovative formats within the hardwood flooring sector are sustaining revenues.

"Primarily new home construction and residential



Strong consumer preference for hardwood flooring continues to lift category sales. Shown is Armstrong's Artisan Collective.

replacement are the sectors driving the most growth for hardwood," said Dan Natkin, vice president, wood and laminate, Mannington. "The category con-

Continued on page 12

FCA Network

Retail members praise industry's 'best-kept secret'

By Ken Ryan

CHICAGO—Cottonwood, Idaho, is located on the Carnas Prairie (population 910, as per 2010 U.S. Census), 158 miles from Spokane, Wash., the nearest city with more than 100,000 people. It is home to Hoene (pronounced Hay-nee) Hardware

Co., a 108-year-old, fourth-generation retailer that sells items including appliances, bedding, furniture and flooring—and is the newest member of the FCA Network.

Gus Hoene, owner, said that after buying out his partner last year he wanted to join a group. He started looking online and came upon the FCA Network and Olga Robertson, its president. Hoene said he dialed an 877 number and Robertson immediately picked up. "I was driving and had to pull over to the side of the road because I didn't think I would get through, and I wasn't prepared to talk," Hoene told FCNews. He



Olga Robertson, president of the FCA Network, addresses retail members during the opening session.

spoke with Robertson for 90 minutes and verbally committed to joining the group.

To seal the deal, Robertson personally visited Hoene's Hardware. She flew to Spokane, traversed rugged mountain

ranges and arrived "white as a ghost" from the trip, Hoene said. During the visit, Robertson rearranged the store's merchandising and collaborated on a new marketing slogan for the store. "Olga bulldozed through my store, which I liked," Hoene recalled. "She said, 'Move that,' 'Get that crap out of the window,' 'Put that here.' The store has never looked better since she redesigned it."

The Hoene Hardware scenario is not uncommon at FCA Network (except perhaps for the long and winding road traveled), where Robertson

Continued on page 22

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MOHAWK

IN THE NEWS

MSI opens new innovation center

Amorim invests in Hydrocork production

SÃO PAIO DE OLEIROS, PORTUGAL—Two years after Hydrocork's launch, Amorim Revestimentos is taking a significant step and investing more than \$10 million in its production infrastructure and procedures. This new infusion will increase the response to growing demand, increasing Amorim's throughput capacity to more than 43 million square feet of flooring per year.



"This investment aims to increase capacity to produce Hydrocork but also create a range of new agglomerated cork composites with features that don't exist in the market yet," said Antonio Cruz, CEO of Amorim Revestimentos. "These products will be truly unique in the market, not only because [they] will be waterproof but also free from PVC."

Amorim Revestimentos, which operates in more than 70 countries, closed 2016 with a turnover exceeding \$133 million. Cruz said the investment "represents a game change in the company and a paradigm shift in how it operates in the market."

Karndean expands American marketing operations

EXPORT, PA—Karndean Designflooring has promoted Jenne Ross, U.S. product manager, to the position of director of marketing. Ross has an extensive background across interior design, graphic design and marketing. She worked with Karndean from 2005 to 2009 and returned in 2014 after serving as senior promotions coordinator at GNC, the largest specialty retailer of health and performance products.



In addition, Emil Mellow has been appointed director of public relations. The 25-year marketing professional began his career with Karndean in 2013. Lastly, Karndean has named Julie Ciccaglione and Cameron Frank retail and commercial channel marketing managers, respectively. Ciccaglione was previously employed with PPG Industries as associate color marketing manager, while Frank was formerly associate brand manager of PPG Paints.

UofCTS updates popular ITS verification course

SAN DIEGO—The University of Ceramic Tile and Stone (UofCTS) has released an updated version of the Tile Installer Thin-set Standards (ITS) Verification course.

The updated course—which applies to the U.S., Canadian and Spanish-language versions—offers a comprehensive review of the current industry installation standards, methods and practices for ceramic tile, porcelain tiles, glass tile, concrete tiles and natural stone tiles. It has two new lessons—special tile applications and grouting—and features expanded sections in various lessons such as preparing substrates and tile installation methods.

The UofCTS ITS Verification course takes about five hours to complete and is available to students 24/7 for two weeks. Students can work on the course throughout the access period. Tile installers who complete and pass the course can use the acronym ITS alongside their name designating them as ITS verified.

By Steven Feldman

ATLANTA—MS International recently opened its new innovation center here, a state-of-the-art, 20,000-square-foot space within a 150,000-square-foot warehouse that supplements its 200,000-square-foot showroom and warehouse five miles down the road.

The new building reflects the enormous growth the company has been experiencing over the past decade. In fact, according to Manny Llerena, director of sales and marketing, the company has grown its sales at least \$100 million each year for the past five years and is on target to surpass the \$1 billion mark this year.

The new innovation center houses the entire MSI marketing team, 18 strong and growing. This includes graphic designers and the digital marketing and product development teams. "The idea was to create a space that was exciting, where you would want to come to work," said Emily Holle, creative director. "It's beautiful, comfortable and inspiring. It's a cool space and shows off much of our product." The space also includes a training area that doubles as a break room. As well, a creative library space—where MSI designers can design the next wave of



MSI's new innovation center was designed to be comfortable and inspiring, but more important, a place where people would want to work.

product—offers a plethora of natural light. "Here our designers can track home décor trends."

But it all wouldn't be possible without MSI's exponential growth, which Llerena attributes in large part to a philosophy of being affordable and accessible. "We find

the best-looking products from around the world. We are low cost from the manufacturer to the retailer. That whole idea is allowing us to expand the market as opposed to taking a share of the market."

He added that success begins with the

Continued on page 29

Mike Blanton, Dalton Carpet One Floor & Home, 62

ATHENS, GA.—Mike Blanton, founder and principal of Dalton Carpet One and DCO Commercial Floors based here, died March 25. He was 62.

Blanton was honored in 2013 with the World Floor Covering Association (WFCA) Gold Standard Award. He was also the 2011 recipient of the Carpet One Alan Greenberg Award.

Blanton opened Dalton Carpet Outlet on July 5, 1978, with just one other part-time employee; it has since grown to 130 employees. Through growth and relocations, the company eventually joined Carpet One and changed its name to Dalton Carpet One in 1988. A second location in Gainesville, Ga., had already been added in 1979, and the company's third store opened in Eatonton, Ga., in 2000 and a fourth in Lawrenceville, Ga., in 2015.

Dalton Carpet One Floor & Home was one of the 30 retailers featured in a commemorative 30th anniversary Carpet One



Floor & Home issue that was published by FCNews in December 2014. In that profile, Blanton noted that Carpet One's marketing prowess and influential buying power aided him in transforming a strictly retail business founded on cut roll orders of carpet and vinyl into a national commercial entity.

Blanton is survived by his wife, Kelley; daughter Katy Blanton and her partner Meg Mantia; sons Curtis Blanton and David Blanton; sister Jann Blanton and her partner Wendy Johnson; sister-in-law Victoria Farmer; sister and brother-in-law Alice and Hal Pruitt; niece Patricia Pruitt and nephew William Pruitt.

"My dad was the best man I have ever known," Curtis Blanton said. "He has inspired and taught me and so many others so much. He was a coach, a mentor, a leader, a best friend and truly a role model to us all. He touched more people than I ever knew."

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be sent to the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation's Building For America's Bravest program in Mike's honor. To make a donation, visit OurBravest.org or mail to:

Tunnel to Towers Foundation, 2361 Hylan Blvd, Staten Island, NY 10306.

SNAPSHOT

Alliance Flooring names Carpetland USA Dothan Retailer of Year

ATLANTA—Dothan, Ala.-based Carpetland USA was named Alliance Flooring's 2016 Carpetland Retailer of the Year. The award is presented to members who exemplified leadership in the following categories: rebate volume earnings, convention and summit attendance, support of merchandising launches, networking with fellow members, branding of their store and use of Web Pro 3.0. Bob Caputo, owner, accepted the award during the group's recent 20th anniversary conference. Joining Caputo on stage is the Alliance Flooring executive team, from left: Ryan and Ron Dunn, and Jon and Kevin Logue.





my take

The next big thing is more than a century old

Everyone is always seeking “the next big thing.” It’s the way of the world. In the mid-’90s it was laminate. Years later it was Konecto and click LVT. Then came the soft carpet craze. More recently it was USFloors and WPC. These days everyone is trying to build a better WPC mousetrap, whether that means rigid core or some other take on the innovation.

But the next big thing may actually be an old thing—150 years old to be exact. That’s when Forbo introduced the world to an innovative product called linoleum, and today the company, which basically owns the U.S. healthcare and education segments with the product, is refocusing on the residential side for a number of solid reasons.

OK. I already know what you’re thinking. I’m insane. Possibly, but not in this case. You’re thinking linoleum has a bad connotation. People associate it with those outdated, inexpensive floors that hearken back to the days of sitting around your grandmother’s kitchen table. Yes, the word is lost in American vocabulary. Yes, the average flooring dealer defines linoleum as cheap vinyl with a felt or asphalt back. But I’m going to share with you a little secret that Denis Darragh, Forbo’s general manager of North America, told me recently: If

someone invented linoleum today, people would think it’s one of the coolest products ever made. But because it was created 150 years ago, that is not the case. There are no plasticizers. It has been phthalate free for 150 years.

Many of the top retailers in the country are having success selling linoleum in 2017. These include members of the National Floorcovering Alliance. The secret: training retail sales associates on the benefits—and unique attributes—of linoleum and conveying those qualities to the consumer. Done successfully, this is a viable product with which store owners can make a healthy margin.

Most people understand linoleum as a sustainable product. And that has been a driver on the commercial side. But the question you need answered is, how does linoleum bring value residentially?

Forbo, which markets its linoleum as Marmoleum due to the aforementioned connotation, has a clear understanding of why consumers are buying, the result of extensive consumer research. The two main selling points:

1. Color and design. If I walked into your showroom I would find a litany of gray and beige. Linoleum offers a whole lot more.

2. Health. Linoleum is arguably the healthiest floor you can install, especially

as it relates to children with allergies.

So what’s the problem? In a word, education. Tim Donohue, who heads up residential sales for Forbo, told me the key is helping dealers understand the difference between linoleum and LVT. Many people think they are interchangeable. But because retail salespeople don’t understand the differences, they have a hard time taking customers to a Marmoleum display; rather, they take that consumer to LVT because it is the path of least resistance.

So educating all of you will be a focus for Forbo this year. You will learn of linoleum’s durability; even commercially there is a 30-year wear warranty. Because, just like concrete, the product becomes more durable over time.

You will learn the many issues linoleum can solve for the consumer with respiratory issues or with small children who want to avoid some of the possible dangers with other types of products.

At the end of the day, it is the lack of knowledge that drives people away from linoleum. As Darragh said, “We know every sale we get is because the consumer wants it.”

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Getting social with fcnews

Freadreacea returns as chairman of WFCA

DALTON—Nick Freadreacea has been named chairman of the board of the World Floor Covering Association, his second stint as WFCA chair. Freadreacea, president and owner of The Flooring Gallery in Louisville, Ky., fills the role vacated by Scott Walker of Walker Flooring & Interiors who becomes immediate past chairman. He takes over this quarter.

“Rarely in any industry will you find a person with the qualities, traits and skill sets of Nick Freadreacea,” Scott Humphrey, chairman and CEO of the WFCA, told *FCNews*. “Nick is an accomplished businessman, inspiring leader and all-around good guy. We have been fortunate to have many impressive leaders through the years. With many major decisions on the horizon, we are indeed blessed to have Nick agree to return to the helm as one of only a few people to serve in that role multiple times.”

A 40-year industry veteran, Freadreacea started his career at Kinnaird and Francke in Louisville. There he worked his way up to vice president before the company was sold to The Maxim Group. He was promoted to regional vice president while at Maxim. In 2000, Freadreacea made a deal with his employer to purchase the stores he had been supervising in his region. Over time these stores became what is now The Flooring Gallery, which has grown to be the largest locally owned flooring store in the area.

Freadreacea’s involvement with the WFCA began in 2001 when he was first elected to the board. He has since served once as chairman of the board, sat on numerous committees and was chairman of the WFCA’s finance committee. “The association has made great strides over the past few years in implementing necessary changes and enhancing our industry for the betterment of all,” he said. “Those in my position before me, as well as Scott Humphrey and his team, have truly taken the organization to new heights that none of us could have imagined.”

New board members

The WFCA board of directors also elected Maryanne Adams, president, Avalon Flooring chairman-elect and confirmed Jason Fromm, Carpet Spectrum, as chief financial officer and treasurer. In addition,

Scott Appel, president, Touch of Color, was named secretary; and Deb DeGraaf, president and owner, DeGraaf Interiors, along with Dean Howell, Moda Floors and Interiors, were appointed vice chairs. These individuals will comprise the association’s executive committee for 2017.

“The team in place is second to none and nothing is going to get in the way of continuing to fulfill our mission every day,” Freadreacea said. “As it has been since I joined this esteemed group over 15 years ago, I am

committed to the ongoing success of the WFCA and all its members.”

The WFCA also elected its board of directors for three-year terms. Current directors include: Curt Bowler, Abbey Carpet & Floor; Tony Buckhardt (CFI), Carpet Cushions & Supplies; Tom Cartmell (CFI), Mr. Davids Flooring International; Kelby Frederick, My Flooring Texas; Karyn Hadley, Rite Loom; Tim Jacobi, Jacobi Carpet One; Shane Lewis, Town & Country Floor Design; Sam O’Krent,

Nick Freadreacea, right, speaks with Rob Purkins of Gilford-Johnson Flooring in March.



O’Krent’s Abbey Flooring Center; Donny Phillips Jr., Atlanta Flooring Design Centers; Don Roberts, Wheat’s and Don’s Carpet One; Carrie Seifert, Diversified Flooring Design Center; Roger Wilson, Nampa Floor and Interiors; Keith

Campbell, Mannington Mills; Paul Murfin, IVC US; and Bob Weiss, All Tile.



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Restoring porcelain's luster

BY DONATO POMPO

Here at Ceramic Tile & Stone Consultants (CTaSC) we field a lot of questions from retailers and consumers alike about restoring the surface of porcelain tile products, which are growing in popularity. Following is a customer's recent inquiry about how to remove common grout haze from unfinished porcelain tile:

The grout haze and residue was allowed to cure and dry on the porcelain tile for 11 days before any attempt for removal of this product. After three days of cleaning the floor, I still have a dull

residue and dripping spots on a large portion of the tile. (Do you think the grout haze and residue remained on the porcelain tile too long to affect the cleaning process? If so, what would be considered an adequate time frame to start removing the grout haze and residue from the tile?)

All materials were installed on a concrete slab—1,030 square feet tiled, three bedrooms with closets and a living room. The tile—Crossville Moonstruck Series Luna and Juno 12 x 24 unpolished with cross-sheen product—is a rectified tile and porcelain installed over Laticrete Fracture Ban 40 mil membrane with the recommended floor primer. The mortar used for the installation of the tile was Mapei Ultraflex 1.

The grout width is 1/8 inch thick and the brand used is a Bostik TruColor rapid cure grout. The grouting process was completed on Feb. 17, 2017, by the installers.

On Feb. 28, I first attempted to remove the haze and residue with Bostik Blaze. But there is still a dull residue and shiny dripping spots on the tile.

I would appreciate your advice on fixing this issue.

Dear homeowner:
It's important to note there is always a grout haze after grout-

ing a tile. For cementitious grouts, the haze should be polished off with a dry clean cheese cloth soon after the tile surface dries. If you wait too long the haze can be very difficult to remove.

Sometimes the haze could be a latex residue from the polymers in the grout or thin-set mortar. There are special removers of latex haze that can be bought from the various tile and stone cleaning and sealing manufacturers. Check the CTaSC Resource Directory at ctasc.com.

However, it isn't clear what the drip marks are. If you used a very corrosive acid to try to clean the tile it could possibly etch the surface. If it is etched the only thing you can do is get a professional stone restoration company to hone the surface.

If it is a cementitious haze, you can use some diluted vinegar or diluted phosphoric acid and scrub it with a 3M pad to remove the haze. In situations where the haze is more difficult to remove, use a scrubber with water and detergent with silica sand. Note: This can only work if the product is an unglazed or unpolished porcelain tile. You can never perform these steps on a polished tile, so it's important to know what you're working with. Always test the scrubbing method in an out-of-the-way spot before you apply it to the floor.

There is a condition called optical haze that can occur on some polished tiles that gives it a sort of cloudy appearance when the light shines on it at a certain angle. But that isn't known to happen on an unpolished tile.

If all else fails, there are stone restoration companies that can deep clean and refinish stone and some tile floors. Make sure they are credible and qualified with a lot of experience.



Donato Pompo, CTC CMR CSI CDT MBA, is the founder of CTaSC and a leading stone forensic expert and consultant in North America.

RETAILERS REACT

What excites you about the spring selling season



For many flooring dealers, the spring is a time for optimism as consumers turn their attention to decorating their homes.

“To me it's kind of like when spring training ends and the Major League Baseball season is just beginning. You hope you have selected all the right products from all the different shows and conventions you attended and that your product lineup will get you to the World Series.”

—Steve Weisberg, Crest Flooring, Allentown, Pa.

“What excites me is that people will be coming out of hibernation and have their tax return check in hand. Three days ago it was 20 degrees in Michigan with 25-mile winds. Who wants to leave the house on a day like that? Today in Chicago it was 70 degrees—so it's time to buy some flooring.”

—Randy Wells, Wells Floor Covering
Adrian, Mich.

“Business is booming in British Columbia like we haven't seen in a while. We have brought in a new inside salesperson, and our installation crews are growing. It's very exciting here.”

—Gary Grubb, Downright Floors
Abbotsford, B.C., Canada

“Spring has come early here in Oklahoma. We have had unseasonably warm weather; now that the fear or concern of winter weather is over people are ready and excited about decorating their homes with new carpet or flooring. If the customer is excited about getting new flooring we are excited about the opportunity to help them.”

—Paul Johnson, Carpet One Floor & Home
Tulsa, Okla.

“I am very optimistic about the spring selling season. Our retail business had a very strong start to the year, and we only see continued growth into the second quarter. Floor traffic has been strong, and I do not see anything on the horizon that would negatively impact this positive trend. Pent-up consumer demand along with positive news in the economy are the driving forces to this upswing.”

—Craig Phillips, Barrington Carpet, Akron, Ohio

CALENDAR

April 4-6

NWFA Basic Installation
Chattahoochee Technical College,
Marietta, Ga.
Contact: Tricia Swindoll,
800.422.4556;
member.nwfa.org

April 4-7
Coverings

Annual conference,
Orlando Convention Center,
Orlando, Fla.
Contact: 800.424.5249
coverings.com/register

April 11

**INSTALL/Tarkett
Infection Control Risk
Assessment/Health Care CEU**
North Texas Training Center,
Arlington, Texas.
Contact: Don Styka,
don.styka@tarkett.com;
goo.gl/HljNSO

April 11-14

NWFA Expo – 2017
Phoenix Convention Center,
Phoenix.
Contact: 800.422.4556;
nwfaexpo.org

May 4-5

**Haines Loyalty Club
Northern Summit Meeting**
Gaylord National Harbor,
Oxon Hill, Md.
Contact: lthorne@jjhaines.com;
jjhaines.com

May 10-11

**CARE (Carpet America Recovery
Effort)**
15th annual conference
Hyatt Regency, Indianapolis, Ind.
Contact: 706-428-2127;
carpetrecovery.org

May 18

**INSTALL/Tarkett
Infection Control Risk
Assessment/
Health Care CEU**
Twin Cities Training Center,
St. Paul, Minn.
Contact: Don Styka,
don.styka@tarkett.com;
goo.gl/Tj1MYJ

REMEMBER WHEN...



NeoCon '95 brought scores of commercial interior designers to the Chicago Merchandise Mart for four days of exhibits and product demonstrations. Karastan Bigelow was one of the featured vendors on hand as it won a Best of NeoCon gold award for Nouveau, a textured woven loop product using DuPont's Antron yarn. Joe Ross, right, Karastan Bigelow, performs a demonstration for Jack and Barry Kornik of Carpets by Kornick, Chicago. Ross is currently regional vice president at Phenix Flooring.



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Karastan retail program goes 'Platinum'

LEAD-GENERATION TOOLS DRIVE BUSINESS FOR ALIGNED DEALERS

By K.J. Quinn

Just call it the gift that keeps on giving. "What we have been doing the last three years is providing several independent programs that help our retailers in digital [marketing]," said Seth Arnold, vice president of residential marketing, Mohawk Industries. "What we've learned is if we're really going to win in the future of retail, we have to provide a comprehensive assortment of digital programs all tied together."

The crown jewel of these lead booster programs is Platinum, introduced in 2015 by Mohawk in collaboration with its aligned retailers to specifically address the need to improve store traffic. According to Arnold, the lead-generation program leverages Mohawk's digital platforms and its search engine marketing (SEM) strategy to deliver highly qualified, in-market leads to aligned dealers with a lower cost and higher value than open

market alternatives.

"When we became a Platinum Karastan dealer, our sales improved dramatically," said Darren Groteboer, president, Minnesota-based Carpet One of Rochester. "We decided



Many customers enter Enhance Floors & More, Marietta, Ga., pre-sold on Karastan products.

to join to gain more access to the quality brand name and an exclusive product line that customers know and trust."

The program includes digital tools that help drive consumers onto the Mohawk site and to its retailers, particularly aligned partners. These marketing efforts are critical, as most

consumers conduct online research before visiting a store. "Mohawk has a huge advantage in the marketplace because of our brand recognition," Arnold pointed out. "We tend to be an early source during their shopping process to begin learning about flooring. That's why we're able to do more leads per dollar by helping retailers with their SEM and using our websites—karastan.com and mohawk.com—as other channels to drive traffic."

Aligned dealers can leverage the Mohawk site as it enables a store's information to show up more prominently on search engine result pages. "When we set up retailers, we not only give them enhanced landing pages and a presence on our website, but we also help enhance their Google business listing," Arnold said.

The Platinum program complements online strategies deployed by retailers to boost foot traffic and sales. For example, dealers utilize social media to promote their products and

store brands while rewarding followers with exclusive deals and offers for sharing a post within their own networks. "We advertise Karastan on our website and pay-for-click site," noted Bill Sonntag, owner, Suburban Floor Covering-Abbey Carpet, White Bear Lake, Minn. "Karastan has skyrocketed to the top of our carpet sales."

A fundamental requirement of any online marketing program is providing an offer that links back to a specific product or brand. Platinum retailers are supported with promotions targeting Karastan lines. "The offers will change at times, but the retailer understands the costs of the offer and builds it into [his or her] selling strategy," Arnold said. "We build a series of landing pages that deliver the offer. And those landing pages help us capture leads to deliver to the retailer."

These electronic referrals often lead to additional customers visiting aligned stores looking for Karastan products. "Potential clients have indicated their interest in being contacted, and when we follow up they almost always come in to our store to look at Karastan products," said Elisabeth Stubbs, co-owner, Enhance Floors & More, Marietta, Ga. "These clients are responding to the Karastan name, so they are almost pre-sold on the products."

While capturing leads is important, response time is critical for dealers to capitalize while the proverbial iron is still hot. "We're working with retailers to make sure when the leads are coming in, they're following up within 24 hours," Arnold said. Retailers are advised to assign a staff member to add local, personal content to their store's online marketing campaign.

Once customers are inside the stores, retail salespeople can direct them to Karastan products. "We receive promotional support from Karastan's marketing department in the way of pre-made advertising materials, both in print and digital formats," Carpet One's Groteboer said. "We also receive support from our local Karastan representative to train our staff on the newest fibers, styling and promotions."

Floor space and merchan-



Karastan represents the bulk of Suburban Floor Covering-Abbey Carpet's broadloom sales.

dising requirements for the Platinum program are negotiable and customized to meet each store's needs. "We have committed over 600 square feet on our show floor for Karastan displays," Sonntag said. "We get tremendous support from our salesman and the whole Karastan team."

Johnson Carpet One, Duluth, Minn., displays its Karastan selection at the front of the store, so it's easily noticed by consumers. "Karastan has helped bring a higher quality of carpet and pad into our store, which allows us to sell a more reliable floor, lowering claims and raising the value," noted Thor Kurtz, sales associate.

Carpet One of Rochester devotes approximately 1,200 square feet to merchandise more than 100 SKUs of the Karastan line. "We display the products using Karastan's new and innovative Studio display system along with flip card and vertical sample displays," Groteboer said. "The Karastan line is set apart from other brands in our store by the amount of large sample sets we display."

Mohawk reports delivering more than 100,000 leads to Platinum and Five Star aligned dealers over the past two years. Additional leads are driven back to Platinum retailers as a result of the Realtor Connect program, which connects members with realtors who offer home buyers promotions or discounts for new flooring purchases.

The gold standard for determining the effectiveness of any marketing campaign, dealers concur, is based on how many people walk through the door and purchase product. "The Platinum program has definitely been effective," Stubbs reports. "We get good, qualified leads for a nominal cost."



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Floor, Shower Wall: Pietra Calacatta 24x24 / Countertop: Arctic White Quartz

Coverings to put the spotlight on latest trends,

By Lindsay Baillie

There will be plenty to keep Coverings' attendees busy, according to industry ambassador Alena Capra "There are an estimated 1,100 total exhibitors this year, representing over 40 countries across 400,000 square feet of exhibition space."

Educational opportunities

In keeping with tradition, Coverings 2017 will host an abundance of conference sessions available to professionals serving the stone and tile industry. Over 65 conference sessions will be available during the show, with many offering CEUs.

"We have a robust conference program with sessions for all segments of our audience, including distributors, retailers, architects and designers, builders and remodelers, fabricators, contractors and installers," said Jennifer Hoffman, president, Taffy Event Strategies. "We have sessions in Spanish for 2017 as well."

New to the educational program are seminars regarding advanced contractor topics, a business topics track, contractor

beginner-intermediate topics and the thin tile mini-track. These classes are open to all attendees.

New thrills

Coverings 2017 is offering three new features to complement its educational programming. "Elements new to Coverings 2017 include guided audio tours, a NASCAR racing experience and a reinvigorated social media lounge that will enhance the show by allowing attendees opportunities to further interact, explore and engage," Capra said.

This year, Coverings is hosting four guided audio tours: Coverings 101 Overview Tour in English and Spanish, a Trends Tour, and an Installation Materials and Systems tour. These pre-recorded tours will be available via the official Coverings mobile app and provide insight into booths and pavilions.

The NASCAR racing experience provides attendees with the opportunity to find out what it is like to be a professional racecar driver. Drivers with the fastest simulator times each day will win two tickets to the NASCAR

events of their choice. NTCA, Schlüter Systems and Laticrete are sponsoring the event.

Coverings Connect, the show's refreshed social media

"Byte" sessions that have a digital focus. Some of the sessions include "LinkedIn Basics," "Picture This: Instagram as a Customer Connection Tool" and

a beverage and make new connections.

Returning features

Many of the elements Coverings attendees have enjoyed from previous years will also be present at this year's show. The popular Installation Design Showcase returns but with a twist. For 2017, this program will feature three tiny houses on site—a West Michigan house, a Retro Bungalow and the Vitruvian. NTCA Five Star Contractors and leading designers will partner together to showcase the synergy between design and installation. Each tiny house will highlight a different design aesthetic and feature tile and stone in a live installation.

Coverings will also host afternoon happy hours on the show floor from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday. The bars will be located in the Tile Council of North America and Ceramic Tile Distributor's Association booth, the Installation Design Showcase booth #458 and Coverings Connect booth #1568.

Also returning to the show



Some of the main points of interest at Coverings include the Spain, Italy and North America pavilions, a roster of impressive educational conference sessions and the new Installation Design Showcase.

lounge, allows attendees to relax, charge personal electronic devices or network. Coverings Connect will present a series of educational seminars called

"6 Cs to Social Media Success." Additionally, a bar will be located in Coverings Connect from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., offering a happy hour for attendees to enjoy



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education

are the Coverings Appreciation Days, which feature tailored guided tours of the show floor, lunch and focused education sessions, among other attractions. The 2017 Appreciation Day schedule is as follows: Builder & Remodeler Day, April 4; Architect & Designer Day, April 5; Contractor Days, April 5–6; and Fabricator Day, April 7.

The show will also offer both CTEF Certified Tile Installer (CTI) and Advanced Certifications for Tile Installers (ACT) testing, as well as Stone Fabricators Alliance demos. Lastly, the Live Demonstration Stage at booth #3135 and the Coverings Rock Star program will also return this year.

Product showcase

Exhibitors plan to showcase the latest tile and stone trends on the show floor. This includes a wide array of formats. “From a size perspective, we anticipate companies will introduce large slabs reaching up to 126 inches in length in a variety of materials,” said Shelly Halbert, director of product design, Dal-Tile. “On the opposite end of the spectrum, we will see smaller formats in hand-crafted looks, including 8 x 8, 12 x 12 and 6 x 12 sizes.”

Donato Pompo, president of Ceramic Tile and Stone Consultants, anticipates seeing a lot of wood plank porcelain tile, gauged porcelain tile/panels (thin tile panels) and ink jet reproductions of various types of stone. He explained that rectangle tiles are still popular as well as large module tiles. He also expects to see various types of decorative wall tiles.

Innovations in porcelain tile will also be on display. Style options run the gamut from marble looks, bright colors with unique textures, wood and metallic looks. “Porcelain tile panels are a significant development for the tile industry because of their size—measured in feet, not inches—and range of potential applications,” said Lindsey Waldrep, vice president of marketing, Crossville. “These panels can be used in applications where traditional tile wouldn’t be an option. They can also be installed directly over previous tile or stone, eliminating the cost and labor involved in [demonstration] spaces, all while achieving big style with all the performance of porcelain.”

Emily Holle, director of trend and design, MSI, expects to see more wood looks and various sizes at the show. “This is an exciting trend that’s morphing and evolving quickly, with new

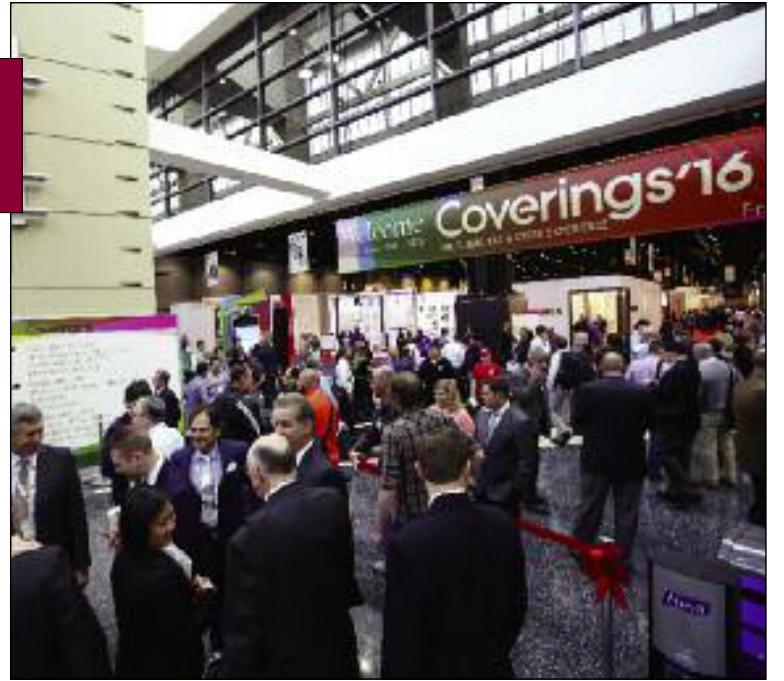
styles constantly emerging and all types of edgy wood looks holding their own against the most traditional styles.”

While Emser is not exhibiting this year, Barbara Haaksma, vice president of marketing, plans to walk the show. She expects to see products that will build on existing trends. “Some of the looks we’re expecting are a continuation of the longer slabs. We’re going to see a lot when it comes to larger format tiles. We’re also expecting to see a lot more decorative tiles.”

Attendees will also be on the

Coverings '17 will showcase products and designs from an estimated 1,100 exhibitors, representing over 40 countries.

lookout for technological advances in design and performance. As Kristin Coleman, marketing representative for Ceramics of Italy, put it: “The capabilities of tile are expanding every year, moving from a flooring material decades ago to a truly versatile, high performance material that can be used to clad buildings, serve as kitchen and bathroom countertops, outdoor pavers and more.”



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dear david

Should RSAs generate their own leads?

Dear David:

Is it just me or do sales associates seem less motivated these days? It is like pulling teeth to get them to go out and get their own leads. Am I wrong in expecting them to generate their own business? Do you have some techniques that have worked to incentivize them to get out of the store and shake the trees?

Dear Owner,

What you are facing is most likely attributed to generational differences and a flaw in your philosophy. Workers today are much different than those of your generation. Some of the differences are amazing and some can be frustrating. Expecting employees to be “just like you” is not only an unfair request due to these generational differences, but it is also unfair because you are a business owner with different aspirations and priorities.

The bigger concern is your overall philosophy on generating new business. There are two types of people in this world: hunters and skimmers. Very rarely do you find a person with both

HAVE RSAs SEND CARDS WITH HANDWRITTEN ENVELOPES TO PREVIOUS CUSTOMERS INVITING THEM TO A SPECIAL EVENT.

qualities. Most RSAs fall under the category of skimmers, people who do a great job with product selection, measuring, quoting, etc. They are content to work with customers to solve a need and be an advisor throughout every step of the process.

A hunter, on the other hand, is someone with a thirst for the thrill of the kill. They want to prospect, close the deal and then go back for more business later. They don't want to do any of the “mundane” tasks of a skimmer. In fact, they are rather bad at that part. These highly specialized individuals make up less than 10% of the population.

You should have your skimmers focus on doing the best they can with the customers in front of them. Don't push them out the door to fumble the ball and ruin any real chance you have of



DAVID ROMANO

securing new business. However, you are looking for marginal gains and want to feel better about your team driving more business. Here is what I recommend:

- Have your team ask for referrals. Have them send an email to all closed customers with an attachment explaining your Friends and Family Program, which provides special accommodations to anyone who closed customer refers. All the referred customer needs to do is mention or print out the email to get the accommodation. For the person who provided the referral, they get a store credit for future purchases they can either use or transfer to anyone else.

- Have them send cards with handwritten envelopes to previous customers inviting them to a special event. Include all customers who have received

a quote in the last six months but haven't yet purchased. Also, include customers who have bought flooring from the store seven-plus years ago.

- Send a birthday card to the flooring. (Yes, I did just say send a card to the carpet, wood or tile.) Include tips to making sure it is cleaned and properly maintained. This simple, two-minute process will keep the RSA top of mind when there is a flooring need.

- Have each RSA join local referral groups. A ton of business can be generated over a glass of wine with the girlfriends or having lunch with other business-people.

- Make sure they are active with their online network of friends and colleagues on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Pinterest. They need to let everyone know where they work and keep them informed of any special events or latest trends.

- Lastly, make sure they always have business cards to distribute to potential clients.

David Romano is the founder of Romano Consulting Group and Benchmarkinc, a group that provides consulting, benchmarking, recruiting and software solutions to the flooring, home improvement and restoration industries.

State of the industry

Continued from page 1

tinued to increase in 2016, albeit at a slightly slower pace—3%-4% over the prior year.”

Other major manufacturers were also conservative in their estimates. “Last year was a fairly good year in hardwood sales with the category up by low- to mid-single digits,” said Christopher Moore, wood product manager, Armstrong Floors. “While the new home construction sector did not reach the lofty highs that many expected, a modest movement helped to lift sales of hardwood flooring to a respectable level in 2016.”

Some estimates were much more aggressive. Mohawk, which also counts the Quick-Step wood line among its brand assets, believes the prefinished hardwood flooring market grew close to 10% in 2016 vs. 2015. “The majority of this growth was driven by the new construction market, both in single-family and high rises,” said Roger Farabee, senior vice president, wood and laminate. “Remodel grew as well but at a slower rate. Commercial had the lowest growth and remains a very small part of the overall hardwood market.”

Within the prefinished segment, suppliers saw particularly brisk activity on the engineered side of the business. Indeed, in 2015 the industry saw a continued shift in the ratio of engineered to solid production. In fact, more manufacturers are developing engineered products that mimic the thickness of solid but offer the performance



Suppliers see engineered products gaining more share over their solid counterparts. Pictured is Mohawk's Vintage Vintique line.

attributes of engineered. (Lauzon's new Organik series, which features the company's innovative Pure Genius antimicrobial technology, is a case in point.)

The trend toward wider plank visuals lends itself to engineered given their enhanced stability, experts say. Natkin estimates engineered will represent 60% of the hardwood market within the next two years—up from about 50% today.”

The continued shift from solid to engineered is increasingly evident, experts say, especially as imports continue to take market share from domestic manufacturers. Brad Williams, vice president of sales and marketing for Boa-Franc, cited several reasons why these thicker engineered products continue to increase their share. “With the builder market using wood subfloors, their goal is to make a flush transition with

ceramic floors in the kitchen, bathroom, etc. As ceramic tiles trend larger and thicker, it's a nice option to have the same in hardwood—wider and thicker. There is also the renovation market where flooring ripped out was $\frac{3}{4}$ inches thick. It makes for an easier renovation as the heights for doors and cabinetry were done based on $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thickness.”

For some buyers, it boils down to personal preference. As Michael Barnett, wood product manager, Armstrong, explains: “Innovation continues to happen across both structures and, of course, engineered offers opportunities for design innovation combined with its installation flexibility. While solid wood continues to be a coveted choice for homebuyers, certain looks, lengths and widths can be achieved with engineered that either do not exist with solid or are more challenging to produce. Engineered hardwood floors are also better suited than solid in certain installation applications, such as basements.”

The ongoing migration to engineered hardwood is reflected in the investments major manufacturers are making in the segment. Shaw Floors, for instance, completed the expansion of its hardwood flooring manufacturing facility in South Pittsburg, Tenn., specifically to meet the growing demand for its engineered hardwood flooring products. According to Vance Bell, chairman and CEO, the \$40 million investment adds more than 60% capacity to the existing hardwood manufacturing facility. “The expansion of our South Pittsburg engineered hardwood facility is a prime example of our continued investment in new product development and advanced manufacturing practices. Hardwood is important to Shaw's business growth strategy.”



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Shaw is not the only company heavily investing in engineered production. Last summer Mullican Flooring announced plans to invest \$15 million in equipment, buildings and working capital to expand its manufacturing operations via the acquisition of a 126,000-square-foot warehouse in Johnson City, Tenn. This latest expansion, which marks Mullican Flooring's fourth major growth initiative in Johnson City during the past 16 years, will provide extra capacity as well as raw material and finished product storage space to meet increased manufacturing needs.

In that same vein, Wickham Hardwood has invested more than \$7 million in a new, state-of-the-art engineered flooring line. The game plan over the mid to long term, according to Paul Rezuke, vice president, residential sales, USA, is to align its engineered offerings with its solid products.

Pricing stability

Another factor that has positively impacted U.S. hardwood flooring manufacturers is the continued stabilization of raw material costs. In 2013 and into 2014, skyrocketing lumber costs negatively impacted margins for many suppliers—including Canadian companies—and forced several market leaders to raise prices. But manufacturers report the raw material pricing stability they experienced in late 2015 has carried over to much of 2016.

"There is great pricing stability at the moment," Boa-Franc's Williams said. "We believe the demand from overseas has softened with North American suppliers, which creates more of a need to supply the local market here in North America, so pricing is holding steady. At the same time, inventories throughout the pipeline are at good, balanced levels—which also contributes to stable prices."

For Mohawk, lumber pricing stabilized overall in 2016—a trend that, according to Farabee, seems to be holding steady so far in 2017. "But this could change if demand for certain species (e.g. white oak) outstrips supply."

That's a real concern for some suppliers. Mannington's Natkin says raw material prices are still high but have been stable through the first quarter of 2017. Certain species, such as hickory, walnut and white oak, he said, are showing modest inflation. "But it is generally under control for the time being."

Stiff competition

While hardwood suppliers are keeping a close eye on raw material costs, they are also watching the rising popularity of competing hard surface products, particularly those that are doing a much better job of replicating natural materials such as wood. WPC, LVT and, yes, laminate all fall into this category.

Wood suppliers agree some of their products could be ceding market share to these competitive categories. "For the first time in my career, I can definitively say some of these categories have taken share within certain segments from hardwood," Natkin said.

"Particularly in new home construction, both single- and multi-family units."

Others are not as concerned. Armstrong's Moore believes that as long as hardwood itself is desirable, there will continue to be a proliferation of wood looks, whether in resilient, tile or laminate. "While hardwood is challenged by some look-alike products, we believe genuine hardwood flooring will continue to be desired by homeowners because of its natural beauty, enduring quality and durability. This is an investment that lasts for years and offers timeless style."

Continued on page 14



Shaw is optimistic that it will exceed the overall growth rate of the category for 2017 based on acceptance of its hardwood offerings.



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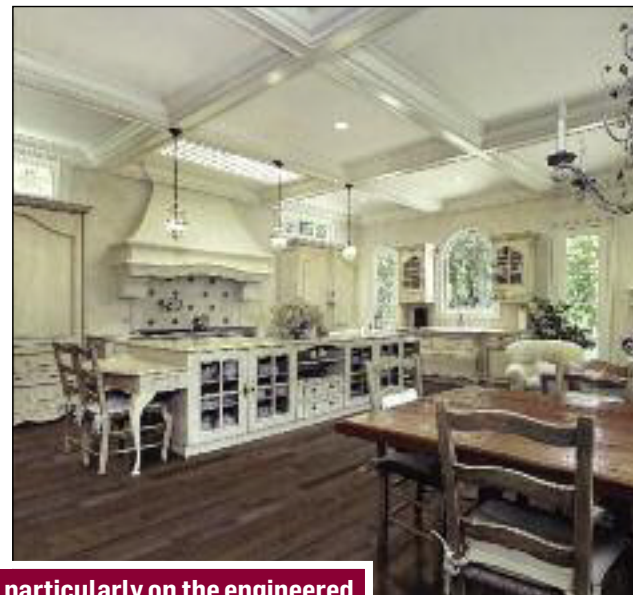
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Canadian suppliers have made strides in developing products tailored for U.S. customers, particularly on the engineered front. Shown, from left, is: Lauzon's Rustica; hard maple element from Mercier; and Winery from Wickham Hardwood.

State of the industry

Continued from page 13

Mohawk's Farabee agreed, adding: "Hardwood remains the top aspirational hard surface flooring product, and we don't see that changing anytime soon. While the other categories have done a better job imitating wood, many customers don't want an imitation; they want the real thing. No other product will ever be able to duplicate the 100% custom, unique look obtained with every hardwood floor that is installed."

Williams believes some wood products—especially those on the lower end of the price spectrum—have ceded some market share to competing categories, but he thinks that pressure is coming primarily from builder and residential renovation markets, which tend to be more cost conscious. On the whole, though, he has not seen any dramatic market share shift from a numbers point of view to substantiate and support this increase is coming at the expense of wood.

Mitigating factors

Beyond pricing/raw material costs and competitive pressures (both within the category and externally), suppliers identified other issues that stand to impact hardwood's growth. These range from global competition to changing retail dynamics right here at home.

"Imports continue to be unfairly dumped at low prices," Natkin said, adding this is an issue primarily with engineered hardwood. "Despite the ITC actions, there is rampant circumvention and the U.S. government

has failed to act on any of it."

For Armstrong, one of the issues in the hardwood industry right now seems to be private-label imports. "At the entry level, where the growth rates are highest, most of the competitive landscape is dominated by imports, which keep margins thin," Barnett said.

Mirage's Williams also expects to see an increase in imports as well as additional pressure from "look-alike products" from other categories. But he also thinks home centers and large retailers are getting bigger and taking market share from the smaller independents. "Private-label programs also continue to take market share."

Outlook for remainder of 2017

Despite these pressures, many suppliers are optimistic hardwood will continue to hold its own as a category. They cite, among other things, continued investment in manufacturing and innovation as well as strong demand among consumers and end users.

"The housing market will continue to strengthen, although single-family starts

and completions remain more than 20% lower than the historical average," said Neil Poland, president Mullican Flooring. He expects to see growth in the 4%-5% range for 2017. "Engineered flooring will lead this growth as housing grows more rapidly in Sun Belt markets."

Others are more bullish with their projections. "We are confident that—if interest rates remain constant and the U.S. economy continues to be positive—growth will be in the 6% to 10% range," Wickham Hardwood's Rezuke said. "Our opportunities will derive from our increased expansion in the U.S. market, along with successful implementation of new products."

Shaw also expects to see growth in the 6%-8% range for 2017, based on trends it is seeing in the new home construction market. "We will continue to outpace the growth of the flooring market," said Drew Hash, vice president, hard surfaces. "Our wide breadth of categories and consistent standard of quality supports that outlook."

Mirage adds new formats

Saint-Georges, Quebec, Canada—Mirage has launched new board lengths up to 82 inches in keeping with design trends.

The new lengths represent an average increase of 25% for Mirage Engineered 5- and 6½-inch widths. According to the company, the new lengths make any room in the home appear bigger than they actually are, and because fewer boards are needed to cover a given area, fewer joints are visible. For homeowners, the upside is twofold.

"The final results speak for themselves," said Brad Williams, vice president of sales and mar-

keting for Boa-Franc, maker of the Mirage brand.

The new board length is in direct response to emerging trends in interior design. Experts say it began several years ago and has only accelerated. "The trend towards longer boards has continued this year," Williams explained "Increasing our board lengths supports that trend. It's wood at its best, and it's now available in more flooring types."

The new lengths are available for all 5- and 6½-inch-wide Mirage Engineered floors as well as the 7¼ inch products launched in 2016.



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EPIC Plus Extreme Nature Hardwood is the longest and widest hardwood on the market today that is manufactured in the U.S.A.

Bamboo, cork intros offer flair for the dramatic

By Ken Ryan

As sub-segments of the hardwood flooring category, cork and bamboo are heralded for their eco-friendly attributes. Beyond their notable green characteristics, however, new cork and bamboo products are also renowned for their stunning visuals, durability, comfort underfoot and water-resistant properties.

Following is an overview of some of the latest products cork and bamboo suppliers have to offer.

Bamboo Hardwoods

Bamboo Hardwoods' Manor Clove flooring (pictured) features engineered strand woven bamboo with a multi-ply core. Strand woven bamboo ranks over 3000 on the Janka Hardness Scale and is a great option for both residential and commercial installations. Each plank of Manor Clove has a unique appearance due to its handscraping. The product is FloorScore certified.



Cali Bamboo (cork)

Cali Bamboo offers GreenClaimed cork flooring, which is comforting to the body and warm to the touch underfoot. Its visuals range from Shoreline (natural) to products made to resemble more natural wood looks (Silverwood and Driftwood). Pictured is Sandalwood, an engineered cork. A total of eight colors are available.



Cali Bamboo (bamboo)

Cali Bamboo offers a complete line of solid and engineered bamboo offerings. Cali Bamboo is ultra-low VOC with no added urea formaldehyde and features the company's proprietary Fossilized manufacturing process that boasts twice the density of typical hardwood flooring products. Twenty colors encompassing unfinished, distressed natural, to cognac and vintage java (pictured) are available.



USFloors (bamboo)

Muse Strand (pictured) from USFloors is the ideal strand bamboo floor for homes located in a wide range of climates. Muse Strand's cutting-edge design features distressed and chiseled surfaces, hand sculpted scraping and wire-brushed enhanced grains. Fashion-forward stains and washes evoke a sense of artistry and inspiration. These bamboo floors are Greenguard Gold-certified for indoor air quality.



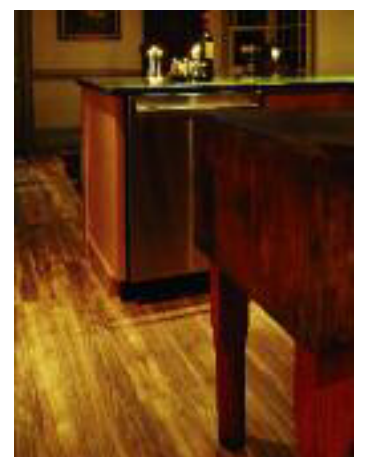
USFloors (cork)

Natural Cork (pictured) floors from USFloors are made from the bark of the Portuguese cork oak. No trees are cut down to harvest the bark and cork trees produce new cork for re-harvest every nine years making cork a sustainable, environmentally friendly and rapidly renewable resource. Cork floors are quiet, warm and comfortable underfoot, durable and resilient. Natural Cork floors naturally resist mold and mildew, fire and pests.



WE Cork

Sunset Acacia, from the Serenity collection of digital print on cork, provides comfort, thermal and sound insulation from the sustainable cork base. This cork base is then cloaked with wood or stone visuals that extend the design options beyond the regular cork visuals in the Serenity collection stocking line. It is finished using a hot coat finish with an AC rating that the company said exceeds LVT in wearability.



Wellmade

Wellmade's Strata composite bamboo plank couples the performance features of rigid core HDPC (high-density plastic composite) technology with the natural warmth and character of eco-friendly bamboo. Featuring a solid strand bamboo top layer, Strata (pictured) bamboo outperforms traditional engineered flooring while remaining stable and extremely water resistant in the most demanding environments. Quality performance features include HDPC rigid core, HardMax nano finish and Uniclic floating installation system.



Wicanders

Wicanders' Hydrocork offers a low thickness floating solution with the benefits of floors with Corktech, a technology that helped create the innovative core board made of composite cork. Hydrocork is water resistant and stable while maintaining the resilient properties and comfort rendered by cork. Wicanders' Hydrocork comes in 10 wood look visuals, including Arcadian Rye Pine (pictured).



Novalis, partners support worthy cause

COALITION HELPS FLOOD-RAVAGED LOUISIANA COMMUNITIES BEGIN REBUILDING PROCESS

By Reginald Tucker

For a storm with no name, it sure inflicted a lot of destruction on Baton Rouge and surrounding areas.

The storm rolled in on Aug. 12, 2016, with more than three times the amount of rainfall than Hurricane Katrina, the massive superstorm that ravaged Louisiana back in 2005. Over the course of three days, 146,000 homes were flooded, thousands of businesses went under and 13 people lost their lives.

While the state of Louisiana is no stranger to hurricanes, this area in particular has not historically been associated with massive flooding. The storm forced thousands of Louisianans into shelters when their homes were destroyed. Since many people who were affected did not reside in "high flood risk areas" they were not required to carry flood insurance.

But sometimes the worst of times brings out the best in people. In the wake of the natural dis-

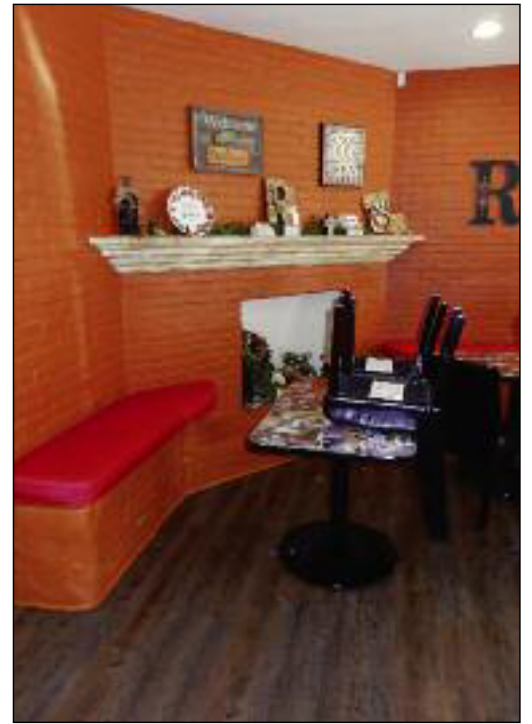
aster, Novalis Innovative Floors reached out to its distributors and dealers serving the area to explore ways in which it could lend a hand.

Angie Alexander, national sales manager, flew to Baton Rouge in the immediate aftermath of the storm to assess the damage with Pat Barker, outside sales representative of Crescent Hardwood Supply, the Novalis distributor in the area. They met with David Iles, president and co-owner of The Floor Store & More, a Carpet One dealer in Denham Springs, La., who sustained significant damage to both his home and his store. Together they toured the area, riding through neighborhoods devastated by the flooding and listened to the gut-wrenching accounts of the residents and business owners who were affected.

"I knew we needed to do something to help this area," Alexander recalled. With the go-



Randazzo's Family Restaurant in Metairie, La., was one of the many businesses Novalis and its retailer and distributor partners helped rebuild following the flood.



ahead from John Wu, CEO of Novalis, she was able to offer at no charge as much close-out LVT as possible to help as many as possible in the area. The initial dollar value of the floors transported from the Novalis warehouse in Georgia by Crescent was over

\$40,000. (The value of donated flooring now exceeds \$55,000 and that number is climbing.)

Soon thereafter, a "partnership of recovery" between The Floor Store & More, Crescent Hardwood Supply and Novalis was forged to begin the long

rebuilding process for people in Louisiana.

Iles spearheaded the coordinated effort and floor installations, while Novalis provided all the new LVT at no cost. Crescent provided new displays to affected

Continued on page 20

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Armstrong's CushionStep Better and Duality Premium lines of sheet vinyl now include the company's signature Diamond 10 technology.



Mannington has addressed the trend of bold patterns in fiberglass-backed sheet goods with visuals like Deco wrought iron.



Forbo's Marmoleum Click Cinch Loc is made of natural linoleum on water-repellent HDF with a cork layer backing.

Fiberglass-backed sheet expands its base

By Ken Ryan

Fiberglass-backed sheet vinyl is the unsung hero of the resilient flooring category—a product with characteristics that match up well with its more famous cousin, LVT, yet at a price point suppliers say is very competitive.

Given its well-documented performance attributes, sheet vinyl represents the best value on the market on an installed cost basis, manufacturers say. Within

the sheet vinyl category, glass-backed has taken over as the dominant player over felt, research shows. Statistics indicate fiberglass sheet took home \$362.5 million in 2015, which is 60.7% of residential sheet overall (FCNews, June 27, 2016). Compare this to five years ago when fiberglass represented \$205 million in sales. In terms of volume, fiberglass commands roughly 61.4% of the residential sheet market.

Anecdotal information

shows fiberglass is continuing to take share and grow in relative terms to the total market, with price and performance among the key differentiators. “Fiberglass is an easier product to work with and make repairs to if needed, and it does not tear like a felt product,” said Eric Erickson, vice president of sales, marketing, product and business development for Beauflor USA.

Others agreed. Mary Katherine Dyczko-Riglin, product manager, residential sheet

vinyl, Mannington Mills, suggests the main reason glass-backed has overtaken felt is due to ease of installation. “Experienced installers are getting harder to come by in our industry, and fiberglass is more forgiving in that process than felt.”

While felt still provides advantages in rip-tear-gouge performance—and is still popular in markets with more availability of experienced installers—executives like Matt Savarino, senior product manager, resilient sheet, Armstrong, acknowledges that from an overall installation standpoint fiberglass offers benefits over traditional felt-backed floors. “Fiberglass can be installed as a loose lay or modified loose lay, meaning you use a releasable glue—or no glue in some instances—that is not permanent and can be pulled up and laid back down if necessary. Fiberglass vinyl floors are also waterproof, so they can also be installed above or below grade anywhere in the home.”

Therein lies another key in the ascension of fiberglass sheet as a desirable product—its waterproof characteristics. With so much attention being paid to waterproof floors—from LVT and WPC/rigid core to laminate floors with moisture-resistant properties—it is worth noting that sheet is a waterproof floor as well. Dyczko-Riglin said there are two main reasons why fiberglass sheet is gaining share, with waterproof being first and foremost, which makes fiberglass “a fantastic option for this market. Secondly, glass-backed is a great value compared to others in the waterproof category.”

Dimensional stability is another key benefit fiberglass offers. As Savarino explained, “Fiberglass vinyl won't shrink, warp or change size after exposure to wetness or crack after repeated handling. When paired

with superior underfoot comfort, fiberglass vinyl sheet provides a great mix of features that have tipped the scale in its favor over felt-backed vinyl sheet in recent years.”

New markets

Glass-backed sheet has been able to maintain its share in the residential market as well as penetrate the commercial segment, especially healthcare and property management. Fiberglass is taking stronger holds in the healthcare segment because of its stain resistance and performance ability in sanitary settings. “In property management applications the fact that fiberglass sheet offers realistic visuals at a competitive price point that's stain, scuff and scratch resistant, and easy to clean and repair helps increase unit turnover usage, thus saving the property manager valuable time and money,” said Amie Foster, senior director, product management, sheet vinyl, IVC.

Savarino said fiberglass' growing acceptance in both residential settings and commercial buildings is due to the longer lifespan of these floors coupled with better aesthetics. He noted there has been increased interest in vinyl sheet products in the RV/manufactured home space as one example. “The ease of installation within glass-backed vinyl's unique manufacturing process makes it an ideal solution especially with how far the visuals and designs of vinyl sheet products have come over the last few years.”

With more entry-level products on the market, fiberglass has been significantly expanding its role in the builder and multifamily markets.

Innovations emerge

In many aspects of home fashion, bold patterns are hot right now—

Continued on page 21

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Worthy cause

Continued from page 17

dealers along with the shipping of thousands of dollars worth of Novalis LVT inventory to Baton Rouge.

"We were just the vessel; John and Angie from Novalis were the ones who stepped up," Iles said. "I can't say enough about what Novalis did to help our community."

While his store is back up and running, Iles says there's still a lot of work yet to be done. He estimates it will take at least three years before everything returns to normal. "We've seen this kind of destruction before on TV, but it's not the same until it happens to you," he told *FCNews*.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provided trailers for the residents who lost their homes. But it was clear additional assistance was needed to begin repairing homes and businesses.

"The stories and the devastation are heartbreaking," Alexander said. "Many put a priority on rebuilding their businesses—their only source of income—before fixing their own homes. At least we've been able to remove the costly burden of a new floor for both their home and

business. And for that, these hard-working people are so grateful."

One of those people includes Chris Paul, sales manager of Rancher Floor Covering, also based in Denham Springs. He said 90% of the parishes were flooded, and his store sustained significant damage. "Without the help of Novalis, we would have still been working on bare concrete. The company has done so much to not only help us but also many people in our community, especially the elderly."

Barker also cited Novalis' largesse. "Their generosity they showed was just tremendous. Not only did they replace the flooring for five of my retail customers, but they also took care of the flooring in the store owners' homes as well. They are a top-notch company and they really made a difference."

Crescent also stepped up in a big way to help the community. In one case in particular, the distributor worked long and hard with a local church to rebuild a day care facility housing more than 250 children.

Many other residents received aid as well. "It's a horrible feeling when you have a home you've lived in for 45-50 years, and all of a sudden everything is gone," Barker said. "Many fami-

lies lost everything because they didn't have flood insurance."

Work yet to be done

It took only a few days for the so-called "1,000-year flood" to recede, but officials and residents believe it could take many months or even years to fully recover.

"We're currently overwhelmed with [rebuild] business," Paul noted. "Our owner has been working 72 hours a week."

Crescent Hardwood Supply's Barker is in the midst of wrapping up what he calls the "first wave" of rebuilds. The next rounds could extend for many more months to come. "We've been working closely with dealers like Rancher Floor Covering as well as Smith Building Materials. We've developed a camaraderie that will last a lifetime."

That sentiment extends to Novalis, which often checks in on the progress of those who have become an extended family of sorts. "We felt strongly about coming to the aid of the people of Baton Rouge after hearing the accounts of the devastation," Wu said. "I believe this experience can serve as an example of how businesses can pull together to help the communities they serve. We were only too happy to play a small part."

guest column

When renting space is preferred over buying

(Second of two parts)

In my previous column, "Upgrading your store's location," I discussed the advantages—and timing—of upgrading a retail location (*FCNews*, February 27/March 6). In the second installment, I will review the benefits of renting a space when buying is disadvantageous or not an option.

If you are going to rent, and it isn't in a strip mall or with other tenants, be sure to arrange the following provisions:

•**First Right of Refusal.** If the owner decides to sell and has a bonafide offer, you have 30 days to purchase at the offered price.

•**Option to buy.** You have the right to buy, at a pre-agreed upon price (negotiate this sooner rather than later), and a portion of the rent paid goes toward the purchase. A good trick is to also have the purchase and sales agreement decided on in advance

LOCK IN THE RENT; DON'T AGREE TO AUTOMATIC INCREASES, OR NEGOTIATE LOWER HIKES.

by your attorneys to avoid problems later.

•**HVAC service.** The equipment must consistently maintain an in-store temperature of 70 degrees or the landlord must fix at their expense.

•**Repairs.** Roof replacements, which can be expensive, are the landlord's responsibility.

•**Upkeep.** Determine in advance who is going to paint the building, seal coat the parking lot or fix the exterior lights, etc.

•**Review renewal options.** Lock in the rent; don't agree to automatic increases, or negotiate lower hikes. Landlords must pay to retrofit every time the tenant changes and their cost for owning the building doesn't change. All increases equal more profit from the building for the landlord.

•**Tenant improvement provisions.** Most landlords will provide \$2 or \$3 per square foot toward renovating the space when you first move in. If this isn't necessary, request the allocation be applied towards 60-120 days of free rent. If you do need



VINNIE VIRGA

changes, have the landlord or owner pay for them. If your changes will cost more than that, negotiate terms that stipulate the landlord or owner pay for them, and for your rent to be slightly higher to offset their higher cost.

If you're considering renting in a strip mall here are some tips:

•**Make sure you know the zoning laws, restrictions and easements.**

•**Ensure there are no open violations.** Check roof, HVAC and other structural issues. Make sure the location is ADA compliant.

•**Try for "Gross Leases" if possible.**

•**Good deposit, buyer can terminate for any reason during due diligence.**

•**Possession date based on permit.**

•**Rent starts based on days after opening.**

•**Pre-approved sign, pre-approved changes.**

•**Try to get near an anchor, such as the parking lot of a home center.**

•**Always try for an end cap nearest the entrance.**

•**Assigned parking spaces are vital.** Make sure you have enough for your customers to have easy access near the front of the store.

•**If you are in the mall with other tenants, get a "go-dark" provision stating if more than 33% of the space goes dark, you may terminate the lease with 30 days notice.**

•**Get the right to audit CAM (common area maintenance) expenses and be sure to check their allocation of them based on your square footage rented.**

How do you know it's time for a change of location? Try this experiment: Next time you pull up to your store, try to look at it with fresh eyes. Is this someplace a woman would want to shop? Is it in the right part of town? Does it look nice outside and inviting? Is it safe? If the answer is no, then it's time for a change.

Vinnie Virga is managing partner and president of Big Bob's Flooring Outlet and Floors & More buying group. His experience includes management of various CCA Global Partner retail groups, including Flooring America.


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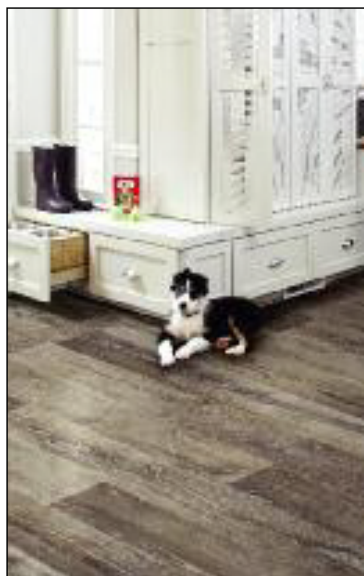
Continued from page 18

and that trend extends to flooring. Mannington is channeling that aesthetic into its sheet lines with stunning visuals such as Deco. “We are continuing to explore ways to engage consumers with these options as these visuals provide style and beauty at an affordable price,” Dyczko-Riglin said.

Armstrong recently introduced Diamond 10 in its CushionStep Better and Duality Premium lines, which the company said significantly improves the product’s scratch, scuff and stain resistance.

Beaufor’s latest introduction, Blacktex, is a cushion vinyl product in which a textile backing is applied to minimize subfloor prep. The product can be loose laid up to 500 square feet, adds warmth to the floor and provides enhanced sound absorption. “We launched this at Surfaces and the reception to the collection has been great,” Erickson said.

Forbo’s Marmoleum Click Cinch Loc is positioned as a nat-



Blacktex, Beaufor's newest glass-backed offering, is a cushion vinyl product.

urally healthy, water-resistant floor constructed primarily of renewable resources, including linseed oil, wood flour and pine rosins. The combination of natural linoleum on water-repellent HDF with a cork layer backing makes for an acoustically sound flooring solution.

IVC is experimenting with advanced embossed-in-register technology with its fiberglass sheet vinyl products. The company is also developing new chemical embossing techniques offering enhanced textural physics that allow the product to rise and fall with designs such as a cobblestone or paver patterns. “We’re always looking at ways to improve and push the limits to take the market to the next level,” Foster said.

SNAPSHOT

Floor Solutions named Gilford-Johnson Dealer of Year

FLORENCE, IND.—During its spring meeting on March 8, Gilford-Johnson Flooring honored its top flooring retailers for 2016. Among the winners were Carpet Specialists of Louisville, Ky. (Newcomer of the Year); and Floor Solutions, Louisville, which was named Advantage Partner Dealer of the Year. Stephen Elkin Jr., center, manager of Floor Solutions, is flanked by, from left, Doug Troklus, territory sales manager; Jason Elbert, regional sales manager; Nik Burdett, vice president of sales; and Scott Roy, CEO, all of Gilford-Johnson Flooring.



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FCA Network

Continued from page 1

and her team are a mere phone call away. FCA Network is not the largest buying group, but to hear its retail members tell it you would be hard pressed to find a more

loyal group of dealers.

“The FCA Network may be the best-kept secret in the industry,” said Carlton Billingsley, owner of Benton, Ark.-based Floors and More, a member for 15 years. “I don’t think they realize how great having a female leadership of a

flooring buying group adds to each member’s success from not only a woman’s expertise, but the female perspective of what the customer really wants.”

The majority of FCA’s newest retailers (it has 54 members and 62 storefronts) come via online searches or referrals from existing members. As Robertson explained, “We don’t have people beating the bushes looking for new members.”

FCA Network, which bills itself as the low-cost buying group with high-powered expertise, is unique in that it is the only retail group actually run by retailers (it has its own corporate stores). The group, an offshoot of Floor Covering Associates, a \$40 million-plus retailer based in Shorewood, Ill., was launched in 1998 with the goal of assisting independent retailers in expanding opportunities through marketing, merchan-



Bob Hill, right, founder of Floor Covering Associates, and his assistant, Judy Marsh, left, meet with Ann McDermott, vice president, national accounts, Shaw Industries.



Jerry Lagowski, left, of Town Square Flooring Experts in Schaumburg, Ill., listens as Marc Tinter, right, and Jerry Reed, both of USFloors, discuss the company’s newest offerings.

dising and buying power.

Appropriately, this year’s convention theme was “Opportunity Knocks,” and against a backdrop of an improving economy and more favorable housing numbers, the outlook is indeed bright for the group. “I really believe there are unlimited opportunities for us,” Robertson told members. “We all have to step up our games because the status quo is not a business strategy. Retail is getting more complex every day. Creative thinking, networking and the strength of our product assortment are what are needed. FCA has the muscle to help [members] survive and thrive.”

Dennis Thiets, senior vice president of residential sales for Mohawk Industries, a keynote speaker, tapped into Robertson’s positive outlook in his address, saying, “There is once again reason for optimism all around us. If you look at consumer confidence, for example, the most optimistic of all age groups is 35 and under, which is very encouraging for our industry.”

Ninety percent of membership attended the Chicago event, which is par for the course, and yet a rather significant statistic considering the conference is not mandatory. “Our members are here because they want to be here,” Robertson said. “They are committed to this business.” As with everything with this group, no program or product is mandated; retailers remain autonomous in how they want to run their business. FCA Network is there to provide the necessary support through professional assistance.

Bob Gaither, owner of The Carpet Gallery and Quality

Carpet & Flooring, Akron, Ohio, was one of the original members of FCA Network. He said each convention gives him a renewed sense of purpose. “I wouldn’t call it a pep talk, but I think it is a shot in the arm when I come here—and when I get back to the office I am fired up. I remember Bob Hill [FCA Associates founder] saying 15 years ago that if you did things the same way you did them a year ago, then you are doing something wrong. This group is constantly evolving with products and programs, which they have to do because the industry is evolving.”

Supplier executives who took part in the vendor trade show said FCA Network’s can-do spirit starts at the top. “While a lot of groups help out with their buying power, Olga does that and more—she helps them with their merchandising and store layout,” said Ann McDermott, vice president of national accounts for Shaw Industries. “Many of the smaller dealers in this group who may not have known where to turn if they have a problem can count on Olga. She takes care of their needs. She’ll go into their stores and give them a facelift. She really beautifies their stores.”

Joe Ross, regional vice president of sales for the north central region, Phenix, noted, “Olga always tries to create a unique venue to inspire her members in a different way, whether it is product assortment, merchandising or digital platforms.”

Robertson is happy to oblige. “FCA Network is a partner in our members’ success; helping them improve their profitability while maintaining their local identity.”

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marketing mastery

Note to dealers: Beware of burnout

(First of three parts)

“I was putting in 60 or more hours per week,” Earl Swalm told me. “I have two kids and I felt like I was missing out on a lot. It was really tough, very stressful.” Many dealers can relate.

In this series you’re going to learn Swalm’s story. Specifically, how he took control of his business, cut his work hours by more than half and grew his revenue by 50% in one year.

Swalm owns a flooring dealership in Moosejaw, Saskatchewan; he bought the business in January 2000. He worked many 70-plus-hour weeks for 10 years. “I started to implement paper systems early on, but couldn’t escape the ‘I wish I could find someone just like me’ syndrome,” Swalm said. “I felt like if I didn’t do it myself or babysit it, things wouldn’t get done right.”

He liked the flooring business, but he couldn’t escape the fact he was working for his business instead of it working for him. The long hours, stress and the burnout were taking their toll. “I finally decided to

IN MY OPINION, THE PURPOSE OF YOUR BUSINESS IS TO FUND AND FACILITATE YOUR IDEAL LIFESTYLE.

sell my business,” he told me. “I couldn’t see any other way to get my life back.”

This is something I hear from a lot of dealers. They get into the flooring business because they see it as a better opportunity than a 9-5 job to create a great life for themselves and their family. Unfortunately, for many the dream of owning their own store turns into a nightmare, with long hours, stress, not enough money, etc.

Swalm began to research selling his business. He wanted to get top dollar, so he reached out to me to help him with his marketing and business systems so the store would be more appealing to a buyer. He began implementing systems and strategies to make his business more profitable and efficient.

About a year into this



JIM AUGUSTUS
ARMSTRONG

process I got an email from Swalm saying he’d decided not to sell after all. Curious, I called him and asked why. “Because I’m only working about 35 hours per week,” he quipped. “Business is fun again. Why sell it?”

In my opinion, the purpose of your business is to fund and facilitate your ideal lifestyle. Providing employment and great products and taking excellent care of your customers are all important. But if you’re not funding and facilitating a great lifestyle, then what’s the point? If you’re stressed out and tired all the time, then what good does that do you? Life is too short to live it burned out and wishing for something better. The bottom line: Make it count.

In the end, that’s what Swalm decided to do. Today he works an average of 35 hours per week and often-times only 25. He regularly takes time off, including 10-day trips away from his business. And while he’s away it continues to run like a well-oiled machine. Last fall his revenue was up 50% year-over-year.

“I now work from home a couple of days a week,” he told me. “My day starts at 7 a.m. and I usually quit by noon or 1 p.m. Last Thanksgiving I took four days off and completely unplugged from work. In the past, when I’d take time off, I would check emails and take phone calls, so I was still mentally working. But now I’m totally present for my family, and I really enjoy myself. It’s great.”

In the next I’ll cover the sales and marketing strategies Swalm used to grow his revenue and review the steps he took to cut his work hours.

Jim Augustus Armstrong specializes in providing turnkey marketing strategies for flooring dealers. For a complimentary copy of Jim’s book, “How Floor Dealers Can Beat the Boxes and Escape the Cheap-Price Rat-Race of Doom Forever,” visit beattheboxestoday.com.

By Lindsay Baillie

For many retailers, jumping into social media is similar to exploring uncharted territory. It is unfamiliar, time consuming and poses the risk of failure/getting lost. However, now more than ever, social media has become a crucial part of the consumer’s search for products and services. If you are not maintaining your presence on social media, you run the risk of being buried by your competition, experts say.

FCNews recently spoke with three social media marketing experts to gather tips on how to create a social media strategy.

Tip #1: Make it mandatory. “The first thing retailers have to realize is social media is no longer just an option—it is a necessity,” said Paul Friederichsen, marketing expert and owner of BrandBiz. Retailers have to “understand it is a part of their overall marketing strategy. It is just as important as advertising and public relations.”

Tip #2: Align your social media efforts with your business strategy. Christine Whittemore, chief simplifier, Simple Marketing Now, encourages dealers to ask themselves a few questions when developing a social media strategy. “Why are you doing this? It takes a lot of time and effort to do social media correctly—just like anything else



Paul Friederichsen’s top social media platforms for flooring retailers

1. Facebook & Houzz
2. Instagram
3. Pinterest
4. Twitter
5. Youtube
6. LinkedIn

does—and you want to make sure those resources deliver value to the business.”

Tip #3: Start with your customers. After fitting social media into your business strategy you have to decide what platforms to join. For this, Whittemore suggests talking to your customers. “Find out where they hang out online. Ask them what they do there. Where do they go to find inspiration? That can help guide content and the kind of relationship building you do.” According to Whittemore, the time you spend on digital media is similar to what you would spend networking in person, so you also want to uncover where the majority of your customers look for new products.

Tip #4: Learn about each platform. According to Friederichsen, retailers should learn the best roles for each platform and what kinds of social etiquette are required for each. Bottom line: Retailers should

have a pretty good understanding of what each platform does and what the environment is on those platforms before joining.

Whittemore calls this understanding the “nature of the network,” so you can show up with the right kind of content and know how to say what you want to say. “It’s not just about sales,” she explained. “It’s about providing helpful information.”

Tip #5: Be selective. After talking with customers and learning about the different platforms, take the time to be selective about which platforms you actually join. Whittemore suggests retailers stay away from joining every social media site. Instead, maintain a presence on heavily populated sites such as Facebook and where your customers hang out such as Pinterest. She also recommends regularly Googling your business to see if any listings—such as Yelp—show up. If they do, make sure to claim them.

Tip #6: Start with one and then add on. If you are worried about maintaining multiple sites, experts advise starting small and concentrating your efforts on one. “Start with one and work on it,” said Lisbeth Calandrino, FCNews columnist and retail industry consultant. “Get a lot of customers on your page so then when you have good sense of that [platform] and people are replying to you, you’re ready to go to the next one.”

After you have successfully grown one social media account, try branching off to another site; however, make sure you do not take on too much to handle. “Retailers should be on as many sites as they can do well,” Friederichsen noted. “It’s better to do a few things well than many things poorly.”

Tip #7: Engage your customer. “This is the age of the consumer, and the consumer needs to talk,” Calandrino said. “What better way to get a referral than to have your customer be online

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by Jim Augustus Armstrong

A few years ago Craig took over his parent’s dealership in Florida, but soon found himself working “dark-to-dark,” 7 days a week. He felt like he was on a hamster-wheel, always running but still falling further and further behind. Because he spent so much time just trying to keep his head above water, he wasn’t able to grow the business, which was frustrating and scary. Late one night (hours after everyone else had gone home) Craig sat alone in his office, wondering if he had made the biggest mistake of his life by taking over the family business. He’d hit rock bottom. It was at that moment that he made a decision that would change his life forever. This decision took him on a journey that allowed him to cut his work hours in half, grow his business by 50%, and most importantly get his life back...*all within one year!*

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Christine Whittlemore's cheat sheet to social media

1. Welcome new followers/likers and be aware of who is who.
2. Acknowledge people who interact with you.
3. Monitor conversations.
4. Share your own content.



Lisbeth Calandrino's suggested reading

"Winning the Zero Moment of Truth" by Jim Lecinski, managing director of U.S. sales and service and chief ZMOT evangelist at Google



time as you think. In order to maintain a couple of social media sites, experts say retailers should spend anywhere from 30 minutes to one hour every day, as time and effort are equally important.

Friederichsen warned retailers that building followers on social media doesn't happen overnight and followers should never be purchased. His recommendation: "Build a following over time with good content and consistent posts—with proper etiquette."

and talk about a job you've done? You have to figure out how to engage the customer."

Along the same vein, Friederichsen explained it's not the place to push out your message as you would in an advertisement. "It's the sharing of ideas; it's an engagement [with others]. A lot of dealers feel like that is really not selling, when in fact it is because it creates a much broader view of your store and your brand so that you can attract the kind of customers you want."

Tip #8: Create a blog. In addition to communicating with your customers, social media helps call attention to your website. While social media platforms provide ample opportunity for customers to visit your site, Calandrino recommends creating and maintaining a blog. "It's likely that your website is stagnant. If every time I go to your website it's exactly the same then I am less likely to return. If you have a blog and it is up to date—you decide to post every week or every day—then whoever signs up for [the blog] will see your site." She recommends retailers build content around their personality and strengths instead of buying posts.

Tip #9: Let social media buffer your other marketing outlets. Social media is an interconnected form of marketing and can easily complement a retailer's overall marketing campaign. Friederichsen suggest retailers use their social media accounts to share when sales are occurring, when new products come in or when any seasonal promotions are going on in the store, etc. "Like advertising and public relations, social media plays an important role. They don't all play the same role but they complement one another."

Calandrino agrees, adding: "A social media strategy doesn't stand by itself. It is not an isolated strategy. Rather, you need to work it into whatever else you're doing. If you're doing a contest you

should move it to your social media so people have to respond."

Tip #10: Be patient. Developing and maintaining a

social media strategy requires time, but probably not as much



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Suncrest Supply expands capabilities

PALM BEACH, FLA.—Suncrest Supply has acquired a specialty handcrafted wood manufacturing facility based in South Carolina. The move expands the distributor's capabilities to include custom wood flooring, walls, ceilings and furniture.

"We are capitalizing on the evolving handcrafted trend for exclusive designs with an emphasis on 'Made in the USA,'" said Dewevai Buchanan, president of Suncrest Supply. "Our design concepts feature sorting wood species, diverse textures, accents and charred finishes. These unique offerings are available to OEM manufacturers or in a private-label program for distributors, retailers and wood floor specialists."

Suncrest Supply manufactures textured wood that resonates extremely well with the designer and consumer. Its product lineup features mixed textures that include wire-brushed, scraped, circular and straight saw marks, skip-sawn, band-sawn marks and chatter marks.

"Customers are shopping for something unique, which is why

they're drawn to handcrafted designs," said Mike White, manufacturing manager. "It's all about the texture, staining and sheen. We have even managed projects that required mixing different sheen levels in a carton to achieve a multi-sheen visual."



In addition, Suncrest Supply sources reclaimed lumber sal-

vaged from old barns, textile mills and warehouses to be repurposed for flooring and

other uses. The reclaimed lumber often includes the natural look of mortise pockets, tenons, peg holes, insect marks, checking and knots in addition to the original hand-hewn surface. During the manufacturing process, the company removes any metal embedded in the lum-

ber, such as broken nails, bolts, screws, buckshot and other miscellaneous metal hardware.

Suncrest's wood wall panels are also handcrafted to order based on OEM specifications. The peel and stick and mesh-back panels are made of solid wood planks that are custom milled.

Suncrest Supply can fulfill orders ranging from 1,000 square feet to full truckload quantities.

Wickham taps Summit Hardwood Flooring

WICKHAM, QUEBEC, CANADA—Wickham Hardwood Flooring announced a strategic partnership with distributor Summit Hardwood Flooring to represent and market the Wickham brand of high-quality products in the upper Midwest.

"We are very pleased to be partnered with such a reputable, established organization," said Jean-Pierre Nittolo, president of Wickham. "Their management and sales team will do a great job representing our products in the upper Midwest."

Summit, likewise, is optimistic about the opportunities. "Our entire team is excited to partner with Wickham and offer this exciting line to our customers," said Chad

Lemair, Summit president. "We plan on bringing the same level of support and service that has set us apart from our competitors to our existing and new customers in the upper Midwest."



Mannington recognizes Jaeckle Distributors

MADISON, WIS.—Jaeckle Distributors recently earned Mannington's prestigious 2016 President's Award for its residential sales performance in 2016. This is the second year in a row

that Jaeckle Distributors has won this coveted award.

"Mannington is our largest supplier and we are honored to



be a top performer amongst our peers," said Jeff Jaeckle, president of Jaeckle Distributors, a third-generation, family-owned company. "Achieving this award

two years in a row directly reflects the dedication and commitment to excellence of our entire staff, and we look forward to a long and prosperous relationship with Mannington."

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ProMat aims to ease specification process

By Lindsay Baillie

Pro Material Solutions (ProMat) was created as a way for commercial contractors, designers and architects to manage product data for any given project. “We are simply a database for the industry,” said Jerry Freeman, IIDA, president of ProMat.

The company provides users with a plethora of tools including a project binder, a specification download button, a palette builder and a sample ordering tool—to name a few. By using these solutions, users can save time and money when looking for product specifications or manuals and when ordering samples.

According to Freeman, most of the contractor’s time is spent searching for product documents and ordering all of the samples. With ProMat, the company’s administrators search for and upload new products, along with specs, maintenance manuals and any other available information to the ProMat database. Once in the system, the product is available to all users and can be searched based on application, price, color, manufacturer and product type. Ordering a sample or requesting documents is as easy as clicking a button, the company stated.

Boasting the “world’s largest digital database of architectural products and materials,” ProMat is constantly being updated. “We have products for about 860 [flooring] manufacturers in our database,” Freeman said. “We can add an entire company within an hour.”

This efficiency is also seen in ProMat’s ability to create documents for a submitted project that include product specs, maintenance manuals, close-out reports, etc. While most documents are created within five minutes to an hour, the company guarantees 48 hours or less. “I don’t think any job has taken us more than six hours,” Freeman stated.

While there is no cost to join ProMat, only qualified commercial/residential interior designers and architects can request samples. In addition to membership, users are able to access the program’s multiple tools free of charge. According to Freeman, ProMat generates its revenue by charging a \$30 flat fee for each project submitted by a user.

On the horizon

ProMat plans to launch Material Annex, a new platform

to help manufacturers sell their overstock and discontinued products. The new program will also allow subcontractors to sell excess inventory from their warehouses. “We’re basically creating a web exchange,” Freeman explained.

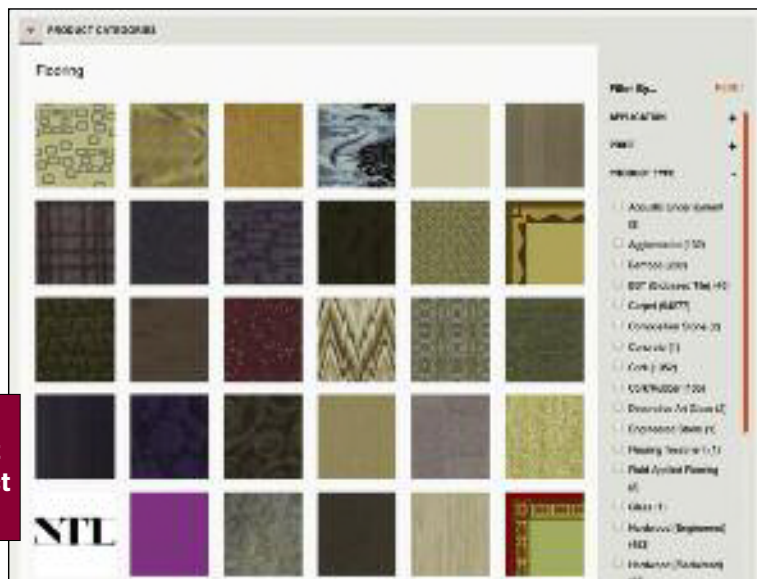
Also in development is an app called Specifix, which uses a phone or tablet camera to show product in an actual room. Designed to interface with ProMat and Material Annex, the app uses the camera to scan a desired room and collect the room’s measurements. Then, in

“paint-by-number” fashion, the desired flooring product is filled in to show what the room will look like.

Material Annex should be available to users by the end of the year. Specifix’s beta launch is scheduled for May 1 with a subsequent rollout on June 1.

For more information visit promatsolutions.com.

Pro Material Solutions’ database allows users to search for product based on application, price, product type, color and manufacturer.



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Karndean expands portfolio with rigid core rollout

EXPORT, PA.—Karndean Designflooring has taken the wraps off Korlok, a new rigid core floor that was more than three years in the making. The new line features several elements that are meant to enhance speed and ease of installation; in this case, the objective was to construct a floor that would be suitable for projects that needed to be completed quickly.

“We took the time to perfect the technology and create designs that fill a need within our existing product catalog,” said Larry Browder, CEO of Karndean, noting the company approaches every project with a design mindset. In this case, the design team searched for natural materials that would be either too costly or impractical for everyday living and then meticulously brought out the true character of these materials in the new collection.

Korlok comes with a 5G drop and lock technology, which requires minimal sub-floor preparation. Likewise, no adhesive is needed. The proprietary, waterproof K-Core technology behind the product provides a rigid core that allows for installation over most existing hard floors. Plus, the pre-attached premium foam backing saves on time, cost and labor since there is no need for a separate underlayment. It also makes Korlok quieter to walk on, making it ideal for upstairs rooms in the home where noise transfer is a concern.

Browder said every prospective Karndean product is put through the rigors of testing to



Korlok, which comes in 12 colors, is inspired by wood sourced across North America and Europe. Pictured is washed gray ash.

ensure it performs to the company's high-quality standards. “Korlok is composed of layers of premium performance, from our waterproof K-Core, to the 5G locking mechanism, to our K-Guard+ surface protection. Nowhere else will you find a rigid core product with the quality designs and performance.”

The collection offers 12 colors from woods sourced across North America and Europe, including Texas ash and butternut, which is hand selected from the East Coast to the cross-sawn grays of reclaimed French oak. Korlok is finished with Karndean's K-Guard+ surface protection, which provides a hygienic, durable surface that is easy to clean, according to Browder. Korlok also carries a lifetime

residential warranty and 15-year commercial warranty.

A complete package

Korlok is the latest entry in Karndean's total flooring solutions package, which encompasses gluedown, loose lay and rigid core formats. In the portfolio are six glue down ranges along with two floating floor solutions—Karndean LooseLay and Korlok—each of which solves a different problem, the company said.

With the addition of Korlok, Browder said Karndean has a format to fit any type of subfloor scenario, be it an imperfect or uneven subfloor or a concrete slab in areas with high humidity. “Regardless of the install method, consumers and retailers can rely on every product we developed. Our mission is to develop the truest, most authentic designs possible across all installation options, which is why we offer more than 200 products across our total flooring solutions.”

Browder encourages Karndean's existing flooring dealers to round out their assortments by carrying Korlok. As of press time, Korlok displays have not yet reached the retail marketplace. In fact, only a handful of dealers have seen the product. One of them, Bob Caputo, owner of Carpetland USA of Dothan, in Dothan, Ala., was impressed. “We are very excited about Korlok—the visuals are great. Karndean does a great job with style and color. This product is designed to be installer friendly, which is always a plus. This will be a great product for us.”

lisbiz strategies

Why trade shows matter

Coverings 2017 is right around the corner. There will be dozens of live demonstrations, over 70 free educational seminars and new products galore.

But how many people will actually show up? I make it a point to go every year, but I usually see the same people. I've found the ones who show up really want to stimulate their minds and gain advantages for their businesses. I know many people do product research at such events. You can do the same at Coverings 2017, but you can also have your sales reps keep you up to date without leaving town.

A recent experience I had illustrates the importance of attending industry conferences such as Coverings. On March 15, I spoke at an event in New Britain, Conn., for the Marble Institute of America. It was hosted by Surfaces, a wholesale fabri-



LISBETH CALANDRINO

thinking if I don't show up, I'll miss meeting business owners who are interested in improving their business. Why wouldn't I go if I could get there?

A note from Seth Godin inspired me to write this article because of his short and simple headline: “Why do people show up?” Here's what he wrote:

“Some people show up when they need something. Some people show up before they need something, knowing that it will pay off later when they do need something. And some people merely show up. Not needing anything, not in anticipation of needing something, but merely because they can.”

So why did people show up to my seminar? One retailer said, “I came to get inspired. Hearing

what others are doing inspires me to try something new. It's great to learn what works; it saves trial and error.”

Another explained, “I want to network and get more answers and ideas after the meeting and exchange business cards and phone numbers.”

Many attendees wanted to learn more about using social media: How should it be used? How can they use it more effectively? What do businesses find successful on social media? They were willing to share with the rest of the group and also asked pointed questions.

Peer-to-peer sharing is invaluable. Where else will you have the chance to learn from others in your industry? Some may even be your competitors.

No matter what the industry, we are isolated from our peers unless we attend conferences. We all want to know what is working in our industry, and who knows better than others in the same business? So if you don't want your competitors to get ahead of you, plan on attending Coverings.

NO MATTER WHAT THE INDUSTRY, WE ARE ISOLATED FROM OUR PEERS UNLESS WE ATTEND CONFERENCES.

cator of stone, quartz and solid surface countertops. The weather was frigid that night, and a blizzard had dumped 17 inches of snow in Albany, N.Y. I kept debating whether I should make the drive to the event. I figured I could live stream it through my blog. But I also really wondered who would show up?

The day before the event, I received a note from Mark Meriauz, accreditation and technical manager from MIA + BSI The Natural Stone Institute, telling me that about 44 people had signed up for my seminar on “The New Consumer.”

I was really surprised. I thought to myself, “Wow. I can't believe we are going to have so many people—I have to go.”

I asked a couple of friends about going—most of them thought I was crazy. They said, “Why would you go out on the roads only to get stuck? Or even worse, have an accident?”

I kept thinking if the roads are plowed outside of Albany, why shouldn't I go? I wasn't scared; I was excited. I kept

Lisbeth Calandrino has been promoting retail strategies for the last 20 years. To have her speak at your business or to schedule a consultation, contact her at lcalandrino@nycap.rr.com.

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MSI

Continued from page 3

product itself. “We are sourcing the latest products, trends and technologies, and are leading in styling and bringing them in at affordable prices. We make even the high-end products very affordable.”

After posting sales of \$920 million in 2016, MSI fully expects to eclipse the \$1 billion mark in 2017. That will be achieved in part by virtue of four or five new branches, bringing to 27 the total number of locations in the U.S. To support this growth, the company hired 280 new employees last year and projects to bring on the same number or more this year.

“We want to work with many of the large retailers and help them grow their tile busi-

ness,” Llerena said. But MSI will be very selective regarding its retail partners. “We are looking to grow with retailers who have dedicated themselves to this category. Ceramic is a difficult category to manage.”

At the same time, MSI also hopes to bring more retailers into countertops, a business that generates approximately half of MSI’s total sales. “With the excitement around quartz, it is easier for the retailer to get involved in the category. They don’t have to show a tremendous number of slabs in the warehouse. We can help them by joining them up with our fabricators.”

Manny Llerena, director of sales and marketing, and Emily Holle, creative director, attribute MSI's growth mainly to being affordable and accessible.



MSI will be exhibiting at Coverings with a bevy of new products. Llerena says they all respond to five trends:

1. A focus on the wall. “Today, one out of every five sales is a wall tile sale. People are getting tired of paint. They are using wall tile to replace paint.
2. A continuation of lineal looks. “They are a little softer,

more water color lines running through tiles.”

3. Black and white combinations for floors and walls.
4. Outdoor spaces. Taking

tiles that can work indoors and coordinating them with outdoors.

5. Creative floor/wall tile combinations.

Fuse Alliance doles out awards

LAGUNA NIGUEL, CALIF.—Fuse Alliance, a member-owned organization of professional, commercial flooring contractors, recently recognized the recipients of the network’s Member and Supplier Awards, at the organization’s 2017 annual conference in Austin, Texas. Fuse Alliance also announced the winners of its inaugural Spark Awards, presented to network members only.

Member Awards were presented to seven network businesses. OEC, Boise, Idaho, captured Excellence in Communication; Division 9, Seattle, and Christian Brothers, San Diego, both took home Excellence in Reporting and Follow-Up. StarFloors, Dallas; Texan Floor Service, Houston; and Franklin Flooring, Pennsylvania, each earned Excellence in Loyalty awards.

ReSource Floors, San Diego, was cited for its contribution to Ecollect—Fuse’s reclamation program—while Resource 4 Floors, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., took home the Spirit Award.

Supplier Awards were presented to Johnsonite (Best Product); Armstrong Flooring (Best Service); Schönox (Best Support); and Ardex Americas (Supplier of the Year).

Lastly, several Spark Awards, which celebrate excellence in project design, were presented to Butler Flooring Services, Louisville, Ky.; Resources (CIR), Irvine, Calif.; Floorz, Denver; and Signature Commercial Floor Covering, Orange, Calif. (Toughest Site Conditions).



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