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Wood: Canadian style

Hardwood flooring manufacturers based north of the border are differentiating themselves via style, innovation.

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

NeoCon 2016



Metroflor's Russ Rogg, left, president and CEO, and Harlan Stone, co-chairman, received accolades for the expansion of Aspecta, which more than doubled over a two-year period.

A&D COMMUNITY SEEKS DESIGN SOLUTIONS

By Sarah Bosquet

CHICAGO—NeoCon has long been recognized as the conference and exposition for those specializing in commercial interiors, and this year was no exception. Boasting steady traffic and high energy levels and enthusiasm, the event drew 53,000 attendees—an increase of 6% over last year.

“Design professionals head to NeoCon each year for a first-

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Shaw eyes new digs for contract division in 2017

DESIGN CENTRE TO HOUSE ALL UNITS UNDER ONE ROOF

By Ken Ryan

Shaw Industries recently broke ground on a three-story, 67,000-square-foot Create Centre in Cartersville, Ga. Scheduled for completion in late 2017, the Centre will house the commercial division's marketing, design and innovation associates including its Patcraft and Shaw Contract teams.

The Create Centre is intended to facilitate collaboration across Shaw's broader business, integrating soft surface with hard surface, according to Brenda Knowles, vice president of marketing, commercial division.

This new building will be based near Shaw Plant 94, where

the company's commercial design and marketing teams are currently located. That facility will continue its custom manufacturing operations and will become home to Shaw's Custom Design Studio and hospitality customer service teams once the Create Centre is complete.

“We find value in locating



An artist's rendering of Shaw's forthcoming Create Centre, scheduled to open in 2017.

manufacturing, design, marketing and others in close proximity to one another in the same region, the same state or, in this instance,

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Mohawk forms industry's first partnership with Yelp

CALHOUN, GA.—Mohawk Flooring has announced a partnership with Yelp whereby its aligned retailers will be provided with an enhanced online presence as well as advertising discounts on the crowd-sourced review site. The deal represents the first marketing partnership of its kind between Yelp and a

flooring manufacturer.

“Mohawk is the industry's digital leader,” said Mollie Surratt, senior director of public relations, social media and content for Mohawk. “So this was a natural step for us—teaming up with Yelp, the clear leader, to give our retailers additional digital support in the reputation management space. Yelp will help our retailers connect with thousands of consumers who trust the Yelp review process to guide them to quality businesses and products.”

Yelp's purpose is to connect people with great local businesses. It does this by offering business profile pages so consumers can locate businesses, visit them and then post a review of their experience. By the end of the first quarter of 2016, Yelpers had

written more than 100 million local reviews.

Visitors access Yelp via their mobile devices (approximately



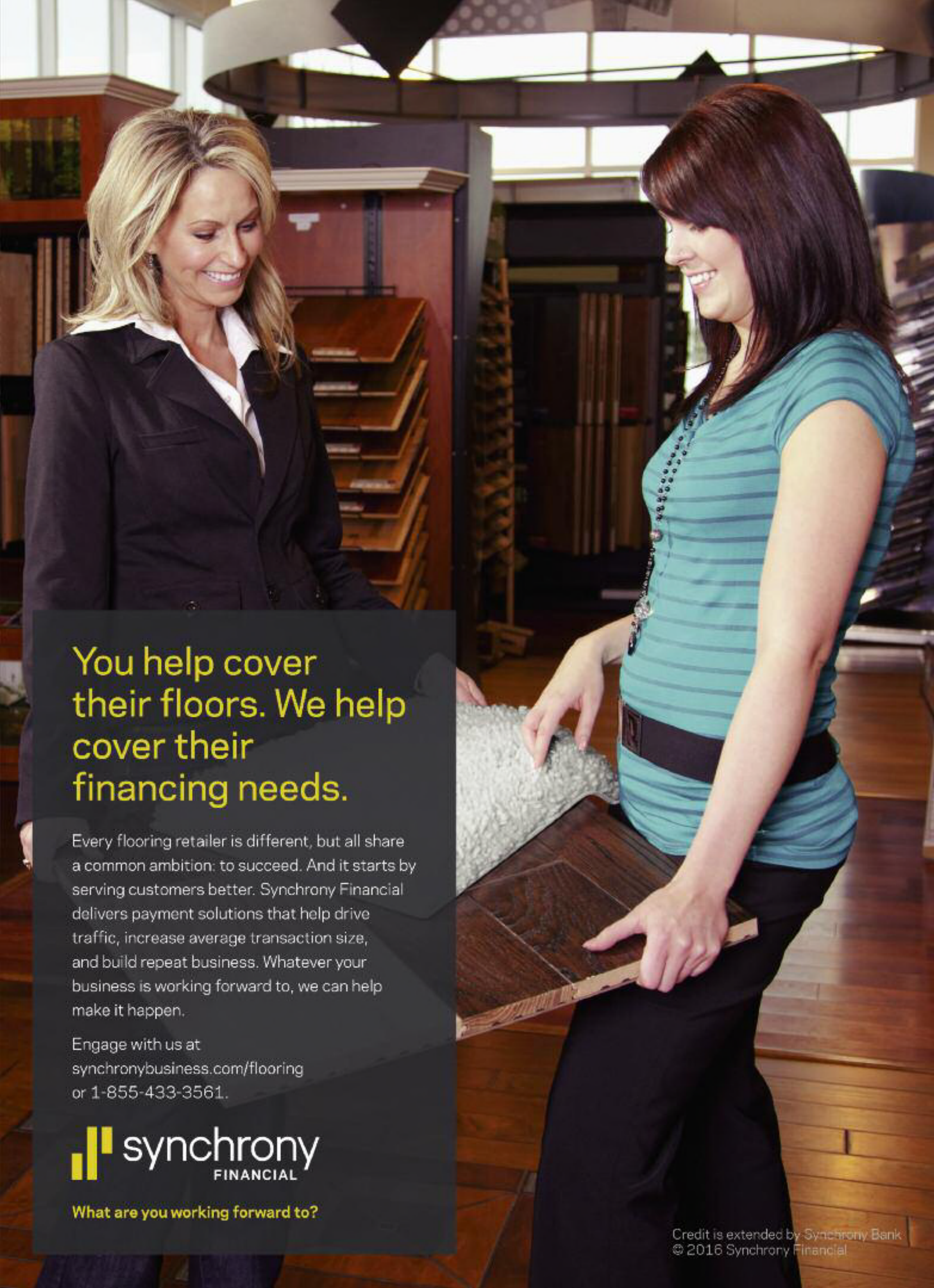
91 million a month on average during the first quarter of this year) and their desktops (approximately 69 million a month during the same period). Home and local services businesses account for 12% of reviewed businesses on Yelp by category.

According to Yelp, 78% of consumers turn to review sites like Yelp to find local businesses, and four out of five users visit Yelp because they intend to buy

a product or service. Yelp helps consumers make buying decisions and drives local purchases because consumers trust Yelp reviews as the most influential, highest quality and most trustworthy reviews online. That trust is embedded in Yelp's recommendation software, which protects consumers and business owners by highlighting the most trustworthy, useful and reliable content on Yelp.

In addition to the Yelp website and mobile app, Yelp reviews are syndicated to a number of major review sites and search engines including Apple Maps, Siri, Amazon, Yahoo, Bing and Mapquest.

See related article about online ratings and reviews on page 16.

A photograph of two women in a flooring store. The woman on the left has blonde hair and is wearing a dark blazer over a white collared shirt. The woman on the right has dark hair and is wearing a teal and white striped short-sleeved top with a black belt and black pants. They are both smiling and looking at a wooden flooring sample board that the woman on the right is holding. In the background, there are shelves filled with various flooring samples.

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IN THE NEWS

Carpenter inks deal with neatfreak's Everfresh brand

RICHMOND, VA.—Carpenter Co., one of the world's largest producers of cushion products, announced the signing of a multi-year agreement with neatfreak, a home organ-



ization products company. The deal gives Carpenter exclusive rights to use the Everfresh probiotic technology brand in Serenity, its latest carpet cushion.

Serenity carpet cushion featuring the innovative Everfresh probiotic technology lets consumers enjoy their floors without worrying about harmful bacteria or germs. Already available in many neatfreak laundry products, the 100% organic probiotic technology reduces odor naturally, continuously and safely.

"The floor covering industry recognizes the importance of living in a clean home without the worry of germs that pose potential harm to homeowners," said Rob Heuay, senior vice president, Carpenter. "Serenity with Everfresh probiotic technology does just that."

Stanton Carpet acquires high-end specialty mill

SYOSSET, N.Y.—Stanton Carpet has acquired all the assets of Crescent Carpet Importers, a company serving the high-end residential market with patterned and textured carpets with a focus on wool. Under the terms of the deal, the Crescent brand will operate alongside Stanton's highly decorative Rosecore umbrella while maintaining its limited distribution strategy and core high-end residential offering.



Jonathan Cohen

"The Crescent Carpet products have a unique position in the very high-end of the market and will be a great complement to Rosecore," said Jonathan Cohen, CEO of Stanton.

Stanton will assume all operational responsibilities and relocate the inventory to its new, 227,000-square-foot distribution, customer service and fabrication center in Calhoun, Ga. Crescent products will continue to be sold through its existing network of sales agents and will show alongside Rosecore at Surfaces 2017.

NWFA launches online university to enhance hands-on learning

ST. LOUIS—The National Wood Flooring Association has officially launched NWFA University, an online learning platform that enhances NWFA's hands-on training programs.

This e-learning initiative launches with more than 50 courses that provide information and instruction for wood flooring professionals.



How it works: Individual courses lead to the earning of digital "badges," electronic representations of a skill that has been mastered. As badges are earned, they can be combined with hands-on training to earn NWFA certifications.

Currently, the career path to earn Installation certification from NWFA is available through NWFAU. Sales certification courses are available as well, and a sales certification path will be finalized soon.

Haines kicks off annual Southern Summit

SPECIAL EVENT SUPPORTS TOP-PERFORMING 'LOYALTY CLUB' DEALERS

By Ken Ryan

Haines, the industry's leading floor covering distributor, recently welcomed 130 flooring dealers to its seventh annual Southern Summit here. The event drew a record number of retailers, Haines noted.

The event provides southern dealers from the Haines Loyalty Club (HLC) with product specials, product knowledge, business training and peer benchmarking opportunities. "It was our best show ever," Bruce Zwicker, president and CEO of Haines, told FCNews. "The mood was very upbeat."

The two-day event, held June 23-24, included a product showcase and breakout discussions run by dealers covering a range of topics, from succession planning to installation to boosting profit margins. "We had four of our top dealers running these panels," Zwicker said. "It was a very popular segment of the summit."

Another highlight was an expanded product showcase that featured several vendors new to Haines' Florida market,



Haines executives Bruce Zwicker, left, and Hoy Lanning, second from right, are flanked by new Haines Loyalty Club members, from left: Matt Johnson and Chris and Melissa Newcom from Bast Floors & Staircases, Tampa.

including EarthWerks and Mullican, as well as several private-label brands.

During the general session, Zwicker provided an overview on the flooring industry, which he noted has been growing at a subdued pace, with 2016 behaving very similarly to 2015. "We all feel like Bill Murray in 'Groundhog Day,'" he said, referring to the movie that depicts a man reliving the same experience day

after day. "Last year the industry saw an air pocket in August and the industry lost altitude for a while. This year, the air pocket came in May. Demand for residential remodel took a hiatus. We were all like, 'What the heck is happening?' Then June was better. We are looking at an industry that is growing at about 3%. It is performing better than

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Bamboo Hardwoods announces new ownership

By Reginald Tucker

Bamboo Hardwoods, formally one operating unit of the Aboeda family of five different companies, announced new ownership through a buy-out from its existing management and manufacturing partner. The original grouping of principals and manufacturing partner have now become full-interest owners who will be solely focused on the Bamboo Hardwoods brand.

As a result of the changeover, David Keegan, president, increases his ownership stake and adds CEO to his title. Keegan, who brings more than 17 years of experience in the bamboo flooring category — mostly with Bamboo Hardwoods — has spearheaded the company over the past decade, raising its profile from a local retailer of bamboo products to a nationally recognized manufacturer of bamboo flooring sold through distributors and authorized retailers nationwide.

Hugh Gallagher, currently CFO, increases his ownership stake as well,

expanding his role to include the title of COO. Gallagher has more than 10 years experience with Bamboo Hardwoods and was an integral member of the company's manufacturing transition team. Additional ownership interest resides with Bamboo



Bamboo Hardwoods chief owners David Keegan, left, and Hugh Gallagher have increased their respective stakes in the business.

Hardwoods' existing manufacturing partner group in China.

"Even though there is a change in ownership, very little will change from what our valued distributors and partners have

come to expect from Bamboo Hardwoods," Keegan explained. "The majority of changes will be on the back side of the business—mostly logistical and fulfillment aspects resulting in greater efficiencies, better terms and shorter lead times for our customers."

What that means for Bamboo Hardwoods' retailer and distributor partners is they will have greater access to inventories in the company's Seattle and Atlanta warehousing operations. Likewise, with the increased focus on increasing capacity at the manufacturing plant, Bamboo Hardwoods' distributors will also be able to build on their respective inventories. This, in turn, means faster shipments to the retailer and ultimately the consumer.

"Basically our partners throughout the chain will have a lot more confidence when they're selling our products to the homeowner," Keegan explained. "Previously, a lot of distributors were relying on our stock; now they are going to be able to tap into their own supply." What is not expected to change, the company stresses, is Bamboo Hardwoods' steadfast

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SNAPSHOT

Paul Pumphrey visits WWII Memorial

The World Floor Covering Association (WFCA) recently honored Paul Pumphrey, a WFCA Hall of Fame member and a World War II veteran, during a recent trip to the WWII Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Leading up to the site visit, it was discovered that Pumphrey, 90, who served with the United States Merchant Marines from 1943 to 1945, was due five medals for his service. During the event he was awarded those medals—accompanied by a letter of gratitude from President Harry S. Truman—at a private ceremony during the visit in June. Attendees included Scott Humphrey, CEO of the WFCA, and Pumphrey's wife, Carla.

Pumphrey, shown here at the WWII Memorial, is the only person to have served as president of the American Floor Covering Association (AFA) and the Western Floor Covering Association (WFCA), the two organizations that merged to form the WFCA.





my take

Why stores go out of business

I recently learned that Sports Authority is going out of business. The sporting goods chain, which operated more than 460 stores in 45 states at its peak, had been in business for nearly 30 years and existed in an industry that is by no means in decline. More and more people are doing more and spending more on outdoor activities.

So it leads me to ask myself: Why would Sports Authority be going out of business? And on a macro scale, why does any chain go out of business? After all, this industry has seen the likes of Color Tile, Sandler & Worth, Kaufman Carpets, Giant Carpet and countless other chains shut their doors.

I did a little research and became somewhat enlightened. Stores go out of business for varied, often-overlapping reasons, some of which are in the store's control; some of which aren't. Whether you wonder why your competitor's front window displays a "Going out of business" sign or if you want to avoid the most common pitfalls, you may be surprised by how many things can cause a store to pack it in.

An article that recently appeared in the *Houston Chronicle* broke it down into four primary causes:

1. Physical causes. Physical charac-

teristics such as location and interior and exterior design features can cause your store to fail. Common symptoms of a bad location include inadequate parking, less-than-desirable surroundings, confusing street layouts, little pedestrian traffic and lack of other retail outlets in the area. If your store's exterior signage or window displays have a poor design, people may be less likely to set foot inside even if the location gets plenty of traffic. Poorly designed interiors can also contribute to a store's demise. For example, if your store plays music at an annoying volume, potential customers may leave the building due to physical discomfort.

2. Economic causes. Stores sometimes go out of business as a direct result of economic causes, such as shifting demand or excessive overhead. Even if your store is thriving by industry standards, it may go out of business if its overhead is too high. Caution in management decisions can help you avoid excessive overhead, such as signing a lease for more rent than the business can afford or hiring more employees than necessary. Shifting demand can sink a store by causing a major drop in sales. For example, if your store is not diverse in the products or styles it sells, and what you sell loses popularity, your store may suffer a drop

in sales and be unable to meet its overhead obligations. In illustration, those flooring stores that were slow to embrace the onslaught of hard surfaces in a meaningful way found themselves on the outside looking in.

3. Marketing causes. Marketing problems can cause a store to fail even if every other aspect of your operation is positive. Inadequate marketing can mean that you don't do enough to promote your business, or that you don't execute your marketing well enough or do not direct it at the right audience.

4. Differentiation causes. Many other causes exist for store failure, among them not enough differentiation. If you can't tell me why your store is different, then it probably isn't. If the market is saturated and your store doesn't have a distinguishing feature—such as a different look, better selection, better service or better in-store experience—you will find yourself in trouble. It is imperative to differentiate your store from the competition; otherwise, it becomes a race to the bottom and you find yourself in the commodity game.

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postmaster

Send address changes to FLOOR COVERING NEWS, subscription Dept., 151 Fairchild Avenue., Ste. 2, Plainview, NY 11803

Floor Covering News (ISSN-10794174) is published biweekly by Roel Productions Inc., 550 W. Old Country Road, Ste. 204, Hicksville, NY 11801. Periodicals postage paid at Hicksville, NY, and additional mailing offices.

IN THE NEWS

FCLC tackles industry issues

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—As part of its mission to work together to resolve some of the flooring industry's most pressing concerns, the Floor Covering Leadership Council (FCLC) conducted its first meeting of 2016 here recently. Fourteen volunteer representatives from flooring industry associations representing all sectors of the market attended.

The 2-year-old group's initiatives include improving communications between member groups and the industry, collaborating and sharing industry-wide professional training programs between member organizations and addressing matters related to the installation crisis.



One of the most pressing topics is the ongoing installation crisis. Certified Floorcovering Installer's Association (CFI), whose own mission is tied closest to this industry-wide challenge, provided updates about the launch of its new school located just outside Dallas.

FCLC attendees also elected members to fill open positions for the 2017-19 term. Michael Martin (chair), NWFA; Bob Blochinger (chair-elect), NICFI; Kim Oderkirk (secretary), FCICA; Kevin Gammonley (communications chair), NAFCD; Stephanie Owen (chair of training), NWFA; and Robert Varden (chair of installation), CFI.

Fuse welcomes new members

LAGUNA, NIGUEL, CALIF.—Fuse Alliance, a member-owned organization of professional commercial flooring contractors, has added two new service providers to the network: GP Land and Carpet of



Brockport, N.Y., and Nevada Contract Carpet of Las Vegas.

"The addition of GP Land and Carpet and Nevada Contract Carpet illustrates our commitment to establishing a strong network of flooring professionals that have the same high-quality level of skill and knowledge throughout the network and in every location," said Geoff Gordon, executive director, Fuse Alliance.

GP Land and Carpet, a certified Woman Business Enterprise and authorized dealer on the New York state flooring contract, is a full-service flooring company. Nevada Contract Carpet is a full-service flooring company that works in both the residential and commercial market segments.

With the addition of these two members, the Fuse Alliance network now reaches 84 member dealer partners with more than 150 locations throughout the United States and Canada.

Spartan Surfaces adds staffing

BEL AIR, MD.—Spartan Surfaces has announced new appointments in the growing Southeast region. Joshua Judy and Keith Lacognata, with a combined experience of 20 years, have been tapped to cover Florida.

Debi Parsons, who joins Spartan with nine years of industry experience, will cover Georgia through Jacksonville, Fla.

Covering the state of Tennessee south to Birmingham, Ala., is Craig Bruehl, a native to this region. Evan Cardwell will cover Mississippi, Louisiana, southern Alabama and the panhandle of Florida.

Mohawk ad campaign earns honors

SMARTSTRAND FOREVER CLEAN, TOUGH MUDDER SPONSORSHIP CITED

CALHOUN, GA.—Mohawk Flooring recently received the 2016 PRSA Silver Anvil Award of Excellence and the PRSA Bronze Anvil Award of Commendation for its year-long SmartStrand Forever Clean launch campaign, which centered around the company's 2015 sponsorship of the Tough Mudder obstacle race. The ceremony was held on June 9 at the AXA Equitable Center in New York City.

Recognized as the public relations industry's top honor, the Silver Anvil indicates Mohawk's far-reaching and strategic campaign development designed to lead customers to its retailers across the U.S., Canada and Australia. Mohawk Flooring was recognized in the "Marketing/Products" category.

"We are truly honored to be among the 2016 PRSA Silver and Bronze Anvil program award winners and give recognition to the hard work of so many talented Mohawk associates," said Mollie Surratt, senior director of public relations, content and social media for Mohawk Flooring. "Last year's award-winning campaign placed our SmartStrand Forever Clean carpet in the

middle of an international obstacle challenge. In the course of the campaign, our product faced a variety of challenges and opportunities to ultimately showcase the cleanability of SmartStrand Forever Clean for the entire world to see. It was a



powerful activation for the Mohawk brand and, most importantly, our retail partners."

Recognizing public relations skill, creativity and resourcefulness, the Silver Anvil Award has served as the public relations industry's most distinguished honor for more than 60 years. The coveted awards program recognizes the most influential and creative PR campaigns throughout the nation and allows winners to promote and share best practices.

The PRSA Bronze Anvil awards pro-

gram recognizes and honors the very best public relations tactics executed every year. Of the 639 entries submitted for consideration in 2016, only 65 organizations were selected as winners by the Bronze Anvil judges. Mohawk Flooring's SmartStrand campaign won in the Word-of-Mouth category.

At the heart of Mohawk Flooring's award-winning campaign was the multifaceted sponsorship of the Tough Mudder Challenge torture test, which put the new SmartStrand carpet "to the test" in Tough Mudder's internationally known obstacle races. Twenty feet of SmartStrand Forever Clean carpet was rolled out on eight Tough Mudder courses, where it was stomped on by more than 10,000 muddy participants at each location. The carpet was then shoveled out of the mud and successfully cleaned using only water.

The campaign was supported by robust in-store marketing materials, local event activation kits, national social media sweepstakes and local social media content. Mohawk also worked with leading bloggers to communicate about the campaign.

Mullican Flooring featured on hit HGTV show

JOHNSON CITY, TENN.—Several hardwood products manufactured by Mullican Flooring were featured on recent episodes of HGTV's "Property Brothers." Now in its fourth season, the popular show features twin brothers and business partners Drew Scott, a seasoned real estate agent, and his brother, Jonathan, a licensed building contractor. The show shadows the duo as they work with couples to find fixer-uppers, develop a design plan and renovate the property into a dream home within the established timeline and budget.

The first two episodes, "Peter & Lexa" and "Michelle & Felicia," which aired last month, featured residential renovation projects that include solid flooring from Mullican's American-made Muirfield Collection. For this installation, Mullican supplied 1,260 square feet of 5-inch-wide Muirfield hickory provincial and 1,008 square feet of 4-inch-wide Muirfield oak Tuscan brown.

The floors in the Muirfield Collection are custom-crafted from ¾-inch-thick solid hardwoods and feature a four-sided micro bevel. Offered in hickory, maple and oak, Muirfield is available in 17 colors and four widths. The third episode, "Jon & Michelle," featured a project utilizing 1,200 square feet of Mullican's 5-inch-wide Chatelaine hickory burnt umber. The Chatelaine Collection offers hand-sculpted ¾-inch solid hardwood flooring, featuring 10 distinctive selections in hickory, maple and oak.



Mullican Flooring is the exclusive provider of hardwood flooring for the show's current season. "We continue to

be excited about our partnership with 'Property Brothers,'" said Neil Poland, president of Mullican Flooring. "Their selection of the Muirfield and Chatelaine collections, and the diverse aesthetic appeal that they offer, mirrors the demand we are seeing from consumers. Homeowners are searching for more options, such as wider widths, longer lengths and a robust color palette."

For more information about "Property Brothers," visit hgtv.com/shows/property-brothers.

SNAPSHOT

Salesmaster to expand Mannington partnership

DEER PARK, N.Y.—Salesmaster Flooring Solutions, a flooring distributor for more than 50 years, has announced an expanded partnership with Mannington Mills. Salesmaster, which currently distributes Mannington Commercial in downstate New York, has received distribution rights to the rest of New York state, which ranges from Albany to Buffalo, including Rochester, Syracuse and Binghamton. Salesmaster plans to open a new distribution supercenter in the Rochester area to facilitate faster service to commercial flooring contractors, installation workrooms and flooring stores.

Pictured with Mannington products are Steve Kurtz, left, and Tony Giannattasio of Salesmaster.



educating the industry

Getting the most from online reviews



BY PAUL FRIEDERICHSEN

Let's face it—nobody likes to be “reviewed” because none of us likes the risk of criticism. In fact, most of us tend to take it personally. Like it or not, online reviews are here to stay.

These days, everybody is online—especially consumers in the market for floor coverings. More frequently, consumers who are thinking of replacing a floor are looking online for answers: what to buy and where to buy it. That means she's probably paying close attention to online reviews. In fact, research says 70% of online customers rely on reviews before making a purchase. So, if you're not listed on a review site then you're not in the game. Even worse, if you are online but your reviews are lousy, you're already losing.

That's why understanding the world of online reviews is so essential in marketing today. To begin with, what is the online review landscape for a floor covering dealer? Here are the sites that should be on your radar:

- Angie's List
- Yelp
- Google My Business
- Yahoo! Local Listings
- Better Business Bureau
- Facebook Ratings and Reviews

So, how do you get positive reviews? Think branding. In Brian Gracon's book “Meconomics 101” he lists three brands that every dealer needs to be mindful of to ensure customer satisfaction: Your store's brand, your associate's personal “brand” (how they deliver customer service, etc.) and the flooring brands you carry on your showroom floor. A shortcoming in any of the three brands could result in a poor online review. And here's the really sobering news: Studies have shown that behind every angry or upset customer with an online review, there are an average of 26 more who have chosen to remain silent.

Truth is, there is no online magic bullet, quick fix or short cut

to get positive online reviews for your business. There is simply delivering amazing customer experience across the three brands consistently. Do that, experts say, and you will reap the good graces, loyalty and reviews of happy customers.

How can you encourage customers to post good reviews?

Rule #1: Never ask for a “good review.” Ask for an honest one.

Rule #2: Don't be afraid to ask for a review.

There are a number of ways to do this, whether it's on your website, your social media, your newsletters or email program, your on-hold recording, your business cards, your in-store signage, etc. It's all about customer engagement that's genuine and responsive. Remember this: For every positive review, there are, on average, eight more behind that didn't

bother to post. And never forget to say “Thank you.”

What if you get a bad review? First of all, it's your business that's being reviewed, not you.

And no matter how hard you try, not everyone is going to like your business and bad reviews will happen. So keep these tips in mind:

1. Respond publicly and respectfully but not defensively.
2. Learn from it; a sincere criticism is actually doing your business a favor.
3. Remember your business is not going to be a good fit for everyone—nor should it be.
4. Some people are just jerks or things aren't going well in their world. Just move on.

Think of online reviews like a patch in your overall marketing garden; it needs care, occasional weeding and good stuff to overcome the bad. With proper tending, the fruits can be beautiful and attractive to others. Bottom line: Celebrate those on your website, in your advertising and, just as important, with your staff. Build your business on the momentum created by good, honest reviews and take your business to the next level.



Paul Friederichsen, a marketing and branding consultant, is the owner of BrandBiz, a consumer marketing research firm based in Atlanta. He is also a contributing writer to New York Daily News.

RETAILERS REACT

According to PayPal, the average order size of a small business that offers consumer financing increases 15%. Is this in line with your experience



For many floor covering retailers, financing plays a crucial part in trading consumers up to bigger-ticket items.

“In our area, often customers prefer to use their credit cards in order to receive points, benefits, etc. We have found that a customer vacillating between doing part of a home or the entire home may choose to complete the job at one time using our finance offering. I do not find it makes much of a difference unless we offer at least 12 months/no-interest financing. In general, it is a great tool to have available to close a sale that otherwise may not go forward because of lack of available funds.”

—Janice Clifton, Abbey Carpets Unlimited
Napa, Calif.

“Our history shows that offering financing allows the customer to either upgrade her flooring selection or get more rooms completed than originally anticipated. Of course, the salespeople need the proper training, and that is the critical connection to the process.”

—Kevin Rose, Carpetland
ColorTile, Rockford, Ill.

“It would be hard for me to put a percentage on it because we talk about financing from the very early stages of the interaction, but I definitely feel that a client is more comfortable selecting higher quality products when financing and is also more apt to add on, for example, upgrading their pad, when financing.”

—Elisabeth Stubbs, Enhance
Floors & Moore, Marietta, Ga.

“I'm sure that it has some effect on some of our customers, but in general that has not been my experience. Our specialty retail business is primarily better goods. I think it would be reasonable to assert that the higher the net worth of the customer, the smaller the role financing plays in the decision-making process.”

—Sam Roberts, Roberts Carpet & Fine Floors
Houston

“Our average sale for a financing customer is 20% higher than all other sales. Financing plays a crucial part in our selling process and we are always looking for better ways to incorporate financing into our process whether it is advertising, in-store signage or training.”

—A.J. Boyajian, AJ Rose Carpets and Flooring
Burlington, Mass.

CALENDAR

July 11-13
Flooring America
Summer convention, Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center, Grapevine, Texas.
Contact: 314.506.0000; ccaglobalpartners.com

July 13-15
Carpet One
Summer convention, Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center, Grapevine, Texas.
Contact: 314.506.0000; ccaglobalpartners.com

July 13-16
Atlanta International Area Rug Market
AmericasMart, Atlanta.
Contact: 800.ATLMART; americasmart.com

July 25-28
NWFA Certification Training & Testing
NWFA Training Center, Chesterfield, Mo.
Contact: Tracy Swindoll, 800.422.4556; member.nwfa.org

July 26-27
CFI Hardwood & Laminate Installation Training and Certification
CFI Installation School, Forney, Texas.
Contact: 816.231.4646; cfiinstallers.org

July 26-27
Retail Sales – Overview of selling wood floors
NWFA Training Center, Chesterfield, Mo.
Contact: Tracy Swindoll, 800.422.4556; member.nwfa.org

Aug. 3-5
CFI
Annual convention, Marriott Grapevine - Courtyard/TownePlace Suites Facility, Dallas.
Contact: 817.251.9095; cfiinstallers.org

Aug. 15
CFI 2-week Carpet Apprentice
CFI Installation School, Forney, Texas.
Contact: 816.231.4646; cfiinstallers.org

REMEMBER WHEN...



The National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA) welcomed record numbers to Baltimore for its annual convention in 2015. The number of exhibiting companies (342) was up 8% and overall attendance (4,498) increased 19% over the previous year. Pictured is Chris Thompson, vice president of sales and marketing, Mirage, displaying the Sweet Memories collection, a 5-inch maple product featuring a variable staining process.



THERE IS ONLY ONE CARPET THAT HAS IT ALL



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Combatting the hard surface surge with a 'soft' touch

By Ken Ryan

There may be no stopping the well-documented emergence of hard surfaces as the dominant flooring surface, but some recent reports suggest carpet remains a very viable category, at least with one key demographic.

In a recent report, Mintel Global Research found the 25-34 age group (millennials) was the most active purchasers of flooring; in 2015 65% of millennials who were in the market bought a hard surface product and 51% bought carpet (many bought both). According to Mintel, millennials represented the highest percentage of carpet purchases of any group. Since carpet remains the largest single category in flooring, that research is a confidence booster for mill executives who continue to step up their R&D efforts.

"Even though hard surface has grown in recent popularity, softness and comfort underfoot is still desired by the consumer," said Brad Christenson, director of category and product management at Shaw Floors.

Today's carpets offer many benefits: softness, ease of maintenance and even protection from soil, stains and pet accidents. Executives say it is important for manufacturers to commit to continued soft surface innovation including more visually interesting patterns, designs and colors. "Since consumers are mixing surfaces in their

homes, they are more willing than ever to take unconventional risks with carpet," Christenson said.

The top two manufacturers, Mohawk and Shaw, are well positioned to capture sales no matter which direction product trends go. As Christenson pointed out, "It's rare these days for just one floor covering type to monopolize the entire home. It's important for manufacturers

desires, he said consumers desire carpet that is long lasting and easy to maintain. As such, technology advances in cleanability and durability have become two of the most sellable features. "No matter what the fiber type or carpet, cleanability and durability will be at the forefront," Arnold explained. "We provide a very clear marketing platform for our dealers."

Mohawk first launched

excitement in the category. It gives consumers a real reason to upgrade and it also creates an opportunity for retailers to drive more sales."

Engineered Floors, with its residential DreamWeaver brand, has been driving more sales with its proprietary PureColor soft nylon and soft polyester carpets. For now, Engineered Floors is strictly a

carpet design, comfort and performance."

Premium soft

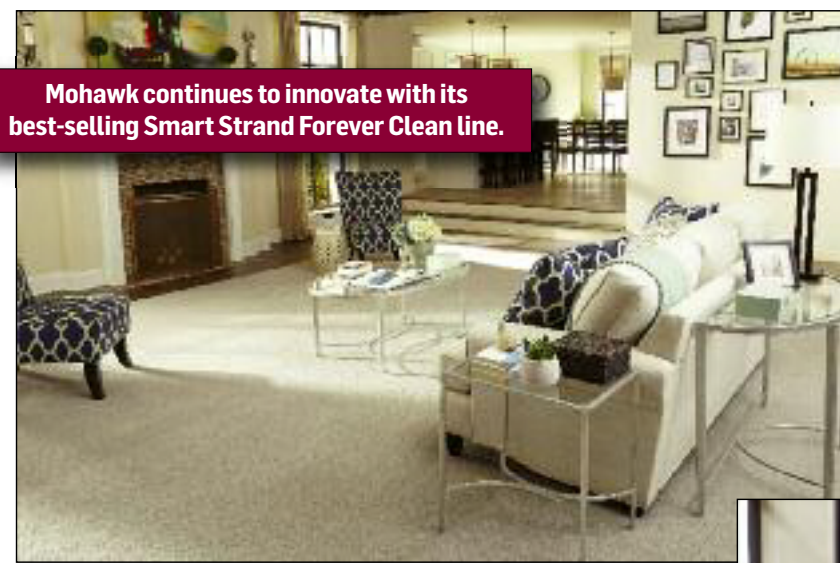
While some manufacturers have adopted a "soft enough" approach in marketing their new products, others continue to focus on the premium soft segment, which offers customers what Arnold termed "immediately perceivable extraordinary differences." A product like Mohawk's Silk, for example, provides durability and a level of softness that Arnold said is unlike anything on the market. "While other manufacturers are probably dialing back on softness for performance reasons, we don't see that; Mohawk is seeing our retailers continue to succeed with products like Silk—extraordinary softness that wins the heart and pocketbook of consumers. We will continue to push and innovate softness as a key feature because premium soft is a sellable feature."

Within a competitive environment for carpet market share, smaller mills are adding value with uniqueness. Lexmark Carpet Mills, which earned industry praise for Tailored by Lexmark in 2015, believes its new Adorn line can become this year's star on the strength of its softer yarn and depth of patterns. While Tailored put Lexmark on the map for the affordable fashion look, Rodney Mauter, executive vice president, residential division, is seeing the same kind of enthusiasm for Adorn, which is just now hitting retail. In terms of new fiber initiatives, Mauter said,

"Our focus will remain with LCL (loop cut loop) and MLCL (multilevel LCL) and solution-dyed offerings. We have an ever-expanding color offering."

Some time ago Marquis Industries made a commitment to add higher quality, better-looking products to its lineup. The move paid off with the launch of three new series of 45 to 65 ounce products that were well constructed and soft to the touch.

"Soft hands, which are a must with consumers, and a high twist gave our products a great visual and a high-performance product," said Mike Lindberg, executive vice president of sales. He noted that consumers are willing to spend extra if they are convinced the added benefits of buying luxurious carpet is worth it in the long run.



Mohawk continues to innovate with its best-selling Smart Strand Forever Clean line.



Engineered Floors/DreamWeaver features PureColor soft nylon and carpet polyester with VariColor technology.

to offer products that integrate well with one another, and it's equally important for retailers to show how colors and textures blend and work well together during the consumer's shopping process."

Seth Arnold, residential brand director for Mohawk Industries, believes while carpet spaces in the home are taking up less square footage than in the past, carpet still offers the homeowner a great value. "We're focused on innovation to create a value product that people will trade up to."

Arnold added that style and design are emotional triggers that compel consumers to trade up. Similar to hard surface

Shaw's Brush Stroke, from the Caress Patterns collection, is 100% nylon and comes in 23 colors. Pictured is Snowfall.



SmartStrand and then added nanotechnology to the line; today dealers can tell a story about a great looking carpet that is also clean and durable. In the case of EverStrand with the Continuum process, Mohawk goes one step further by delivering a cleaner process that is also leading to a cleaner planet.

Shaw Floors continues to drive carpet innovation, most recently with breakthrough products like its LifeGuard waterproof backing system. Carpets featuring LifeGuard backing are engineered to clean easier and better thanks to R2X technology on the carpet's surface, coupled with a 100% waterproof backing. "For the first time, consumers can have the peace of mind that liquid spills and accidents will not seep into the carpet cushion and ultimately the subfloor causing unpleasant and reoccurring odors and wicking," Christenson said. "The innovation has generated

soft surface manufacturer. As such, its challenge is to make today's carpet appealing in a way that cannot be duplicated by any hard surface. "The goal is to make a floor that is warm, soft and inviting to live on while at the same time make it beautiful and incredibly durable and easy to maintain," said Mike Sanderson, vice president of product marketing.

According to Sanderson, carpet customers are responding extremely well to Engineered Floors' new Variable Color Technology, which is branded as VariColor. "By taking various color yarn strands, we're able to create a depth of color that is unachievable in traditional tweeds or accents," he said. "Combine that with our soft PureColor nylon or polyester carpets and dealers have a true step up in

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CFI's Varden shares proven tips on profiting from installation

By Ken Ryan

Robert Varden is best known as the vice president of the CFI division of the World Floor Covering Association (WFCA). However, for a good part of his career he ran successful, high-profit installation businesses.

During a recent FCNews-Marketing Mastery Webinar Series, Varden joined Jim Augustus Armstrong, FCNews Marketing Mastery columnist, in a discussion about profiting from a business in which he sells no products—just service, namely installation. Varden explained how he regularly pocketed six figures from his business and that all of his employees—not subs—fared well economically.

Back then Varden oversaw five to seven crews, 10 to 15 individuals in all, so it

was not a large business. He said he charged above average prices for installation; the higher profits enabled him to pay his installers more. But it was more than just a better wage. He tried to create an environment so inviting that his installers would not want to leave. “You take care of them and they take of you,” he said. “It was a great relationship.”

Nowadays, Varden said dealers are too worried about competing with box stores on price when it comes to installation. As he explained: “Many times the estimate is too short on material for fear of being overpriced, so what they do is cut that yardage down. We would go in there and talk to the customer and say, ‘We could do it this way with this much material. However, if you add two more feet I can eliminate this seam or that seam over there.’ Not one time did they not take us up on the extra material. We gave them options. They are spending thousands of dollars so what is another \$100? To come into someone’s home with that knowledge gives the consumer confidence.”

Independent contractor vs. employee

Varden’s discussion segued into one of the hot topics impacting the installation business today—the Department of Labor’s new classification of what constitutes an independent contractor (IC) vs. employee. Varden said that if a federal

government agency like the DOL today walked into most flooring retail stores they would likely classify the dealer’s sub-contractors as employees because these subs are working for the dealer every day.

As owner of an installation business, Varden hired his own employees. They were not subs or ICs. “As an employee I can train them and train them correctly,” he said. “We started out

wearing a uniform or at least a T-shirt bearing the name of the flooring retailer from which she just bought product.

To illustrate the point, co-moderator Armstrong painted this picture: “How would you like it if you are a homeowner and you see some guy wearing a Guns N’ Roses T-shirt smoking a cigarette in your driveway? You worry that he is going to rifle through your underwear drawer when you are not at home.”

Real-world issues

During a question and answer session, a retailer raised the issue of worker’s comp claims. Specifically, the listener asked if it would be better to use a sub rather than an employee to avoid such claims in the event an injury occurred on a job site. However, Varden said a worse scenario is to have a sub with no health insurance file a claim falsely alleging he was injured on the job site.

Varden said he could cite many cases where that has happened. “I’ve seen it where the guy gets injured on his motorcycle on a Sunday afternoon but manages to get to work on Monday. And then he files a claim that he somehow was injured on the job. He has no health insurance. So many times I have seen someone get injured and it had nothing to do with work.”



Flooring dealers who hire their installers as employees have an advantage over competitors, experts say.

with a lot of carpet installers. To teach them another surface was not that difficult. You could take the carpet guy and he could work with the wood guy, and the wood guy could show him the right way. Try to get a sub to do that.”

Varden said there are many other advantages to hiring installers as employees. Take the consumer, for example. The customer would much rather deal with a single entity. She will feel more at ease if an installer comes to her home

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dear david

How to pay millennial sales associates

Dear David:

I am finding it increasingly difficult to find sales associates. Every time I mention the words “draw” and “commission” everyone under the age 40 declines the offer. I want to bring in some younger sales associates but this seems nearly impossible these days. And hiring experienced sales associates is very expensive and risky; they want such large draws when they start and a lot of them do not cover those draws for quite some time—some never get there. Why is this happening and what can I do about it?

Dear Old School Owner, You are right: The words “commission” and “draw” are like a repellent to the younger generations. Saying “salary” and “bonus” will make hiring millennials much easier. But that does not mean you pay them a high salary and a small bonus. You also cannot offer a low salary because no one will want to take the job. You pay them the same

THE SALARY YOU PROVIDE SHOULD NOT BE MORE THAN 70% OF WHAT YOU BELIEVE WILL BE A SALESPERSON'S TOTAL ANNUAL EARNINGS.

way you would if you were paying draw against commission, but you replace the words “draw” with “salary” and “commission” with “bonus.” Changing the language is all it takes.

The salary you provide should not be more than 70% of what you believe will be a salesperson’s total annual earnings. For example, if you believe he will make \$50,000 per year, salary should not exceed \$35,000 per year or \$673 per week. Your peers are going to tell you that is too much because they only pay \$500 per week, but the truth is they were paying that 20 years ago; I guarantee they are also having issues hiring millennials.

Second, either a sliding scale or percentage of profit bonus will work. Keep in mind the average earnings for a flooring sales associate is 8.9% of sales and the average margin is



DAVID ROMANO

just over 36%. If your goal is to be at the benchmark and you are paying a percentage of profit, you should pay out 25%. See, 25% of 36% equals 9%. If you are going to establish a sliding scale, I suggest you start with paying out 9% for a margin of 36% and scale up and down from that point. If the associate earns more based on sales and margin percentages, you pay out the difference in a bonus.

When it comes to commercial and builder jobs most of your peers pay out 30% of profit because the margin is nowhere near 36 points. If the payout percentage is too small, sales

associates will not earn enough to want to stay with your company. For example, if your commercial sales guy sells \$1 million at a 20% margin and you pay

him 25% of the profit he would earn only \$50,000 or 5% of sales; 25% of 20% equals 5%. If you pay him 30% of profit he would earn \$60,000 (30% of 20% equals 6%), which is more in line with the current market for this type of sales associate. The same 70% rule I previously mentioned should apply here.

If sales associates do not sell at least 70% of what you expected on a monthly basis, you will overpay for performance and your cost of labor will swell. You need to make sure you identify sales deficiencies early, take corrective action and quickly turn around or turn out those who do not cover their salaries. I suggest you do not let anyone go over 90 days in a deficit. An even greater risk than overpayment is not being able to reach revenue targets because you cannot attract effective sales associates.

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.

Bamboo Hardwoods

Continued from page 3

focus on quality, consistency and service. Renowned throughout the industry as a pioneer and well-respected innovator in bamboo flooring production since 1995, the company plans to build on that solid reputation moving forward.

“While this buyout is a significant milestone for us personally, our focus on providing a high-quality brand of bamboo flooring from a trusted manufacturer that proudly stands behind their products will remain unchanged,” Keegan said. “We’ll still make our floors at our state-

of-the-art factory using all the best machines and best practices. Our focus will be stronger; we have a few more key new hires within management and operations and we have more inventory in stock than we’ve ever had.”

Medium- to long-range goals

Over the past few weeks and months Bamboo Hardwoods has been busy at work shoring up its distribution coverage around the country. Following on the heels of the recent signing of top 20 floor covering distributors NRF and All Tile (FCNews, June 6/13), the company announced plans to further support those new wholesale partners as well as others—

including Medallion in California—with the primary goal of helping them build their inventories while increasing the number of displays out in the field.

“Right now we have roughly 1,000 displays standing at the retail level, but we plan to place 1,000 more by year’s end,” Keegan said. “We have a lot of room to grow and more areas to cover. Distributors are investing in displays at their level, and they are seeing an increased return on investment.”

Another key initiative revolves around driving brand awareness through marketing, education and, yes, good old fashioned face-to-face interac-

tion with its retailer and distributor partners out in the field. “By focusing the main education points with our distributor partners, their salespeople and our salespeople and second with media ad campaigns to promote awareness as to what’s accurate (and not accurate) about bamboo flooring,” Gallagher explained. “We also want to start focusing on social media. We have some plans in place to develop a social media platform, which is going to make a big difference. We’re not only looking to start a conversation with people about bamboo but continue that conversation on an ongoing basis.”

Lastly, Bamboo Hardwoods

plans to keep a finger on the pulse of the consumer market to ensure it continues to develop products and programs in line with consumer tastes. “It’s important we stay in sync with what the market is demanding,” Keegan said. “That’s something we want to continue relative to the marketing of the brand.”

Ultimately, according to Keegan, it’s about making it worthwhile for the dealer. “We’re seeing a renaissance with bamboo. To that end, we want to be an easy program that represents a profit for the retailer while driving efficiencies that will help our distribution partners service their customers.”

Lewis Lumber and Milling earns key certifications

ST. LOUIS—Lewis Lumber and Milling recently earned quality certifications from the National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA) and the National Oak Flooring Manufacturers Association (NOFMA). The Dickson, Tenn.-based company manufactures red oak, white oak, and hickory unfinished flooring in multiple widths and lengths.

“We are pleased to welcome Lewis Lumber as the newest member of the NWFA/NOFMA program,” said John Forbes, NWFA manufacturer services director. “Embracing transparency and third-party certification in the wood flooring space has become a requisite to compete at a high level. The growing list of NWFA/NOFMA manufacturer members is an excellent example of this growing market demand.”

Lewis Lumber and Milling prides itself on manufacturing high-quality unfinished hardwood plank flooring for quality-oriented hardwood flooring distributors. “It has been a gratifying challenge to help build the business at Lewis Lumber and Milling,” said Tim Ellrich, sales manager. “The NWFA/NOFMA program gives us the tools and feedback to continue being successful in the future.”

The NWFA/NOFMA certification shows that a manufacturer’s wood flooring meets or exceeds the industry standards for grade, configuration, moisture content and average board length. Trained inspectors check to ensure that each piece of hardwood flooring leaving the mill meets the high standards for NOFMA certification. Certified mills are inspected a minimum of two times per year to ensure consistent grade standards are met.



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Manufacturers leverage the 'Canadian quality'

By Reginald Tucker

Whether it's the distinctive, tight-grained maple species native to the various Canadian forests where lumber used for flooring is predominantly harvested, or if it's just an ingrained mindset embraced by the major wood manufacturers operating here, there's definitely something to be said about the quality of the upper-end hardwood flooring products originating from Canada.

Ask virtually any top distributor or retailer to corroborate many Canadian hardwood flooring manufacturers' claims that their products are among the highest quality available in the world, and you won't find a lot of hesitation. "Mercier gives us a first-quality Canadian manufactured wood line that fits all possibilities in today's ever-changing customer lifestyle," said Steve Flanagan, product and marketing manager for Jaeckle Distributors, based in Madison, Wis. "Mercier fits the consumer's need anywhere from a quality entry-level prod-

uct in their Pro Series to the most fashionable 7-inch pine long board or other popular species like hickory, maple, red and white oak and their entire exotics series."

The sentiment is much the same at Haines, the industry's leading floor covering distributor. When it comes to Canadian brands, the company happily endorses the Mirage Hardwood Flooring line. "Mirage's Flair Collection features a next-generation finish called Duramatt, an extremely durable, low-gloss urethane finish that has the appearance of an oil finish without the maintenance required for oil," said Shawn McCloskey, marketing manager. "Duramatt also contains anti-microbial agents and is 20 times more wear resistant than a conventional oil finish."

McCloskey also likes the fact that the line comes in a

variety of trending options for the consumer. "Originally offered in 5- and 6½-inch engineered formats, the Flair Collection is now available in a ¾- x 7¼-inch engineered format

as well as a ¾- x 4¼-inch wide solid offering in nine fashion-forward colors." U.S. dealers and distributors are also embracing Canadian brands that don't necessarily look to capitalize on the traditional "clean" maple products historically associated with raw materials from that region. Take the Wickham brand, for instance. This company has taken an innovative approach to not only the manufacturing process (the company is renowned for its rustic, textured looks) but also in how it markets products to the distributor and retail channels.

"I really like the finish on their product; it seems to wear better than most," said Mike Winter, president of Builder Surplus, Warwick, R.I. "I'm not sure what they put in it, but it seems they just take extra care in putting out a quality product."

Rochester, N.Y.-based Installers Warehouse, another Wickham customer, attests to the quality of the product. "Our cost of claims with Wickham is almost non-existent compared

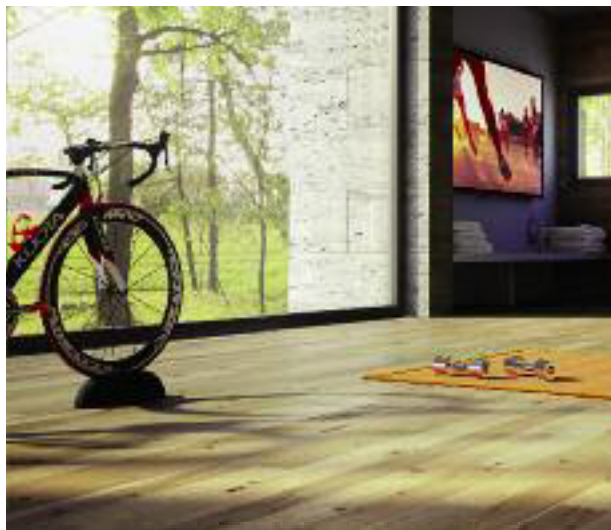
to what it used to be with other vendors," said Craig Dupra, president. "Nobody's perfect, but they are pretty darn close. Also, they are very responsive."

Dupra especially likes the fact Wickham is so accommodating. "They've always been very generous by allowing me to bring my customers up to tour their facilities. I have a lot of trust and affection for that company; the people there treat me like family and it's always a wonderful experience." (See page 14 for an exclusive feature on Wickham.)

Playing to their strengths

Much like their counterparts south of the border in America, most Canadian hardwood flooring manufacturers face stiff competition from other quality-minded suppliers operating in their market. To gain a competitive advantage, many employ proprietary techniques in their respective manufacturing processes. One common denominator, though, is the obligatory attention to detail.

"Anything worth doing is worth doing well," said Jean-



Mercier distributors cite the quality of the finish and construction as well as the availability of different formats and sizes.

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Francois Dufresne, general manager, Preverco. “We apply this ethos to every stage of hardwood flooring production. Our rigorous manufacturing process is the basis of our superior products. Specific pre-established standards are applied at every stage of the manufacturing process. To be certain all products meet our criteria, we subject them to a series of tests to ensure the best possible quality.”

Among Preverco’s routine quality control measures: Each piece of wood is carefully checked and passed through a unit that corrects any deficiencies. Before the final drying process, workers ensure each board has the same moisture level—a step that reduces the risk of splintering during the final drying stage. What’s more, the company’s warehouses are kept at a constant temperature and humidity levels to avoid any imperfections in the wood.

That same emphasis on strict quality control measures is observed at Lauzon. As Priscilla Bergeron, communications manager, explains: “We have numerous points of control to make sure every step of the way our quality is maintained. This starts right from the forests where we choose which tree we’re going to cut all the way through to delivery to the retailer. We also have state-of-the-art equipment to make sure the quality is maintained consistently. We test and re-test to make sure everything we produce has the highest standards in the market. And we communicate that message to the marketplace.”

This focus on attention paved the way for innovations such as Sunshield, which is designed to mitigate the effects of UV light. Lauzon also developed a titanium finish, which it says is one of the strongest finishes on the market. And then there’s Pure Genius technology,

a relatively new innovation that boasts air-purifying capabilities.

“We have won many awards for Pure Genius alone,” Bergerson said. “Last year we won the Best of IBS Award in Las Vegas and we also won the Bronze Innovation award from IBEX Canada in the flooring category. We also won an innovation award at Domotex in Germany last year and we ranked high among environmentally friendly products at the Greenbuild show as well.”

Even Canadian newcomers to the hardwood arena are looking to leverage the country’s reputation for quality products.

For example, Uniboard Canada, which previously only produced laminate flooring, launched its first engineered hardwood flooring line (Calista) at the NWFA convention this past spring.

“We’re focused on the environment and being responsible—no formaldehyde, etc., in our products,” said Lilia Rassoul, marketing coordinator. “We started in the hardwood business at the end of 2015; we’ve put in a lot of effort to have a prefinished engineered hardwood flooring collection featuring an HDF core. We are looking forward to expanding the brand.”



Mirage’s focus on quality has earned the company numerous industry awards, including eight Awards of Excellence trophies.



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Lauzon has garnered several awards for its Pure Genius technology, which boasts air-purifying capabilities.



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Wickham partners reap the rewards

SPECIALTY HARDWOOD FLOORING SUPPLIER HELPS CHANNEL PARTNERS FILL A NICHE

By Reginald Tucker

Craig Dupra, president of Installers Warehouse, a Rochester, N.Y.-based wholesale flooring distributor, likes the flexibility and deep range of options the Wickham Hardwood Flooring brand offers his customers. “I don’t know how they manage the logistics of it, but they’re very good at making a particular product for a particular customer and still get it to my customer in 10-15 business days from the time the order is placed.”

For other Wickham dealers like Mike Winter, president and owner of Builder Surplus, Warwick, R.I., the main attraction is the Canadian manufacturer’s ability to crank out a high volume of specialized product without compromising on quality or caving in to the commodity game. “When you’re working with a lot of vendors it can get a little convoluted because you’re dealing with companies who are doing a lot of the same things—it makes it harder to sell the product,” he said. “As retailers we like to have a product we can build on—a product that others don’t have.”

Scenarios such as these are playing out across Wickham Hardwood Flooring’s network of dealers and distributors across North America. From specialty hardwood flooring distributors looking for quality wood flooring products that provide a good “turn and earn” to specialty retailers and installation houses serving the residential replacement and builder communities, Wickham’s products are helping to fill specific niches within the marketplace while still appealing to mainstream consumers in the market for trendy hardwood flooring products.

“Wickham has a unique business model in that they produce an enormous amount of product but they don’t apply a color or a finish until the product has been ordered by the retailer or distributor,” Dupra explained. “This gives them an enormous amount of flexibility in terms of how the particular

floor can be made regarding width, species, grade, color and sheen. Having Wickham as a vendor is like having 10 lines at the same time.”

This capability is particularly important for dealers who service a broad customer base. For example, at Builder Surplus, whose clientele runs a wide gamut, a diverse range of options is key. “Most of the



Wickham Hardwood Flooring offers distributor partners greater flexibility by applying a finish profile or stain when the order is initially placed.

Wickham products we sell are going into residential replacement applications as well as new homes,” Winter noted. “The product is superb relative to what you might find at Home Depot and Lowe’s. It’s just a wonderful product. And from a service standpoint, Wickham’s salespeople are excellent.”

The fact that they can produce a high volume in a short period of time is also a plus for Builder Surplus, a Wickham Hardwood Flooring partner for the past five years. Winter pur-

chases a full truckload of product roughly every six weeks—and that’s just during the off-season. “We’ve been a good partner for them and they have been a good partner for us,” he said.

Profit opportunities

Beyond providing a deep selection along with a relatively quick turnaround, Wickham’s dealer and distributor partners point to another important benefit of stocking the line: trade-up opportunities. Due to the manufacturer’s cost structure and overall business model, it is in an enviable position to give its partners great deals on pricing.

At the end of the day, this approach allows Wickham’s distributors to be “more aggressive on the street while accessing more customers with a greater variety of products. “Wickham has allowed us to grow our business by leaps and bounds,” Dupra said. “By stocking the Wickham line,

we have easily doubled our bottom line.”

Greg Arnold, national sales manager for Wickham Hardwood Flooring, attests to the value of good partnerships. Over the past 10 months he said the company has added distributors and strengthened relationships with retailers. “We recognize the fact that relationships are earned. Wickham would not be successful without these relationships, and we take great pride in growing these relationships daily.”

marketing mastery

Prioritizing social media marketing

I was helping a flooring dealer prioritize her marketing program when she said, “I think I could be doing more with my Facebook page to generate sales; what do you suggest?” I am asked this in one form or another quite often, and the answer lies in how each individual dealer prioritizes his or her marketing.

My Flooring Warranty is a service that conducts ongoing polls of consumers who recently purchased flooring. One question on the survey is, “What prompted you to buy this time?” The top five answers are:

1. “A referral from one of your past customers.” (50.6%)
2. “I drove by your store.” (8.9%)
3. TV or radio ad (3.1%)
4. Social media (2.2%)
5. Internet search (2.1%)

A few people pointed out that some sales happen because consumers post on Facebook asking for referrals to good, trusted flooring dealers. You may assume these referrals count in the social media category but they do not. They should still be considered referrals from past customers because they would have happened even if the dealer had zero social media presence. Similarly, if someone emailed



JIM AUGUSTUS ARMSTRONG

my team and I teach dealers how to use it in their own organizations. The difference lies in how you prioritize social media; that’s where the three tiers of marketing come in. Let’s review:

Tier 1: Warm market

- Referral marketing system
- Sales closer system
- Market to past customers (monthly direct-response newsletter)

Tier 2: Marketing to cold prospects

- Social media
- Google Ad Words
- Search engine optimization (SEO)
- Newspaper
- Display ads
- Direct mail to targeted list
- Val Pak coupons

Tier 3: Broadcast advertising

- Billboards
- Radio
- Television

You should first implement all tier 1 strategies. Once these are fully up and running, then implement tier 2. Once tiers 1 and 2 are in full effect, then you may choose to implement tier 3. Use discretionary marketing dollars for tier

IF YOU DEDICATED MORE TIME, ENERGY AND MONEY... YOU'D GO FROM 2.2% OF YOUR SALES COMING FROM SOCIAL MEDIA TO 6.6%.

her personal contacts asking for a referral to a flooring dealer you wouldn’t attribute any resulting sales to email marketing.

If you dedicated time, energy and money to social media marketing and tripled the national average, you’d go from 2.2% of your sales coming from social media to 6.6%. Not bad, but hardly a game changer. However, if you dedicated time, energy and money to a referral marketing program and tripled the national average of 50.6%, you would transform your business.

Does this mean I’m against social media marketing? Heck no. I use it in my business, and

3. Comparatively, tier 1 is inexpensive to implement and get big results from, but tiers 2 and 3 become progressively more expensive and difficult to make profitable.

Most dealers spend the lion’s share of their time, energy and money in tiers 2 and 3; tier 1 is virtually ignored. If this describes you, you’re sitting atop an untapped goldmine of hidden profits.

I’ve seen dealers transform their businesses and, by extension, their lives for the better by making this shift to tier 1. I recommend you do the same so you can transform your business, too.

Jim Augustus Armstrong specializes in providing turnkey marketing strategies for flooring dealers. Email him at Support@FlooringSuccessSystems.com with “Dealership Evaluation” in the subject line for a free one-hour dealership evaluation.

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Eternity Flooring scores a 'trifecta'

WOOD, WPC AND LAMINATE LINES PLEASE DEALERS

By Reginald Tucker

Movie stars and celebrities abound in North Hollywood, Calif., but among many specialty retailers based here Eternity Flooring is the star of the show. Specifically, the company's dealer partners are reporting brisk activity with Eternity's engineered hardwood, laminate and WPC lines.

"Across the board, the Eternity Flooring lines are excellent," said Abe Bashir, owner of Flooring Town Group in North Hollywood. "It's clearly one of the best I've ever had."

Beyond the trendy colors, designs and patterns, Bashir said his customers are increasingly gravitating to the performance attributes of the various offerings. The WPC products in particular are generating a lot of interest and traffic. "Consumers really like the waterproof WPC right now. With this product you can wash it, drive on it, whatever—it will take all kinds of beatings."

Bashir is not alone in his assessment. Mike Qudsi, sales manager at Refloors, also based here, is positively smitten. "Eternity Flooring's lineup is really extensive—they have so many different products," he said. "Plus, they always ship to me the same day or next day; none of my other vendors do that."

In his market, Qudsi sees many of the Eternity Flooring lines that he sells going into common areas of the home, i.e., living rooms, entryways, etc. With Eternity's new WPC offerings, he says those areas have expanded to include kitchens and bathrooms—sections prone to water incursion. At the same time, he has seen an uptick in demand among non-residential clients. "We are also selling a lot of commercial jobs with the WPC, such as retail mall stores and some office spaces and small showrooms. [Eternity] even has a laminate that's AC4 rated."

Refloors, which has been merchandising the Eternity hardwood and laminate displays for about nine years, has benefitted from the brand's popularity in his market. Now, with the addition of WPC, consumers have another reason to come back. "A lot of times when customers come in looking for laminate and WPC, that's my go-to display," Qudsi said. "And, once customers who

have installed it in one area of the home, they come back asking for it for other rooms Eternity has a good reputation in the marketplace."

A big part of the allure, according to Doron Gal, owner and CEO of Eternity Flooring, is the company's laser focus on quality manufacturing. "We deal with a top-of-the-line factory in China," he explained. "We haven't had any problems so far."

What's even more remarkable, dealers note, is the fact that Eternity Flooring maintains high quality levels and near-zero

claims despite relatively low pricing on its various products.

Expansion plans

Eternity Flooring is looking to parlay the success it has achieved in its local market and extend that to neighboring states. The company recently opened a warehouse in Phoenix and is looking to branch out into Utah and New Mexico next year. The average warehouse size, Gal figures, will be in the 30,000- to 40,000-square-foot range.

At the retail level, Gal estimates Eternity Flooring has more



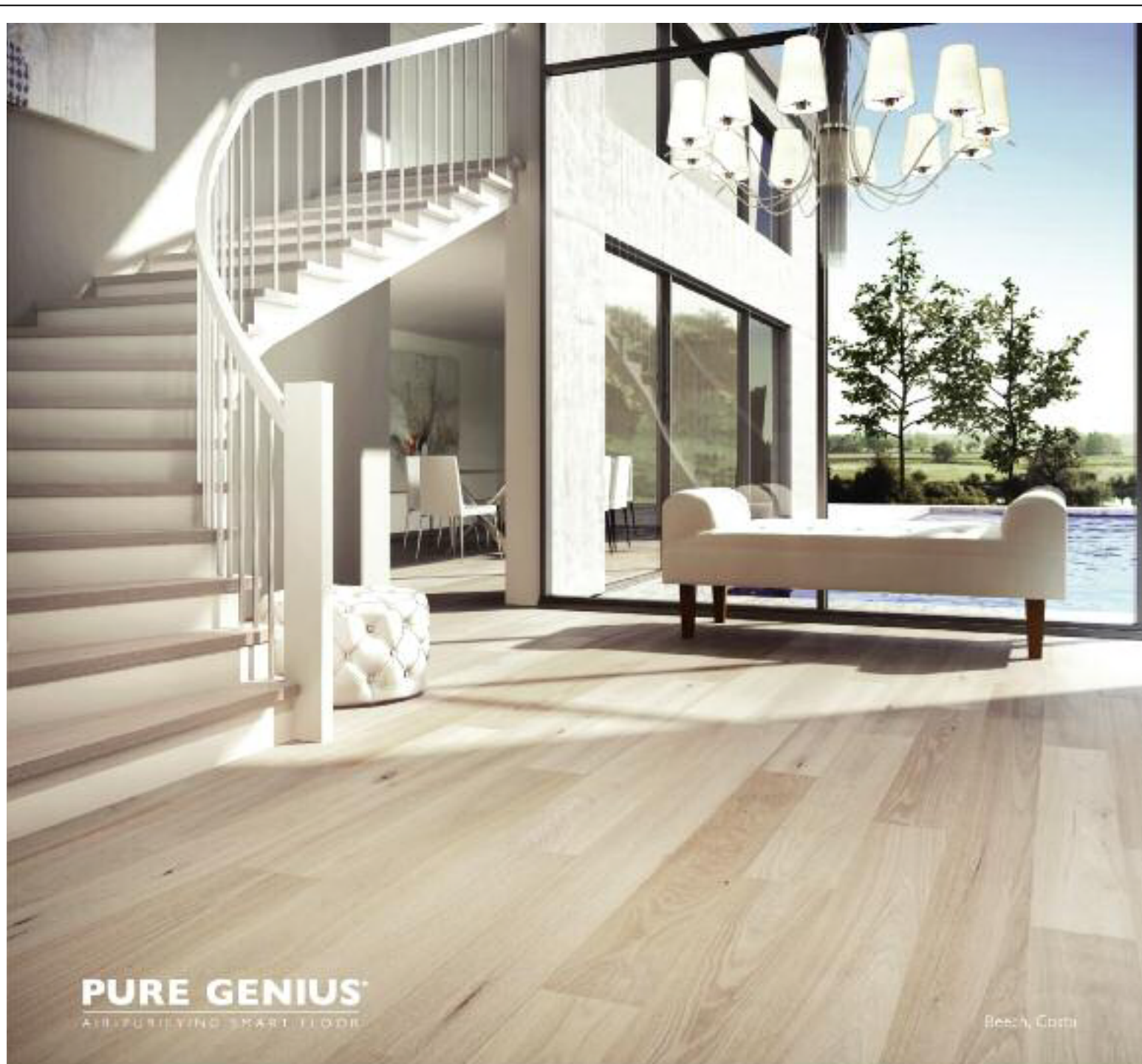
Eternity Flooring attributes the allure of its hard surface offerings to quality, styling, accessibility and brand reputation in the marketplace.

than 2,000 displays in place. Naturally, that number is expected to rise as more stocking facilities become operational in Arizona and Nevada.

Meanwhile, the company plans to continue servicing its

growing base in California, which has demonstrated a clear affinity for the line.

"I really love the designs they've come out with," Qudsi said. "It's a great-looking, quality product."



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MARKETING ONLINE

The importance of ratings and reviews

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This special FCNews Marketing Online series, sponsored by 3M, is designed to help retailers build their social media presence and, by extension, strengthen the connection with consumers.

Nearly 90% of consumers consider ratings and reviews before making purchase decisions, recent marketing industry estimates show. In the era of Yelp, Amazon and Google, among others, shoppers are seeking credible insight and feedback from everyday people long before they hear the retail sales associate's product pitch.

"We all know the way customers research a product or service has changed dramatically over the last several years," said Janice Jacobs, vice president of marketing, Carpet One Floor & Home. "Customers increasingly rely on ratings and reviews to help inform their buying decisions, especially with more difficult choices such as flooring. And it's not just products they are researching. In the flooring industry customers are also paying attention to the reputation of service providers before they walk into their local flooring stores."

With that, flooring manufacturers and buying groups are developing their own systems for helping retailers simultaneously garner and address online feedback that will ultimately be in the public domain even if it doesn't initially start there.

For example, Mohawk launched BuzzLocal powered by FloorForce in 2015 to provide a new ratings and reviews system. The company believes the ability to search on Facebook, Pinterest and YouTube will connect potential customers to online feedback

quickly and seamlessly. BuzzLocal includes three important steps of managing a dealer's online reputation: review, respond and reach.

In that same vein, Shaw refers to its process of organizing and addressing ratings and reviews as "reputation management." Its Share it Forward platform allows dealers to log in and see reviews they have received on sites like Yahoo, Google, Bing and others for complete visibility of their online reputations.

"We wanted to make it easy for retailers to manage [their reputations]," said Misty Hodge, Shaw's director of digital platforms for residential marketing. "Through Share it Forward dealers can see what consumers share about experiences both good and bad. Consumer reviews help go beyond what dealers can say about themselves; it lets potential customers know what people who have done business with [these dealers] have to say."

More importantly, retailers could be getting ratings and reviews and not even know it, which is why management systems come in handy, experts say. To that end, both positive and negative reviews on personal websites, review sites and social media should be recognized.

What is also paramount for independent retailers' online reviews today is proving they are better than the big box stores in town. Flooring America statistics show an average 4.6 stars out of 5 on the 20,000-plus ratings for its stores, which are based on service, installation, etc. The average home center score is 3.3 to 3.5 stars out of 5.

Frank Chiera, senior vice president, marketing and advertising, CCA Global Partners (parent company of Flooring America/Flooring Canada, The Floor Trader, International Design Guild and BizUnite),

noted many salespeople have a "mental block they need to get over" when it comes to requesting reviews from customers once a job is complete. To remedy this, Flooring America continues to enhance programs to make sure RSAs are comfortable asking for

had a less-than-favorable experience there should be an answer/response from the store owner underneath the review," Chiera said. Without an internal system to help with reviews, "unless someone is actively going in and monitoring those reviews

be transparent. You can take a displeased customer and make her feel good about the outcome—that's something she will never forget."

Jacobs reminds dealers to respond to reviews as soon as possible; something "less flattering"



Retailers should respond quickly to both positive and negative reviews. Conversations with dissatisfied customers should be moved outside of public forums like Facebook.



reviews and helping them understand why this feedback is important.

Mollie Surratt, senior director of public relations, content and social media, Mohawk Flooring, also mentioned the importance of encouraging positive reviews. "A lot of the time positive reviews need to be asked for," she said. "Retailers should make an effort to ask happy consumers for positive reviews. This should happen within 30 days of a purchase. There should be an ongoing conversation with the consumer."

Responding to reviews

Responding to customers who post about a store and its service shows a retailer cares about his reputation whether the feedback is positive or negative. Many industry groups and manufacturers offer pointers to help dealers address what is said about them on the web.

Flooring America's internal program for members alerts them to reviews and reminds them to respond. "If a customer

[on sites like Google and Facebook] they might live out there for some time. It's not good to [ignore] customers."

No matter how bad a review, experts stress deleting it is out of the question. "Remove 'delete' and 'ignore' from your vocabulary—it is never good to do either," Surratt explained. "If a consumer is abusive or slanderous that's another conversation. But if you have a person who is reaching out for help with an issue you need to respond as soon as possible. Give a [representative's] name and direct contact information. Apologize for the inconvenience and take the conversation offline. Get the details but make sure all the frustrations come out outside of a public forum. If you reach a resolution, ask the consumer to go back to her review and talk about her positive experience."

Shaw's Hodge believes remaining "authentic" means you cannot manipulate the review process, which includes deleting negative feedback. "You have to

requires "a little more involvement to make sure we are crafting an appropriate response to the customer as well as addressing the customer concerns directly wherever possible."

The steps for addressing a negative review as recommended by Carpet One are as follows:

1. Read the review thoroughly and then conduct research to understand the issue.
2. If possible, address the issue offline and personally with the customer. Offer contact information in the public response to have them contact you.
3. Be sincere, positive and concise in your response. Don't be negative or defensive.
4. Post the response after ensuring it is concise, clear, positive and grammatically correct.
5. Follow up: Make good on any resolution discussed with the customer.
6. Once and only if resolved: Ask the reviewer to follow up her review or complaint with a positive comment or edited review so others know the issue was resolved.



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Haines

Continued from page 3

the GDP, which is good news, and the housing industry is performing better than the GDP.”

Zwicker pointed out that since the recessionary bottom of 2009, the flooring industry’s average growth rate has been about 4%, with one year at 7% and all other years hovering at 4% or less. “It has been extremely tepid. Last year the outlook was for three more good years. This year I said we can expect probably two good years, maybe a third good year.”

Haines reports that many of

its HLC dealers are clearly outperforming the overall market—in some cases with yearly double-digit percentage increases—by taking share from competitors. In a competitive environment like today, Zwicker surmised that it is all the more reason to be aligned with Haines and its bevy of programs and rebates that can help dealers succeed.

Scores are heeding the call. HLC started in earnest in 2007 with a handful of dealers; today there are nearly 600 HLC dealers, including about 130 from Florida. “We keep pushing [HLC dealers] to take full

advantage of all the things we offer because not everyone does,” Zwicker explained. “Others do, however; we have some dealers who have 100% Haines products in their show-



rooms.”

In the past year, Haines has opened up a new warehouse and supplies center in Florida. Its supplies division, which includes equipment and tools, makes up 17% of Haines’ overall

business (\$500 million), and closer to 20% of Florida’s business. “Last year was the first year we had the supplies business and it is growing like gangbusters. It is a high-margin business.”

New initiatives

During 2016, Haines rolled out a new customer service program it calls Voice of the Customer.

Piloted in 2015, Voice of the Customer shares qualitative and quantitative feedback gleaned from every customer transaction. If there is question regarding claims, for example, a notification is sent immediately

to that department. “It is a real fast response rate system,” Zwicker said, noting that Nordstrom and some others have used similar programs to improve customer service.

Zwicker also addressed the new management structure at Haines that was implemented earlier this year. Twenty-five individuals were elevated to director level and empowered to make decisions promptly. “It is very energizing and motivating. We have created a more nimble group. Fewer executives make things run smoother. They can develop faster this way. These are vice presidents in the making.”

Shaw

Continued from page 1

the same county,” said Randy Merritt, Shaw president. “We’ve found that it sparks new ideas, greater information sharing and more meaningful engagement with one another. The Create Centre will be an important tool in supporting our vision of growth for our commercial business, including global expansion and domestic market leadership.”

Knowles concurred, adding the new workspace will provide a collaborative environment while fostering Shaw’s culture of innovation, diversity and inclusion. As such there will be no separate offices, just open space. “When we first started this journey it had to be a space that inspired our team,” Knowles recalled. “Our design teams will create products. We will have showrooms here for each of our brands. We have high expectations for all our inspirations here.”

Designed by architecture firm Gensler, the Centre is expected to be USGBC LEED certified and will feature ample daylight and open collaborative spaces. “This building will be as beautiful as it is functional and sustainable—much like our own products,” Knowles said. “We are committed to continuously providing clients with the best solutions for their projects, and the Create Centre will provide the ideal setting for our talented team members to create, dream, collaborate and solve challenges.”

The new \$24 million facility represents Shaw’s ongoing investment in its commercial business. In the past few years, Shaw has significantly grown its commercial sales team, opened new showrooms throughout the world and invested more than \$85 million in an additional carpet tile manufacturing facility. The latter is slated to open in Adairsville, Ga., later this year.

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NeoCon

Continued from page 1

hand look at the latest prototypes and product launches, and to take advantage of our world-class educational programming — including keynote presentations that provide insider access to today's most influential thought leaders," said Lisa Simonian, vice president of marketing, NeoCon Shows. "This year was no different. In fact, many attendees reported the sense of camaraderie and the

exchange of ideas that occurs during NeoCon is a big draw. More than just a major event, NeoCon has evolved into a true international design hub as well as a dynamic and collaborative learning community."

Stephen Wells and Roy Huebner with One Global Design—a network of entrepreneurial owner-led design firms in the U.S., Mexico and Canada that work through a single point of contact—couldn't agree more. At the Merchandise Mart (theMART) this year as

both NeoCon attendees and exhibitors via a new product partnership with Mannington Commercial, One Global Design was able to see both sides of the expansive knowledge share taking place. "NeoCon's relationship building opportunities align with One Global's own collaborative philosophy and only continue to elevate local expertise and accountability through face-to-face conversations and

education," Huebner said.

Spearheading some of the hot topics in line with this year's theme of "Design That Works," were keynotes by Paul Scialla, founder and CEO of Delos and creator of the International Well Building Institute (IWBI); David Rockwell, founder and president of award-winning architecture and design firm Rockwell Group; and Oana Stanescu, partner of architecture studio Family. Discussions ranged from building design that supports occupants' health and wellness to user experience as well as what architecture/design can do for a community.

Another draw at this year's show was theMART's newly designed public spaces as part of a transformative \$40 million renovation. NeoCon 2016 also welcomed five new permanent tenants and showcased a newly renovated seventh floor exhibit hall. "We added approximately 7,000 square feet of additional showroom space and still had 100% occupancy," Simonian said. "Our redesigned seventh floor exhibit hall offered a comprehensive, easy-to-navigate experience that resulted in positive reviews of brisk business and increased traffic. Exhibitor and attendee feed-

back was phenomenal."

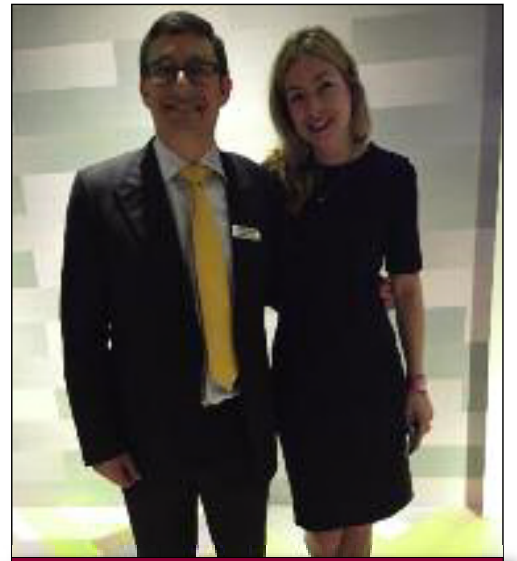
The new seventh floor showcased the latest products and services by group — interior building products/materials and finishes, furniture and fabrics, flooring and technology — touting nearly 50 of the top brands in floor covering, exhibiting across more than 15,000 square feet. Following are just some of the category's highlights.

Focus on innovation, creativity

Providing designers with new and different ways to approach and specify projects was a focal point across virtually all segments at NeoCon this year. From new technologies and expanded original aesthetics to healthier solutions, exhibitors aimed to give the A&D community more creative ways to build.

Attendees are looking for innovative solutions, noted Jonathan Train, president and CEO of EarthWerks. To meet the need, the manufacturer showcased an original installation of its new Cocktail LVT collection in its booth. The playful floor design was created with water jet cutting technology — which can be used with any of EarthWerks' product lines — via the mill's new partnership with Enzo. "Our floor is not only eye catching, but it also shows designers just how creative they can be, which is getting a great response," Train stated.

Also catching the eyes of attendees was Mohawk Group, which partnered with 13&9



Jonathan Klinger, chief marketing officer for Tarkett, with Krista Ninivaggi, founder of K&Co and Tarkett design partner for Infinies Glow LVT (underfoot).

Design—an Austrian product design firm—on its showroom redesign as well as some of its latest products. Topography, for example, won a Best of NeoCon 2016 Innovation award for its landscape architecture-inspired style. The new carpet tile collection features five styles with varying surfaces of relief and dimension that can be mixed together or used separately to create unique flooring.

"We're noticing this year's attendees are drawn toward products they can make a statement with as a designer," said Jackie Dettmar, vice president of commercial design and product development, Mohawk. "Topography allows designers to play with scale in a system that when used together can provide infinite design options."

Tarkett's booth design and new products offered similar custom elements and creative inspiration. "This is the first year we are exhibiting Tandus Centiva, Tarkett and Johnsonite products in the same booth space," said Mark Bischoff, vice



Ralph Grogan, right, president and CEO of Bentley, alongside industry veteran and consultant Mac Bridger.

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EarthWerks' Shane Calloway, left, vice president of sales, and Jonathan Train, president and CEO, showcasing the company's new Cocktail collection.

president of Tarkett North America. “We wanted to showcase how we work together and/or separately in a way that’s real to the A&D community — for example, allowing attendees to see Tandus Centiva’s low-profile soft surface products set into our LVT offerings.”

Tarkett also invited designers to co-create their own flooring with the reveal of its new Infinies collection. Utilizing a new technology to deliver what the company claims is the industry’s first digitally printed LVT, designers can create custom looks via a simple online tool.

Other vendors also cited the importance of applying new tools and expanded creativity. “We’re noticing a lot of corporate projects are looking for flooring alternates to break up large office spaces,” said Emil Mellow, vice president of marketing, Karndean. “We have a team dedicated to providing new tools such as architect folders to help specifiers create and achieve their desired outcomes.” On the hospitality side, he mentioned attendee interest in the new Kaleidoscope LVT collection—wood, stone and block colors available in six geometric designs—for its flexibility and

new pattern options.

Over at the Interface space, the focus was on using creative ways to broaden building solutions in an entirely different way. Hence the company’s new mission: Climate Take Back. “While we’ve seen a lot of corporate and higher education projects walk through, our showroom was set up to draw attention toward finding a better, smarter, healthier way to complete projects across all segments — not just sell products,” Chip Degrace, executive creative director, explained. “After all, what makes a good product is the company behind it. Climate Take Back will look at ways Interface and the industry at large can reverse the impacts of climate change, for example sequestering carbon dioxide from the air into building products.

Next, Crossville also aimed to push creative boundaries with the launch of its Satori collection from Laminam. Lindsey Waldrep, vice president of marketing, pointed to the porcelain tile panels as an example of Crossville’s product evolution, noting Satori hits the mark for aesthetics, install capabilities and quality.

“Attendees are looking for



Karndean’s Emil Mellow, left, vice president of marketing, and Milton Goodwin, vice president of commercial, preview the company’s new Kaleidoscope collection.



Stephen Wells, left, and Roy Huebner of One Global Design unveiled the organization’s new Intrinsic carpet collection and Infused LVT line in partnership with Mannington Commercial.

visual texture and materials that offer more of an edge without being too trendy or something that will go out of style,” Waldrep explained. “Satori does this with an enhanced texture that is visual and tactile, yet it is still easy to clean and durable. It can also be installed over existing flooring or as a wall tile, which extends design options and shortens project turn time.”

Metroflor addressed the A&D community’s wish lists by

unveiling an extension of its popular Aspecta collection. “We wanted to offer a one-two punch,” said Russ Rogg, president, USA, “to meet the needs of varying budgets and projects. Aspecta One is intended for applications where the 3.2 mm, 28 mil Aspecta Five is not required.” He mentioned continued interest from attendees working in the healthcare and education segments, with design versatility as a leading factor.

Lastly, in examining the idea of reinvention, Bentley’s (los)t angeles collection looked to inspire designers to find new energy within already known places. “The gems of LA are hidden in plain sight,” explained Todd van derKruik, vice president of design. “Our (los)t angeles collection goes beneath the glitz and glamour and behind the urban decay to discover extraordinary, exciting and unexpected things.”

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The RFMS team gathers at company headquarters in Tuscaloosa, Ala., at the conclusion of its annual training week event.

RFMS event puts the fun back into training and education

TUSCALOOSA, ALA.—Resource & Financial Management Systems (RFMS) held its annual company training week here, wrapping up the festivities with a fun family night in nearby Birmingham.

RFMS places high importance on providing continuing education for all staff members. As such, everyone comes together once a year at the corporate headquarters in Tuscaloosa to attend department and company-wide meetings and training sessions.

RFMS employs 80 people, with 63% working remotely. “We have always been a very family-oriented company, and we feel it is important to bring together not only the staff members at least once a year but to also include their family members for a fun get-together,” said Terry Wheat, RFMS president. “RFMS introduces hundreds of enhancements to the software each year and we believe in keeping everyone on the team up to date with our software development. Also, it is beneficial for everyone to stay on top of current software trends in general as well as current training methods.”

To end the week of training, RFMS reserved the McWane Center, a hands-on science center located in Birmingham for the private event. More than 225 people, including staff, spouses, children and grandchildren, attended the dinner and “evening of discovery.”

During the last day of training the RFMS staff attended a working luncheon where many employees won trips, concert tickets, vacation days and other prizes. No one left empty handed. “We had a contest during lunch to see if anyone could guess the number of combined years of flooring and RFMS experience we had represented

in the room,” Wheat recalled. “In that room we had 1,234 years of flooring experience and 1,070 years of RFMS experience—the numbers are mind-boggling.”

This wealth of experience, according to Wheat, shows how

RFMS has become the business and software giant it is today. “Our team works hard all year long to provide the best software for our flooring clients out there. This event is just a small way to say ‘Thank you’ for their hard work.”



RFMS president Terry Wheat takes his turn experiencing the Center of Gravity at the McWane Center in Birmingham, Ala.

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installments



Avoiding hollow spots in hardwood flooring

One of the most frequent consumer complaints about hardwood flooring installations is the common creaky, hollow-sounding floor that can develop once the job is complete. These hollow spots can even detract from the overall visual and essence of a hardwood floor.



JOHN
BROWN

Most hollow spots or loose areas in a glue-down wood floor come from not following the flooring and adhesive manufacturers' installation specifications and limitations.

Hollow spots are often blamed on adhesives but they are rarely the cause. If a bad adhesive is used to install wood flooring, the entire installation would be negatively impacted—not just a few select areas. Most complaints concerning hollow spots make up less than 5% of the entire area that was installed.

The most common cause for hollow or loose spots in a wood

deflection or variance with the substrate and thus the occurrence of a hollow spot.

Other common causes for hollow and loose spots are neglecting to apply the correct amount of adhesive or not ensuring the flooring is in contact with the adhesive during the curing process. If a board is laid into wet adhesive and raises up from the substrate before the adhesive cures, a hollow spot will occur. This can be avoided by applying weight to these areas until curing.

Using the proper flooring trowel when applying the recommended adhesive is very important. Installers' comprehensive understanding of trowel requirements is highly recommended by adhesive manufacturers. Insufficient adhesive application may cause substandard adhesion and/or final bond strength and in many cases development of hollow spots can occur throughout the installation.

Some hollow spots require removal of the wood flooring, flattening of the substrate and replacement of the wood flooring. This is expensive and time consuming for all parties involved.

Injection repair kits are available and allow an installer to inject additional adhesive under the flooring specifically in the section where popping conditions or voids have developed. This typically alleviates the issue and causes popping sounds or creaky conditions to dissipate. These repair kits are typically easy-to-use, eco-friendly and cost effective. The more user-friendly kits are water-based, which makes them very easy to clean.

Premium grade, pressure-sensitive wood flooring adhesives will remain tacky for the lifetime of the floor and allow you to simply apply weight or walk the floor to correct the issue if proper contact is not achieved during the installation.

USING THE PROPER FLOORING TROWEL WHEN APPLYING THE RECOMMENDED ADHESIVE IS VERY IMPORTANT.

floor system is not getting the concrete substrate flat to industry requirements. The National Wood Flooring Association recommendation for flatness of the substrate for an engineered hardwood floor installation is no more than $\frac{3}{16}$ inch deflection or variance in the slab within any 10-foot radius of the floor. If the substrate reveals any variance greater than $\frac{3}{16}$ inch in any 10-foot radius, proper sub-floor preparation steps must be applied to rectify the situation. Grinding the substrate and/or leveling with a Portland cement underlayment may be required to achieve flatness. Hollow spots will occur if the installer fails to ensure the substrate is flat enough for the specific installation.

The flatness of the substrate becomes even more important depending upon the hardwood product being installed. It is imperative to have a flat substrate when installing boards that are greater than $\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick and greater than 5 inches wide. The thicker and wider the board, the less likely it will conform to any

John Brown is a field technical representative for DriTac Flooring Products. He has 15 years of experience in the flooring industry, working in various roles ranging from an apprentice mechanic to manufacturer sales rep.

Using financing options to seal (larger) deals

By K.J. Quinn

The availability of financing can be a key factor for consumers when making large investments such as flooring. And unlike yesteryear, today's shoppers are savvy, spending an extended period researching their options including credit and financing.

"Customers seeking flexible payment options consider financing during their flooring research and may proactively ask about promotions," explained Glenn Marino, executive vice president and CEO of Payment Solutions, Synchrony Financial. "Dealers benefit by offering programs to help them stay competitive and help build a stable of loyal customers who may make higher-quality choices or return for future flooring purchases."

There are many consumer credit options available to finance floor covering purchases. Choices range from private-label credit cards, deferred payments and same-as-cash, which provides consumers with low monthly payments and extended financing. "These programs allow the smaller independent retailer to better compete with the big box stores," noted Mike Zoellner, Mohawk's vice president of marketing services. "They can advertise extended-term consumer financing and pay rates that are comparable to large retailers with lots of buying power."

Synchrony's Fourth Annual Major Purchase Consumer Study, released in June 2015, underscores the importance of financing. The report found 87% of Synchrony's flooring cardholders "always" seek promotional financing when making a major purchase (more than \$500). What's more, over one-third of flooring cardholders surveyed would not have made a major purchase if financing was not available. "Further, 91% of flooring cardholders surveyed said they feel promotional financing makes their large purchases more affordable," Marino said.

Leveraging credit for upgrades

A promotional financing program arms consumers with buying power to purchase the products and services they want instead of settling for something less expensive. "When a customer provides her budget but realizes her project will be more than she had anticipated, financing becomes the perfect fit," said Brian Witkin, executive vice president of sales, Avalon Flooring, Cherry Hill, N.J., which operates

14 locations in Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. "Our sales associates can then show more high style/price product options which the customer is open to as she understands the long-term investment." A sales team can also take the opportunity to introduce complementary products customers may not have been initially shopping for such as window treatments, rugs and backsplashes.

Retail financing promotions have proven to increase the value of the average ticket. Case in point: The Synchrony study found its flooring cardholders spent 64% more for their average purchase than shoppers who did not have a card. "Financing allows our customers to get the floors that they want now and pay the balance later when the funds are available," noted Kurt Duitsman, president, Floors for Living, which operates 20 locations in the Houston area.

Many plans allow financing to be funded at the time of sale. "To avoid problems, our contracts are very specific about the funding date and our customers initial it," Duitsman added. "The customer gets free financing and we get the use of the cash prior to paying for the installation and the products."

Other retailers are using credit to boost orders. "We find promoting long-term financing has helped to create more sales as well as increase the average order," said Darren Braunstein, vice president, Worldwide Wholesale Floor Coverings, Edison, N.J.

The retailer, which utilizes Synchrony, usually offers 12 or 24 months of financing with 0% interest. "The main difference with financing today is the requirement for the consumer to pay a minimum monthly payment," Braunstein added. "This has been a good change in that the consumer is more accountable for the transaction; they have an immediate obligation to start paying down the purchase."

Financing spread out over 12 to 15 months is commonplace, industry members said, although some retailers are more inclined to offer longer credit payment plans. For example, Flooring America/Flooring Canada offers various consumer financing programs with most members preferring 18- and 36-month deferred payment/same-as-cash plans, explained Keith Spano,

Synchrony Financial offers flexible credit programs for independent retailers.

president of the Manchester, N.H.-based retail buying group. "Flooring America/Canada members benefit from not only our low-negotiated financing rates but also from the fact that we corporately buy down the rates, saving our members substantial financing charges."

Groups such as Flooring America have the buying power that allows members to offer

interest-free finance promotions throughout the year. "They are able to tie together product and finance [offers] to create [valuable] retail promotions that enable us to provide aggressive price discounts on our products," said Kelby Frederick, co-CEO and owner, My Flooring Texas, based in Denton. "Plus, they offer long-term finance offers instead of having to offer one or the other."

While there is no "one-size-fits-all" credit program, lenders can recommend an approach that fits a retailer's sales model and provide assistance for optimizing the results. "Our programs do more today than simply fund the purchase of goods and services," Synchrony's Marino said. "The proprietary tools, branded programs and promotional financing help attract flooring shoppers and foster loyalty among our partners' customers."

Both retailers and consumers want a smooth, seamless experience at every stage of the financing process. A major challenge is effectively communicating

options to shoppers. "We mention it early and often throughout the sale and do not 'sell it' in the traditional fashion," Avalon's Witkin said.

When financing options are explained at the outset it makes it easier to use them as a closing tool. "It moves the focus off the per-unit price and moves it to the full-project price," Frederick pointed out. "[This] typically allows the customer to seek out higher-quality products she really wants for her home."

Store employees are advised to receive credit sales training, which includes guidance on how to offer financing in an effective manner. "We have Flooring America corporate staff working with Synchrony daily to ensure a good financing experience for our members and their customers," Spano said. Synchrony employs a team of trainers dedicated to ensuring its partners have the necessary tools to help them successfully offer financing promotions. By consulting with retail partners, lenders can develop financing programs to help increase engagement, sales and loyalty.

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OUTSIDE SALES REPRESENTATIVES

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Benefits:

- Full health benefits • 401K • Paid Vacation

Compensation:

- Base salary plus commission *Earning potential \$100,000 plus after 1 year
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Responsibilities:

- Design an action plan to successfully create new business and build client relationships
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- Maintain a professional, ethical, and positive disposition as a primary representative of Provenza in the community
- Regularly attend client meetings, trade shows, networking events, conferences, and any other flooring related functions
- Integrate sales efforts with other organized marketing activities (promotions, advertising, exhibitions, telemarketing, social media marketing, etc.)

Requirements:

- 3+ years previous experience working in a sales role and/or as a business development representative, preferably outside sales and in the flooring industry
- Bachelor's degree (BS/BA) from a four-year college or university or related work experience preferred but not required
- Industry knowledge or the ability to seek knowledge if new to the industry
- Able to work in a fast paced environment with a demonstrated ability to multi-task according with the tasks of the job
- Proven ability in creating new business and strong client relationships

Keywords: sales, business development, flooring, growth, relationships
Please email: hr@provenzafloors.com



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