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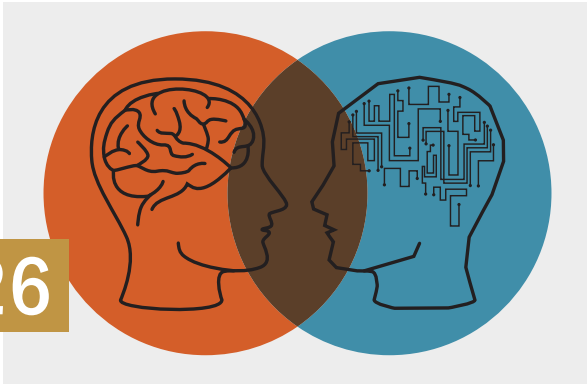
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Editorial

BY ERIKA TAYLOR, CHIEF OF CONTENT

Latin Class

There's a podcast I want to listen to," my husband said the other night.

"Great, what is it?" I asked, picturing us curled up together on the couch, taking in a fascinating, relevant topic.

"It's called, 'The Factors Behind the Dominance of Ancient Rome,'" he said enthusiastically. "Isn't that interesting?"

"Hmm." I glanced at the length of the podcast (40 minutes) and our wine bottle's contents (60 percent full) and said, "Let's get to it then."

But as it turned out, the talk actually was fascinating and the topic highly relevant to business today.

Rome's rise to power happened for several reasons, but one of the most important was the values upheld by its citizens. Those "virtues" filled the Romans with moral strength as they conquered so much territory that, at one point, one in every four people on Earth lived under Roman rule.

But while there were more than 40 individual qualities that were considered important, the speaker we listened to focused on five that he believed were the most crucial.

Hearing those foundational values described made me think about the truly great companies I've come into contact with over the years, and it occurred to me that every one of them is lead by a person who embraces these ideals.

To run a successful business, all you need is the right strategy and knowledge of the field and you can grab a large share of your market. But that doesn't make a company great, it just makes it profitable. Greatness comes from the personal values of a company's leader, which are then communicated to staff on a frequent basis both verbally and through action.

The five core Roman values are:

Gravitas: dignity and weightiness of character. People with gravitas inspire others to follow them.

Fides: loyal, ethical behavior. Legally, "fides" refers to honoring the terms of an agreement. It's also behind the Marine's motto *Semper fidelis*.

Frugalitas: simplicity and good management of resources. Although the word "frugal" is derived from this term, it shouldn't be confused with cheapness. There's a difference between careful spending and holding onto every penny out of fear or greed.



Greatness comes from the personal values of a company's leader.

Virtus: Directly translated, this means "manliness." That said, in ancient Rome the idea of *virtus* could be attributed to women, animals, and even inanimate objects. (My son's 1963 Dodge Rambler is very *virtus*.) Really, it means toughness, courage, and the willingness to fight for your cause.

Pietas: a sense of duty and reverence. In Roman culture, a huge premium was placed on having deference for the Gods, your country, and your parents. However, in this context, it means holding respect for the people around you.

It's amazing to think that the same values: character, honesty, simplicity, toughness, and respect have played a crucial role in great endeavors for thousands of years. Cheers! Or, as the Romans would say, *salve!* **PR**

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MARVIN MAKES STRATEGIC BUY

In a move that strengthens its market position among larger window and door manufacturers, the Marvin Companies purchased high-end door maker, TruStile. Terms of the deal were not disclosed. The acquisition is Marvin's largest to date and expands the company's portfolio into interior doors.

Denver-based, TruStile is one of Colorado's fastest-growing privately held companies, with 2013 revenue of more than \$40 million, according to the Denver Business Journal. Marvin, based in Warroad, Minn., has an estimated \$550 million in revenue, according to the Minneapolis / St. Paul Business Journal.

REMODELING INDUSTRY BLOG CONTEST SHOWCASES WINNERS

For six years now, San Diego-based Jackson Design & Remodeling has been sponsoring an industry blogging contest. One blog is awarded in each of six categories: architecture, construction business, remodeling, interior design, green, and microblog.

This year's remodeling winner was BuildDirect, an online home improvement retailer. The Canadian company sells building and remodeling products at lower cost, competing head-to-head with big-box stores. BuildDirect's blog covers topics from preparing a home for surgery recovery to the pros and cons of different countertop materials. The company's blogsite also has a color palette of the week and a guide to the "best" interior designers in a variety of cities.

Contest winners receive a \$500 prize and a logo to display on their blog. To find information about next year's submission process, go to jacksondesignandremodeling.com.



The JDR Industry Blogger Awards are designed to increase recognition for the best blogs in the business. Pictured above is company CEO Todd Jackson

DRYWALL ARTIST COMPETITION NOW ACCEPTING ENTRIES

Trim-Tex is accepting submissions for the 10th Annual Drywall Artist of the Year contest.

The competition seeks to highlight exceptional drywall artists and increase recognition of the trade. Any drywall projects exclusively using Trim-Tex bead are eligible to win.

"The contest has become a tradition in the drywall industry and Trim-Tex is thrilled to be a part of it," said Joe Koenig, company president. "We are looking forward to seeing quite a few great entries."

Winners are selected based on overall skills, creativity, and design. Prizes include \$1,000 in product credit, an estimated \$500 in drywall tools, and airline tickets to Chicago with two nights hotel accommodations. Entries are accepted through Jan. 31, 2016. For more information, go to trim-tex.com and click on the pull-down menu under "Design and Training Center."

Trim-Tex manufactures rigid vinyl drywall corner beads and accessories.



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As I See It

BY SAL ALFANO, DIRECTOR OF CONTENT

Gray Area

In late April, a week of demonstrations and rioting erupted in Baltimore after a 25-year-old black man named Freddie Gray died of a spinal cord injury while in police custody. Anyone who watched even a few minutes of TV coverage probably recalls the burning vehicles and looted CVS pharmacies. Footage of Toya Graham chasing her teenage son off the street while smacking him in the head went viral.

At about the same time, a contractor posted a story to our LinkedIn page about losing another bid to a noncertified window replacement contractor. His bid was 50 percent higher, and he complained that the contractor who got the job told the homeowner that he wouldn't disturb any paint while replacing the windows. His post concluded with a familiar rant against big government and over-regulation.

I didn't make the connection until I read an April 29 story in *The Washington Post* about the extraordinarily high blood lead levels among black children growing up in Baltimore's Sandtown neighborhood. It was in a rental property there that Freddie Gray was poisoned by lead paint that flaked from the peeling walls and windows.

Evidence from a lawsuit filed by Gray and his siblings against the property owner revealed that a blood test taken when he was just 9 months old showed 10 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood—that's double the maximum level set by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Three months later, his blood tested at almost 30 micrograms, and just before his second birthday, it measured 37 micrograms.

Gray's history reminded me of the RRP (Renovation, Repair and Painting) certifica-

tion class I took in 2010. Our instructor told a story about when he and his wife had their first child. They were living in public housing just after college because it was all they could afford. They knew that the doors and windows would stick a little, but they didn't know that each time they opened or closed them small particles of dried lead paint scraped off and floated onto the carpet and bedding and toys.

They soon noticed problems with their son's balance and reaction time, so much so that he couldn't put his hands out in time to break his frequent falls. Finally, during a hospital visit to treat bruises on the boy's face from a bad fall, a blood test revealed that he had lead poisoning.



Freddie Gray was poor and black and lead-poisoned. The combination proved deadly.

I'm sympathetic to the plight of small remodelers competing against uncertified, unlicensed, and uninsured contractors who don't know their costs, have never pulled a permit, and are unaware of or ignore regulations such as the RRP. But I also know that poisoning from lead paint has real-world consequences.

Whatever the undisclosed settlement was in Freddie Gray's 2008 lead-poisoning lawsuit, it came too late to undo the damage that had already been done. I don't know whether the problems he had while growing up—trouble in school, drug abuse, repeated run-ins with the police—happened because he was poor or because he was black or because he was poisoned by lead. But the combination seems to have been deadly.

For remodelers, the RRP rule is an expensive hassle, but compliance won't kill anybody. Noncompliance just might. **PR**

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Raise Your Predictability IQ

Some things in our day-to-day lives are more predictable than others. For example, most people can predict the amount of time it takes for their morning routine, and some can predict their regular monthly expenses to within a few dollars. Given access to a sufficient amount of relevant data, even more complex predictions can be made with remarkable accuracy, such as declaring the outcome of a political election after only a small percentage of votes have been counted.

The opposite is also true. We like to think that we can predict next week's weather or the level of traffic on a particular driving route, but we often get such predictions wrong.

In our daily lives, we depend on accurate predictions to plan and communicate with others. And when we're unsure, we adapt with built-in tolerances. For example, we may allow an extra 10 minutes for a familiar driving route if we're unsure about traffic conditions.

One element that separates great businesses from the merely good ones is the ability to make accurate predictions. Predictions about cost and weather affect your ability to produce the work as sold and meet the schedule as promised. Predictions about new hires and employee development affect team performance and plans for growth. And predictions about profitability are critical to overall company management.

Whenever I want to get better at something, I find that it helps to make a list of reasons that answer the question "Why?" Here are seven reasons why you should improve your skill at predicting. It will:

- 1) Reduce stress;
- 2) Enable the right investments in time and money;
- 3) Help you make better decisions;
- 4) Win trust in your leadership and vision;
- 5) Create alignment both within and outside your company;
- 6) Provide for a more meaningful dialogue;
- 7) Improve effectiveness and ROI.

BETTER PREDICTIONS

Having good reasons helps, but you need to take specific steps to improve your ability to make more accurate business predictions.

Know your numbers. The more data you have at your disposal and the better you understand it, the easier it will be to draw accurate conclusions. The data may include lead sources and client demographics, or close rates from individual salespeople or project types, or average job size and recurring expenses.

Ideally, you should be familiar with your historical data going back at least three years—and don't be afraid of what you find; knowing that something is off track is better than not knowing at all.

Make predicting fun. I used to create games for members of my team around making predictions. My goal was both to hear their ideas on particular business initiatives or metrics, but also to get them to think more about forecasting. Incentives can help. For example, you could give a prize for the prediction that comes closest to the actual result. Skill at making predictions varies among individuals, but predictive skill can be learned and mastered.

Create alignment within the team. One business theme that I often relate to making predictions is "aggressive but realistic." Predictions must be aggressive and challenge the status quo, but unless they're realistic, they deteriorate into fantasy. A sales team that produces an aggressive but realistic total sales prediction for the follow-

ing month is more likely to engage in a useful thought process and discussion and may come closer to producing the desired results.

Make accurate predictions a priority. Those whose performance matches their prediction deserve as much or more praise as those whose performance exceeds their prediction. It's hard to complain if someone consistently exceeds their prediction, but it also makes it more difficult to plan. If profit is consistently 5 percent higher than predicted, that's a good thing, but it may also represent some lost opportunity.

One thing that separates a great business from a merely good one is the ability to make accurate predictions.

Hold people accountable. The CEOs of publicly traded companies sometimes lose their jobs because they missed a projection. I'm not suggesting a do-or-die approach, but there should be some accountability for the accuracy of your team's predictions. If there are no consequences to getting it wrong, then the results won't be as reliable as they could be. And accountability isn't limited to sales; it can be related to expenses, schedule, or even client experience.

If you want to take your business to the next level, then master the science of prediction. Not only will you likely experience great success, you will also find the journey to be much more fulfilling and enjoyable. **PR**

*Mark Richardson, CR, is an author, columnist, and business growth strategist. He authored the best-selling book, *How Fit is Your Business?* as well as his latest book, *Fit to Grow*. He can be reached at mrichardson@mgrichardson.com or 301.275.0208.*

For more from Mark Richardson, visit
ProRemodeler.com



Efficiency, for a Price

Ultra-efficient Energy Star Version 6.0 windows are here, but are homeowners willing to pay the higher prices?

By Professional Remodeler Staff

It's been about six months since the Energy Star Version 6.0 (V6) window requirements for most parts of the country went into effect. And while the new standards boost efficiency, they also increase unit prices. So how is this shaking out in the remodeling and replacement window markets?

"Each new version of Energy Star requires an enormous leap of faith that consumers will recognize and understand the cost increases that come with meeting the requirements," says Maureen Knight, government affairs/product stewardship manager for the American Architectural Manufacturers Association (AAMA), which represents window makers and suppliers.

All Zones Not Equal

The Environmental Protection Agency, which administers the Energy Star program, rolled out Energy Star V6 requirements for residential windows, doors, and skylights on Jan. 1, except for the Northern zone criteria, which will go into effect on Jan. 1, 2016.

The EPA revised its implementation date for the Northern zone in response to manufacturer concerns about being able to produce cost-effective units by 2015 that meet the more stringent Northern zone standard. Currently, the U-factor requirement for the Northern zone is 0.30; Energy Star V6 calls for a U-factor of 0.27.

Many manufacturers believed that triple-pane windows would be needed to meet Northern zone criteria. Frames for double-pane units typically aren't deep enough to accommodate triple-pane glass, resulting in the need to redesign and



Marvin Windows says that all of its windows currently meet the Energy Star Version 6.0 standard. (Pictured here as Marvin's Contemporary Awning windows, from the Contemporary Studio collection.)



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Unveiled at the 2015 International Builders' Show, Jeld-Wen's Sitrine wood and clad-wood windows and patio doors meet the EPA's 2016 Energy Star V6 requirements.

retool. According to the AAMA, the EPA's stated \$20 per Northern zone unit upcharge is only about 25 percent of the ultimate production cost increase.

But many manufacturers are ahead of the implementation schedule. "Each of our vinyl, fiberglass, and wood product lines ... met the Energy Star 6.0 guidelines in January 2015, including the more stringent Northern zone," says Erik Ashcraft, product manager for Milgard Windows & Doors.

Still Early Days

To qualify for the V6 requirements, windows must meet or exceed the following U-factors and solar heat gain coefficient (SHGC) ratings:

Energy-Efficiency Requirements for Windows		
Climate Zone	U-factor	SHGC
Northern	≤ 0.27	Any
North-Central	≤ 0.30	≤ 0.40
South-Central	≤ 0.30	≤ 0.25
Southern	≤ 0.40	≤ 0.25

Energy Star V6 window, sliding door, and skylight units also must have air leakage ratings that meet or exceed 0.3 cfm per square foot.

In the future, manufacturers say that they will continue to look to glazing producers for improved technologies, both in coatings and films, to help them meet lower U-factor requirements. Milgard's Ashcraft says that within five years, it's likely that additional climate-specific glazing options will be available.

"The question is how well it will be accepted, demanded, or requested by the consumer," Lance Premeau, Kolbe's product and market manager, says of the new V6 criteria. "I think we'll see a shift in the perception of the Energy Star program," adds Christine Marvin, director of marketing for Marvin Windows and Doors. "Now homeowners will have to think, for this investment, what's the payback over time?" According to the National Association of Home Builders, homeowners typically live in a house for 13 years, but manufacturers say that the payback on V6 windows could be more than 20 years.

Still, some believe that buyers will pay the higher prices, as the trend for energy-efficient homes grows. "The homeowner marketplace is ready to say yes to these windows," says Sarah Nettleton, a Minneapolis-based architect. "The public gets granite counters, but now the public is coming around to energy efficiency, too."

But consumer awareness of energy-efficient window options varies widely. Chris Zorzy, owner of A&A Services, a roofing, siding, and window company in Salem, Mass., says that his company's window supplier, Sunrise Windows & Doors, still has to "do a few tweaks" on its V6 product offering, adding, "I'm not seeing a big demand for it. I'm not sure people are even aware of it. Of course, every once in a while you'll get the homeowner who wants the most efficient window."

Newer state and local building codes require more efficient housing, and V6 windows can play a role in meeting those requirements. But it may take several years for municipalities to adopt V6 requirements as code, and even then, they may not adopt them in full.

In Petaluma, Calif., John Gorman, president of Save Energy Co., a window, door, siding, and solar installer, says that his focus is not so much on Energy Star V6 but on meeting the state's Title 24 energy standards (maximum U-factor 0.32; SHGC at or below 0.25). His company installs Simonton, Milgard, Marvin, and Cascade windows.

But, as Zorzy points out, the benefits from all these advances in energy efficiency are moot if windows are leaky or poorly installed. A window really is only as good as the installation. "Anything we sell is based on installation," Zorzy says. "We tell homeowners that if the manufacturer is offering a lifetime warranty and the product's not properly installed, you don't have much of a warranty." **PR**

Adapted from the article "Higher Performance, Added Cost," by Jean Dimeo, that appeared in the February issue of our sister publication Professional Builder.



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IS FRANCHISING FOR YOU?

Franchising in home renovation is set to grow. The key: creating systems that can be duplicated anywhere. We take a look at what this business model has to offer

B Jim Cory

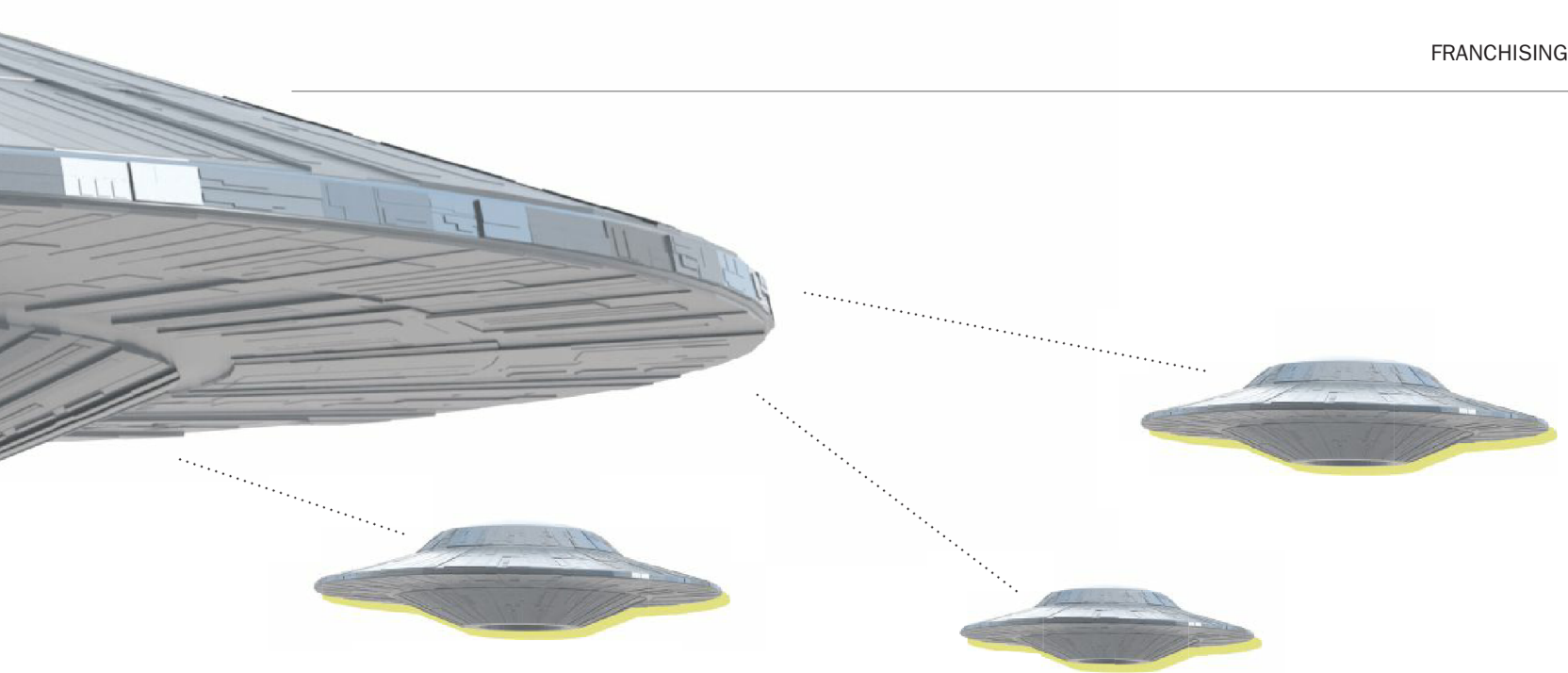
Here's something you probably didn't know: Every eight minutes of every business day, someone in the U.S. opens a franchise location. Franchises are so pervasive and blend so seamlessly into the business landscape that we hardly notice them. You might do business with nearly a half-dozen franchises in a day—eating lunch (Burger King), buying screws (Ace Hardware), getting your car repaired (Maaco), renting a replacement car (Hertz), shipping a package (The UPS Store).

Here's something you probably did know, or you at least suspected: Franchise companies tend to be more sustainable than other types of businesses. An Arthur Anderson & Co. study of 366 franchises found that 97 percent were still in business after five years,

a figure confirmed in a U.S. Department of Commerce report, which found that fewer than 5 percent of franchises are terminated each year. Compare that with the U.S. Small Business Administration study, which found that 62.2 percent of new businesses fail within their first six years.

Positioned for Growth

Franchises are popular with aspiring business owners for good reason: they tend to be successful, sustainable, and, ultimately saleable. But franchising, like many businesses, took a hit during the Great Recession. Franchise unit numbers fell after 2008, as franchise businesses failed or franchisees that wanted to expand



DreamMaker is one of eight home improvement franchises offered by the Dwyer Group, with corporate sales of \$1 billion. Doug Dwyer is president and CSO at DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen, in Waco, Texas.

found that they couldn't get credit. "Most of the prospective franchisees were damaged greatly," says Doug Dwyer, president and CSO at franchisor DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen, in Waco, Texas (dreammaker-remodel.com). The recession left "some pretty big scars," he says, and even today, prospective franchisees remain skittish.

Even so, franchising began to rebound in 2012, with lodging, health care, and casual dining leading the way. Home renovation franchises are coming back, too. According to research center IBISworld.com, a fully recovered housing market and annual sales of at least 5 million existing homes will drive franchise growth in the fields of handyman, plumbing, electrical, and home inspection. "Franchises in the home improvement sector," the center's report states, "are well-positioned to capitalize on the recovering economy and obtain a strong foothold for future growth over the next five years." IBISworld.com projects, for example, that handyman franchise revenue will reach \$3.1 billion in 2018.

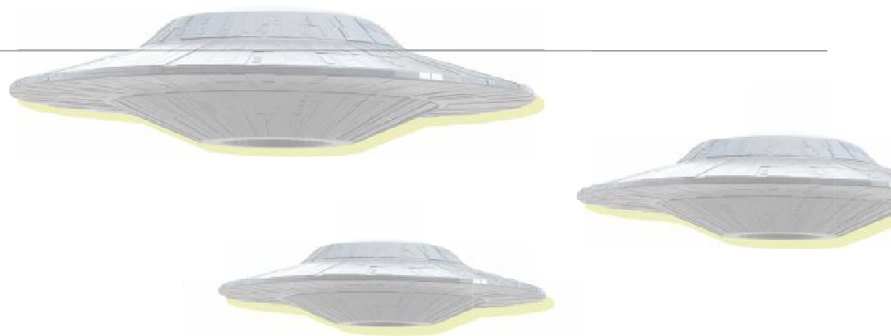
Niche Brands

That number seems conservative to Brad Fluke, CEO of The Honey Do Service (yourhoneydo.com), the newest of more than a half-dozen franchises offering home repair. Like many franchisors, Fluke's idea was to take his own highly systematized

HANDYMAN IN A BOX

Founding owner Brad Fluke says that The Honey Do Service differs from some older competitors in the handyman field in two important ways: Honey Do offers homeowners a fixed quote price for work rather than charging by the hour, and it uses only employees to do the work. Since finding "the right people to do the work" is the No. 1 challenge for home renovation companies today, the franchisor provides "tools of retention" at no cost to its franchise units: a 401(k) plan, short- and long-term disability insurance, dental insurance, and life insurance. New franchises get four weeks of corporate training, a state-specific general contracting license, and Environmental Protection Agency lead-paint certification. They're also assigned a marketing coach to help make leads flow. Fluke says that his goal is to make The Honey Do Service franchise company a national brand.





“We want highly motivated people who will follow a proven system.”

—Brad Fluke, founder, The Honey Do Service

Virginia-based operation and multiply it out exponentially (there are 26 franchises so far). In home renovation, this has worked far better in narrowly focused niche offerings than in full-service remodeling, an industry that consultant Mark Richardson calls “unfranchisable.”

“The ‘full-service’ franchise has crashed and burned,” Richardson says, while highly specialized franchises such as insurance restorer Paul Davis (pauldavis.com), house painter CertaPro (certapro.com), and storage maven California Closets (californiaclosets.com) are continuing to add units and volume.

Franchises are typically able to charge substantially more than local independents because franchise brands come with the assumption of professionalism, stability, and reliability.

“We do everything,” explains Lisa Walling, co-owner with her husband, Jeff, of bath franchise ReBath of Tucson

(tucsonbathroomremodel.com). The ReBath model uses only employee installers, which enables the Wallings’ company to run “a very tight schedule” on a type of project that, when it lags, seriously inconveniences homeowners.

Specialists Prevail

In franchising, the brand is a business model, and whether or not it’s successful usually has more to do with how much energy and attention franchisees will put into it than the feasibility of the model itself. To turn your business into a franchise requires systems that can be taught and replicated anywhere.

Take gutters, for example. For years, people had asked Ryan Parsons and his brother, Ken, whether their business, The Brothers That Just Do Gutters (brothersgutters.com), in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., was a franchise. It wasn’t. But, inspired by Michael Gerber’s book *The E-Myth*, as well as the hugely successful franchise 1-800-Got-Junk, the Parsons set out to turn every part of their gutter business into a documented process that would be portable and repeatable. (Read more about the Parsons on page 22.) Last year they launched The Brothers That Just Do Gutters franchise.

Gutter businesses, Ryan Parsons says, are a lot like independent junk haulers: It’s one guy, a helper, and a truck. “I don’t know many who do more than \$300,000 in sales,” he adds. What the brothers figured out was that a well-managed gutter operation could generate millions in sales—their Poughkeepsie gutter business multiplied sixfold, from \$500,000 initially to \$3 million last year—with a healthy gross margin. Replacing gutters wasn’t new, but their method of running a gutter company was.

“We just have a really good way to do this,” Ryan says. Before launching, he and his brother took themselves out of the management of their own gutter company to focus on a franchise business that is “all about support.” Recognizing that their initial franchisees would likely be installers looking to become businessmen, they set up a centralized call center to process inbound leads and set appointments at all the Brothers franchises.



Lisa and Jeff Walling were ReBath customers before they bought their franchise. A business model that relies on staff installers enables ReBath of Tucson, their company, to keep jobs rigorously on schedule.



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“[As a franchise] job size is significantly more, and I can produce twice the sales with the same amount of labor.”

—Curt Trampe, owner, DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen of Springfield

Why Buy a Franchise?

Franchisors will be the first to tell you that franchising is not for everyone. But for installers who are unfamiliar with marketing or sales, businesspeople without contracting experience, or remodelers looking for a brand to build on, the right franchise often clicks.

Curt Trampe, owner of DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen of Springfield, Ill. (dreammakerspringfield.com), had a solid remodeling business when he bought the kitchen & bath franchise eight years ago.

“Things were going well,” he recalls, but he saw DreamMaker as a way to exclusively focus on kitchens and baths—the two projects he prefers. Last year his franchise business did \$1.8 million, which



Curt Trampe spent about a year transforming his remodeling business into DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen of Springfield. One of the best things about being a franchise, Trampe says, is the chance to network with other owners and compare performance.



MAILBOX MONEY

Almost 20 years ago, the company that's today known as The Brothers That Just Do Gutters, in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., started as Ken Parsons' part-time summer job. With a desk, a truck, and estimating sheets from Staples, that summer job grew into Water-flow Gutter Solutions, a gutter installer doing most of its work for general contractors and builders.

That all changed between 2008 and 2010, when Ken (left, in photo) and his brother, Ryan, shifted the focus of their business, making homeowners their primary customers.

ALL SYSTEMS GO

The Parsons brothers set out to “make every aspect of our business a system that could be followed,” Ryan says. Given job size—\$1,500—lead procurement was a constant. Converting leads into jobs was critical. The right price was essential.

Ultimately, the biggest challenge was finding people who could install, interact comfortably with homeowners, and stay on schedule. So the Parsons brothers created a five-rung skills ladder, which kept them in crews. “We were creating a franchise model and we didn't even know it,” Ryan says.

When they did decide to franchise, the model was 1-800-Got-Junk, a hugely successful junk removal franchise, 11 years old, with more than 200 franchises in the U.S., Canada, and Australia.

A franchise with 10, 20, or 100 units would supply them with what Ryan Parsons calls “mailbox money.” (To watch

a video about the process, go to YouTube and search “How The Brothers That Just Do Gutters franchised their business.”)

REPLACE YOURSELF

But becoming a franchise was more difficult than the brothers had anticipated. They realized that they had to be paperless before going into franchising. Then, before launching, they decided to re-brand, with a new logo.

They researched the gutter industry, concluding that potential franchise rivals were few, small, and pretty much inert.

Then, the Parsons brothers say, “we literally had to replace ourselves,” hiring others to run the gutter company, so that they, in turn, could manage the franchise.

“Once you do this,” Ryan says, “you're no longer in the gutter business, you're in the franchise business.”

The last step was having an attorney draw up a Franchise Disclosure Document with the Federal Trade Commission, which contains essential information (including audited financial statements) and must be furnished to franchisees.

In 2014, they became a franchise, and they now have four units.

WHO'S THE IDEAL FRANCHISE CANDIDATE?

It's someone who wants to own a business, not just have a job, Ken says, adding, “When you own a business, it runs without you.” —J.C.



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FOR OPTIMUM
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circle 761

was double its sales of eight years ago, at far better margins. “Job size is significantly more,” Trampe says, “and I can produce twice the sales with the same amount of labor.” The showroom-centric DreamMaker model has also considerably cut down on Trampe’s windshield time.

What It Takes

Thinking about buying a home renovation franchise? Here’s what you’ll need:

- **Commitment to succeed.** Franchise companies are happy to take your money, but they also want you to thrive. A healthy franchise base helps them sell new territories. So they look for “someone with drive, ambition, a commitment to excellence, and a heart for service,” Dwyer says.
- **Openness to suggestion.** A good franchise will train you to fully understand production, payroll, sales, marketing, and customer service. But that training will only be valuable if you use it. “We want highly motivated people who will follow a proven system,” Fluke says.
- **Specific skills.** These include leadership, management, and professional selling skills. Professional selling is important because the typical home improvement franchise will work from a pricing model that calls for a higher gross margin to support net profit goals. Those higher margins come from knowing how to sell the efficiency and quality of the operation.

“The ‘full-service’ franchise has crashed and burned.”

—Mark Richardson, consultant

In contrast, franchises that are highly specialized, such as those focused on insurance restoration and house painting, continue to thrive, adding units and volume.

- **Capital.** A good franchise lists startup costs on its website (for a list of building and remodeling franchises, with startup costs, search for “franchises” at entrepreneur.com). If you already have a location, trucks, and staff, “the number falls fast,” Fluke says. You’ll be at the bottom of that range, paying for not much more than the one-time franchise fee. If you don’t, costs move up to



FRANCHISE CHECKLIST

TOTAL INVESTMENT: Capitalization costs, which include the franchise fee, tools and equipment, leased office space (if you’re not working from home), personnel, marketing investment, and selling expense. Usually given as a range.

FRANCHISE FEE: What you actually pay to join a franchise in exchange for the right to use the franchisor’s trade name, trademark, and operating systems, plus training, software, and more.

ROYALTY RATE: What you pay to the franchise as a percentage of your gross revenue. The amount typically ranges from 4 percent to 8 percent of gross annual revenue.

TERM OF AGREEMENT: Length of time that you’re contracted to the franchise. Usually five to seven years, but it can be longer or shorter.

MARKETING FUND: Some franchise organizations charge individual franchises a fee that goes into the general marketing fund aimed at generating leads across the entire franchise.

See entrepreneur.com/franchises/categories/home.html for a list of companies and startup costs.

include all that, plus the funds to carry you through training. Most franchise operations will want you selling and installing immediately after completing the training, but you’d still need to budget several month’s worth of operational expenses to carry your business to the point where it’s more than breaking even.

Work to Advantage

For franchisees, what makes it worth the investment is the ability to offer a well-branded name as a locally owned business—just like Burger King, just like Subway. But for DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen of Springfield’s Curt Trampe, the best part was the connection to other entrepreneurs in remodeling through regular biannual networking sessions. “That makes it easy to put your business side by side with theirs and do comparisons,” he says. **PR**

Philadelphia-based freelance writer Jim Cory specializes in covering the remodeling and home improvement industry. Reach him with comments or story ideas at coryjim@earthlink.net.

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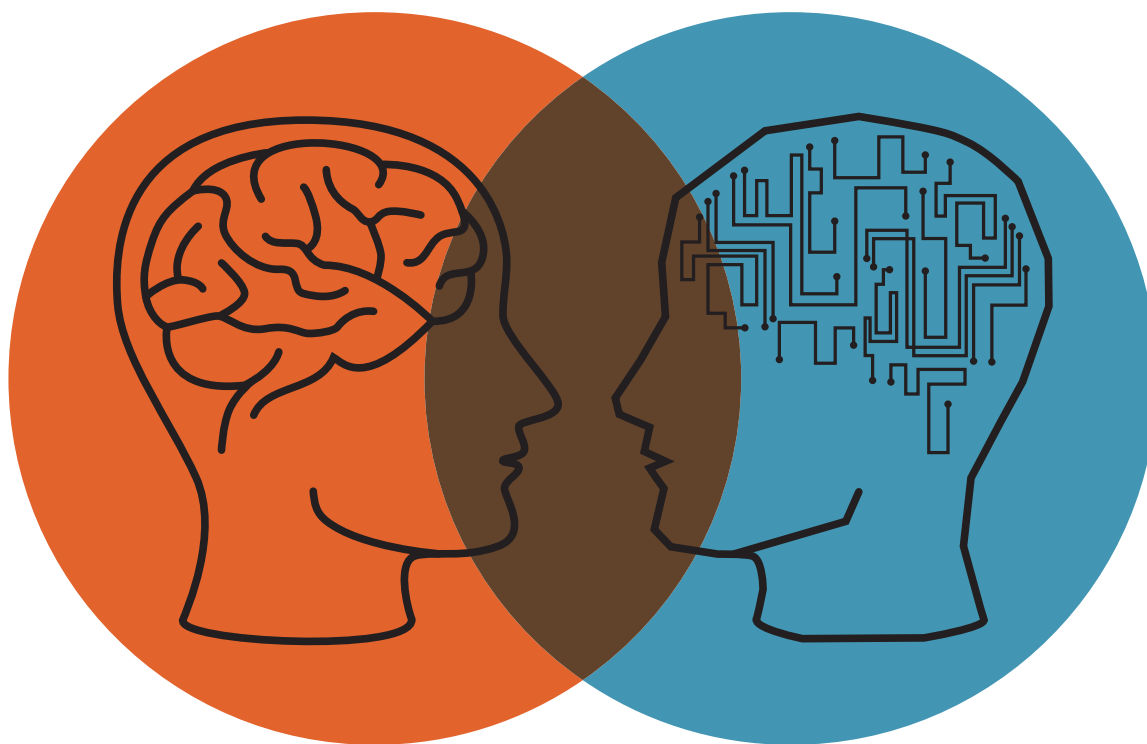
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SEO for Online Leads

Websites have two audiences: search engines and people. Here's how to satisfy both to improve your ranking, increase traffic, and generate more quality leads

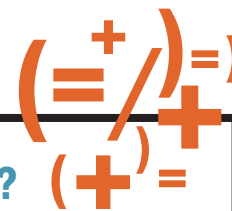
By Mark Harari

With more and more homeowners using the Web to find design ideas, investigate projects, and ultimately locate a remodeling company to do the work, a remodeler's website needs to function as a lead-generation machine. But to successfully generate qualified leads, your website has to attract attention from two audiences, humans and machines—homeowners looking for a contractor, and the robots that the digital search engines use to scour the Web. That means a website must be attractive to its human audience and provide them with a satisfying online experience, while also meeting the technical requirements of the machines that will ultimately judge how relevant it is to a particular homeowner's search. Both audiences are equally important, but as a rule of thumb, you should write first for the people in your audience, then come back later and make sure that what you wrote makes sense to the machines that will also be "reading" your site.

Key SEO Factors

How well your website performs depends partly on SEO (search engine optimization). We've all heard the term SEO, but to really understand what it is and why it's important, it helps to know a bit about how it works. Let's start by thinking about what search engines such as Google actually do.

Google earns revenue based mainly on the quality of its search results, so it works hard to make sure that its rankings include the most relevant webpages given a particular set of search terms. How Google does this isn't magic, it's based on a type of mathematical formula called an "algorithm," which is a fancy word for a predefined set of instructions (see "What's an Algorithm?" page 27). What appears to searchers to be a "judgment" about the content of a website is in reality a literal execution of a detailed set of instructions based partly on how searchers use the results and what they



do once they reach a website, but also based on the words that the machines find on your site.

Title tag and meta description. Which words, exactly? It starts with the title tag, which is the text that appears in the browser tab. The title tag displays by default, but if it's missing, Google just uses the site URL. (Incidentally, underscores between words in a URL turn it into one, long, hard-to-decipher word. A hyphen or space between words gives Google better information and reduces errors.)

The meta description is the text that Google displays under the title tag on the results page. If Google finds the actual search terms anywhere on your site, it will display short excerpts that contain those terms; otherwise, it displays your meta description. Title and description used to be very important to help your site rank high in the results. But these days, Google can easily figure out what your site is about without them, so these words are mainly for the benefit of people who read the search results. The better the title and description, the more likely it is that people will click through to your website (see "Better Tags for Search," page 28).

Headings to structure content. Printed publications use fonts and type size to indicate relative importance of information and create points of entry for readers. In the same way, websites should use HTML "headings" to vary type size to create a hierarchy and establish priority. In code, headings are represented by "H-tags" numbered one through five in order of decreasing importance: <H1>, <H2>, ... <H5>.

For more effective SEO, use H1-tags with your most important keywords, never duplicate a title tag in an H-tag, and use only one H1-tag per page. Generate a keyword cloud (many online sites, both free and paid, can do this) and use Google AdWords Keyword Planner to get an idea of the most frequently recurring keywords in user searches for companies with services like yours. They are likely to be the keywords that rank high in search results.

Keyword frequency. The frequency of keywords is a similar trigger. To improve the chance of ranking high in search results with specific keywords, you should use the most important keywords consistently in your content, title, description, and H-tags, as well as in things like anchor text. (Anchor text is the clickable text in a link to another page or another website. The linked words should always be relevant to the page that you're linking to). Remember also that, like H-tags, bold or italicized type tells Google that the writer thinks the word is important.

Don't overdo it, though. The kind of "keyword stuffing" that was popular a decade ago is now seriously frowned upon by Google and can result in a lower ranking or, in the worst cases, an outright ban from search results.

WHAT'S AN ALGORITHM?

An algorithm may seem mysterious when you think about search engines, but an algorithm is just a set of instructions, similar to the kind we use every day.

For example, if you're flying out of state for a meeting or vacation, you may use the "free-shuttle" algorithm to get from the airport to your hotel:

1. Call the hotel to request pick-up.
2. Wait for driver at baggage claim.
3. Board the shuttle.
4. Buckle in and hope for light traffic.

An alternative, the "taxi algorithm" is similar, but adds a fifth, more expensive, step: "Pay the driver when you arrive." Search engine algorithms are a bit more complex and are expressed mathematically. Here's the original algorithm that Google founders Larry Page and Sergei Brin published in a 1997 paper while still at Stanford:

$$PR(A) = (1-d) + d (PR(T1)/C(T1) + \dots + PR(Tn)/C(Tn))$$

Gibberish, right? (But don't you wish you'd thought of it?) In the ensuing years, Google has changed the algorithm to accommodate changes in how the Web is used—the way your airport algorithm might be modified to include Uber—but the instructions those algorithms contain still determine how the robots interpret what they can "read" on a webpage.

Image descriptions. You need to tell Google what's in your photos. Google's robots can find images on your pages, but they can't "see" what's in the image, so they don't know what it's about. To fix this, use an "alt attribute," which is a text description that explains what's in an image and enables Google to list the image in its image search results. Without alt-tags, a page of images may as well be blank as far as Google is concerned (see "7 Deadly SEO Sins," page 30).

More pages are better. Google automatically indexes your site's pages. The general rule is that the more pages you have, the better. This can backfire if the pages have marginal content or the content strays too far from your most important keywords. But page indexing is one reason why blogging is so important for your website. Blogging creates lots of relevant content to attract traffic, but it also ups the website page count (see "Yes, You Have to Blog," page 32).

Inbound and outbound links. Back when Google started, it delivered better results than its many competitors largely because it used an algorithm that judged a website's relevance to search terms by checking to see how many other websites pointed to it. The algorithm is much more complex today, but links, both incoming and outgoing, are still a big part of page rankings.

Outbound links are important because they provide value to your audience—but only if they work, so make sure you don't have any

Good SEO won't make a bit of difference unless your site appeals to the people who visit. That means using words that attract attention and are persuasive.

broken links (there are a number of free sites that can do this for you). Then make sure that your outbound links point to relevant sites, and that the anchor text (the clickable words you use to link out) are relevant to the site that you are linking to.

Inbound links are equally important because they tell Google that others think your site's content is important. But again, it's important that the linking sites contain content that's relevant to the content on your site. It's hard to control inbound links, but you should encourage links from relevant sites that relate to your expertise—.edu or .org sites, such as the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (nari.org), for example. And you should discourage links from unrelated sites. As with keyword stuffing, too many irrelevant inbound links can harm your ranking.

Getting the Words Right

Pushing all the right SEO buttons will make Google's machines happy, but it won't make a bit of difference if your site isn't appealing to the flesh-and-blood people who land on it. This means that you need to use language that is persuasive. It's not creative writing, and it's not about SEO—it's more like advertising or marketing copy: compelling and attention-getting. Copywriting is an art: I've been doing it for 10 years and though I consider myself above-average at it, I haven't mastered it. Just as you would hire a professional Web designer to create an aesthetically appealing site, I recommend that you hire a professional copywriter to write your site.

Think about how many leads you got last month. Imagine if you could triple that number by using three hypnotic words on your homepage. Would you do it? You probably don't believe it's possible. But I'm going to tell you that it is—because studies show that certain words trigger a subconscious emotional response. Imagine what this would do for your sales!

"You." One of those magic words is "you." Take another look at the previous paragraph: *continued on page 32*

BETTER TAGS FOR SEARCH

Here is how search results for a fictitious remodeler called finehomeinnovations.com would look with three different title tags and descriptions. The order is always the same: Title Tag, URL, Description.

RESULTS:

Fine Home Innovations

www.finehomeinnovations.com

Fine Home Innovations, LLC, is a premier design/build remodeling ... Our team is dedicated to providing our clients with the best customer service and quality ...

↑ *Ho-hum. Nothing special here.*

Additions & Remodeling Services | Pleasantville | Fine Home ...

www.finehomeinnovations.com

Fine Home Innovations, LLC, is a premier design/build remodeling ... Our team is dedicated to providing our clients with the best customer service and quality ...

↑ *Title is more informative and introduces location, which may be important to searchers.*

Award-Winning Pleasantville Remodeler | Download Your Free Idea Kit

www.finehomeinnovations.com

Fine Home Innovations, LLC, is a premier design/build remodeling ... Our team is dedicated to providing our clients with the best customer service and quality ...

↑ *This is my recommended best practice. Location information, the words "award-winning," and a "free" call to action for a "download" are more likely to improve click-through rate (CTR) and boost traffic volume to the site.*

See it at PCBC Booth #823

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milgard.com/DoorCEU



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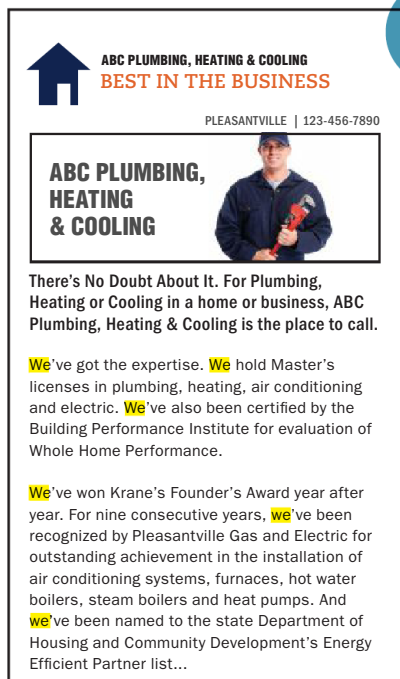
7 DEADLY SEO SINS

Here are seven (plus one bonus) examples where the website doesn't quite get it right

1

◁ IT'S ALL ABOUT ME

The body copy on this page references the remodeler 22 times. But prospects care about themselves, so website content should explain what's in it for them. True, some of this sample copy implies benefits to homeowners, but why dance around it? Tell them directly how choosing your company will benefit them.



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We've got the expertise. **We** hold Master's licenses in plumbing, heating, air conditioning and electric. **We've** also been certified by the Building Performance Institute for evaluation of Whole Home Performance.

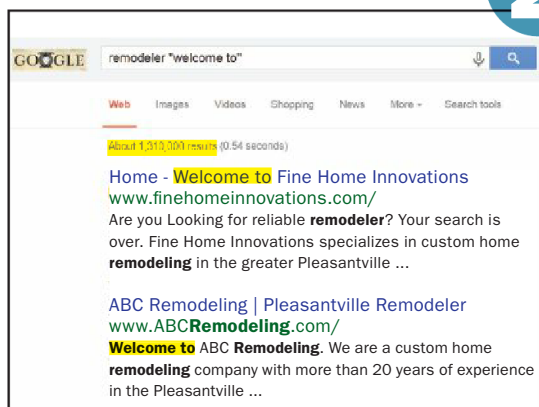
We've won Krane's Founder's Award year after year. For nine consecutive years, **we've** been recognized by Pleasantville Gas and Electric for outstanding achievement in the installation of air conditioning systems, furnaces, hot water boilers, steam boilers and heat pumps. And **we've** been named to the state Department of Housing and Community Development's Energy Efficient Partner list...

2

◁ "WELCOME TO OUR WEBSITE"

Too many websites are filled with overused phrases that have lost all meaning. A random Google search yielded more than 1.3 million results for remodelers who use the phrase "Welcome to" on their homepage.

Save the welcome for when I come and visit you in person. You have three seconds to wow me and keep me from hitting the back button on my browser. Don't waste it by "welcoming" me.



remodeler "welcome to"

Web Images Videos Shopping News More Search tools

About 1,315,001 results (0.54 seconds)

Home - Welcome to Fine Home Innovations
www.finehomeinnovations.com/
Are you Looking for reliable remodeler? Your search is over. Fine Home Innovations specializes in custom home remodeling in the greater Pleasantville ...

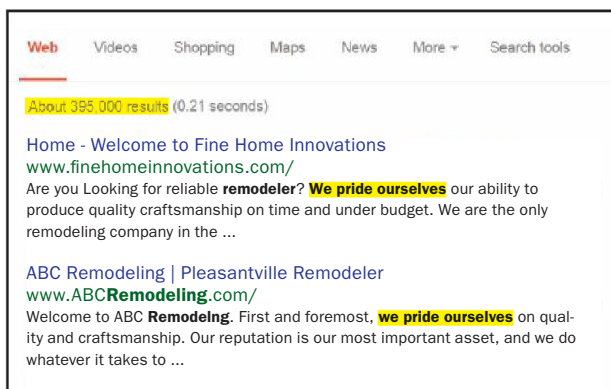
ABC Remodeling | Pleasantville Remodeler
www.ABCRemodeling.com/
Welcome to ABC Remodeling. We are a custom home remodeling company with more than 20 years of experience in the Pleasantville ...

3

▽ "WE PRIDE OURSELVES ..."

This phrase is so overused that it's meaningless. A Google search returned 395,000 remodelers who pride themselves on all the same things: workmanship, customer service, quality, craftsmanship, etc.

If you're trying to separate yourself from the pack, find a different, unique way of telling visitors what you do and how well you do it.



Web Videos Shopping Maps News More Search tools

About 395,000 results (0.21 seconds)

Home - Welcome to Fine Home Innovations
www.finehomeinnovations.com/
Are you Looking for reliable remodeler? **We pride ourselves** our ability to produce quality craftsmanship on time and under budget. We are the only remodeling company in the ...

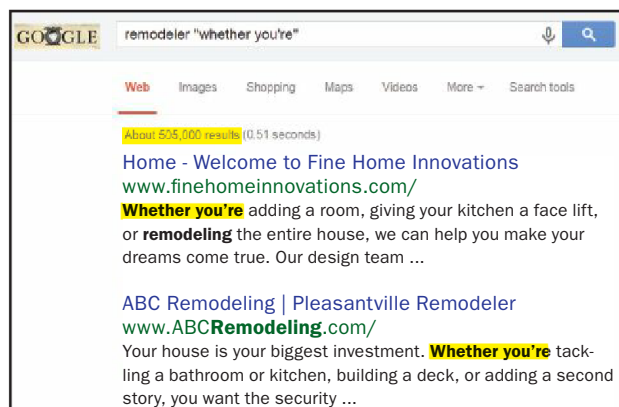
ABC Remodeling | Pleasantville Remodeler
www.ABCRemodeling.com/
Welcome to ABC Remodeling. First and foremost, **we pride ourselves** on quality and craftsmanship. Our reputation is our most important asset, and we do whatever it takes to ...

4

△ "WHETHER YOU'RE ..."

As in, "Whether you're tackling a bathroom, kitchen, or whole-house remodel" A Google search returns more than 500,000 results of remodeler homepages that use this phrase. So it's not going to make your company stand out from the crowd.

The word "you" properly aims at the customer, but in this form, it tries to cover all the bases. Your copy should not speak to everybody; it should speak specifically to the needs of your target customers.



remodeler "whether you're"

Web Images Shopping Maps Videos More Search tools

About 505,000 results (0.51 seconds)

Home - Welcome to Fine Home Innovations
www.finehomeinnovations.com/
Whether you're adding a room, giving your kitchen a face lift, or remodeling the entire house, we can help you make your dreams come true. Our design team ...

ABC Remodeling | Pleasantville Remodeler
www.ABCRemodeling.com/
Your house is your biggest investment. **Whether you're** tackling a bathroom or kitchen, building a deck, or adding a second story, you want the security ...

5

ENDLESS WEB FORMS

This screen is almost comical. I can get a “Quick Quote,” but I have to fill out a form that endlessly spans the entire right rail with a total of eight fields. Not only that, but they all have the dreaded asterisk*, which means they are all required. Why would you want to put this many obstacles in the way of a potential customer who wants to get in touch with you?

Plus, this one has a “captcha” box at the bottom. Unless you’re so overwhelmed with site traffic and form submissions that you need to make sure a spam bot isn’t submitting them, get rid of that immediately.

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Please tell us about your project, and we will be happy to provide you with a free onsite consultation.

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Home Addition

Describe in as much detail as you can about what you are wishing to have done. *

Describe in detail what you are looking for

Captcha

RFTCU

Submit

6

MYSTERY NAVIGATION

Main website navigation almost always runs in a horizontal bar across the top; this site puts it in the right rail. This is awkward and uncomfortable for the user, who doesn’t expect to find it there. I actually struggled navigating this site because I kept scrolling to the top. (And why is “Home” at the bottom of the list?) Unless you’re a master Web designer, don’t get cute with navigation.

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Galleries
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Contacts
Home

7

MISSING NAVIGATION

Look at the last paragraph on this homepage, where it says, “... feel free to look around and contact us ...” Besides the fact that this is very bad copy, why isn’t the phrase “contact us” a hyperlink? Instead, visitors need to search for the link.

Look also in the right rail where it says, “Fill out the contact form.” Where is it? This is poor usability design. Prospects coming to your website don’t want to play Where’s Waldo? Imagine the user experience, then make it easy for users to do the things you want them to do.

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ABC PLUMBING, HEATING & COOLING

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8

INTRODUCTION PAGES

Here’s a bonus example of a homepage design that we can all be thankful is becoming less common. So-called “introduction” pages look pretty, but all Google sees are two words: “skip introduction.” As far as the bots are concerned, there is no content on this page. Epic fail.

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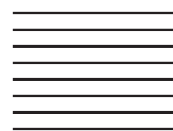
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ONLINE LEADS



YES, YOU HAVE TO BLOG

I'm sorry, but if you want your website to generate leads, you have to have an engaging and consistent blog.

Blogging serves both people and machines, and the data overwhelmingly supports the fact that it has a profound effect on how a website performs. For example, companies that blog have 97 percent more inbound links and more than four times as many indexed pages (source: SocialMediaToday.com). That's a lot of fuel for SEO.

Plus, 78 percent of consumers feel that companies that blog are genuinely interested in building relationships (source: McMurryTMG.com). Maybe that's why companies that blog generate 88 percent more leads per month than those that do not (source: HubSpot.com).

Unlike copywriting, blogging isn't selling; it's building relationships. That's important because, according to Forrester research, 70 percent of the buyer's journey is complete before they reach out to a salesperson. A blog moves people along the path toward buying.

What should you write about? Whatever interests you target market. Remember, it's about them, not you.

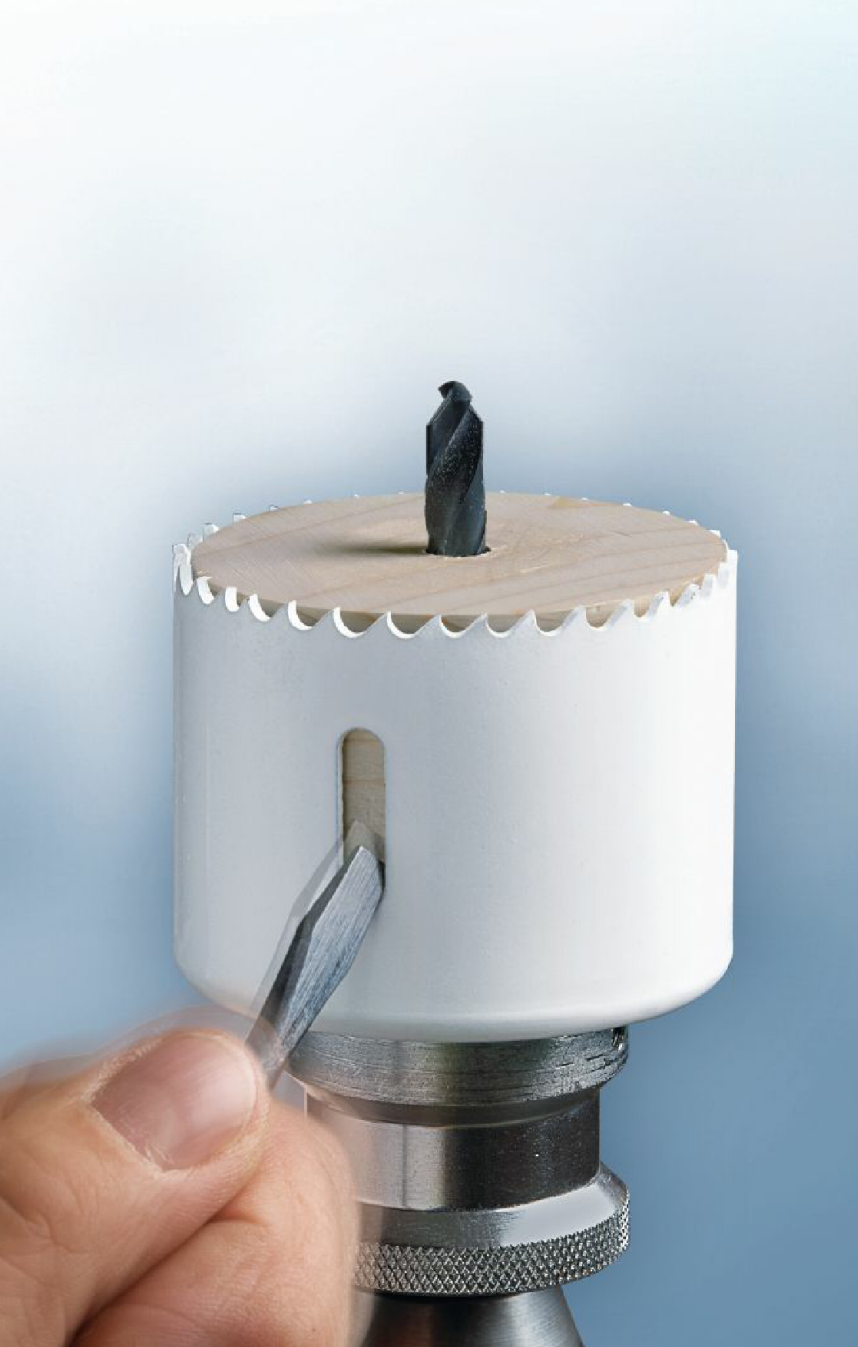
Think about how many leads **you** got last month. Imagine if **you** could triple that number by using three hypnotic words on **your** homepage. Would **you** do it? **You** probably don't believe it's possible. But I'm going to tell **you** that it is—because studies show that certain words trigger a subconscious emotional response. Imagine what this would do for **your** sales!

There's nothing as stimulating to us as our own interests, desires, ambitions, goals, yearnings, and emotions. The psychological effect called Fundamental Attribution Error, which, simply put, means that while we are naturally critical of other people, our critical minds take a break when we evaluate ourselves.

"Imagine" and "Because." Look at that paragraph again. The word "imagine," which appears twice, has a powerful effect on most people. To the human brain, there's no difference between visualizing a tree and seeing an actual tree. If you ask people to imagine a new kitchen or bath, you are giving them a psychological push to pull the trigger on the project.

"Because" is another trigger word used in the sample paragraph that has a profound effect on human behavior. Psychologist Robert Cialdini, in his book *The Psychology of Persuasion*,

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Unlike copywriting, blogging isn't selling, it's building relationships. But a blog definitely moves people along the path toward buying.

describes an experiment in which people using a copy machine were asked by a Cialdini collaborator if they could jump in front. Here are the three ways they asked, and the percentage of people who agreed to stop copying and let them jump in:

"Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine?" Sixty percent agreed.

"Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine because I'm in a rush?" Ninety-four percent agreed.

"Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine

because I have to make some copies?" Ninety-three percent agreed!

The remarkable thing about the last example is that the reason is a tautology, but almost everyone still agreed. We humans need an answer to the question "Why?" Your site can't just say "Choose us." You need to provide unique and convincing reasons for visitors to take action. **PR**

Mark Harari is director of marketing and chief storyteller at Remodelers Advantage, a peer-to-peer network based in Laurel, Md.



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Inventive Remodelers

Do you have a great idea that will satisfy the appetite of a hungry market? Four remodelers show what it takes to make that vision a reality

By Charlie Wardell

Thomas Edison reportedly said that genius is 1 percent inspiration, and 99 percent perspiration. As a prolific inventor with more than 1,000 patents to his name, he would have known. The remodelers-turned-inventors profiled here have all lived Edison's adage. They each had an Aha! moment, followed by years of sweat equity and

tens of thousands of dollars of investment. Most had no idea of the persistence it would require to bring their dream to market.

None have any regrets about their decision, and all plan to develop additional products or are already doing so. It seems that once you catch the invention bug, it's tough to shake it.

Trade Secrets

Frank Notaro's brainstorm was a plastic bracket for framing soffits without dimensional lumber. Although he believed it would find a receptive market, the Long Island architect couldn't afford to walk away from his thriving design/build business, and he lacked the needed engineering and injection-molding knowledge.

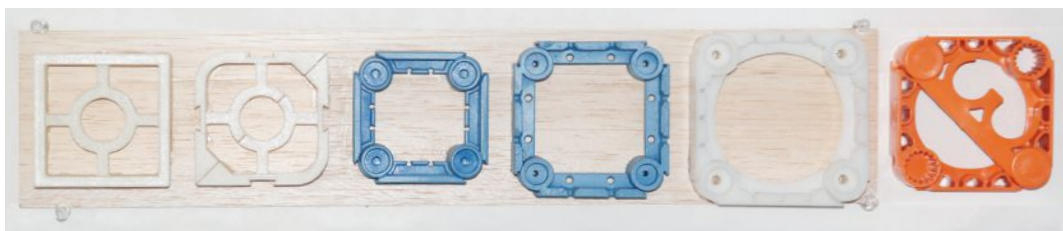
Fortunately, his son is a rocket scientist. "I'm an aerospace engineer by education," Sam Notaro says. "I left my PhD program to pursue Simpliframe full time."

The two men spent two-and-a-half years getting from initial concept to final product, with several iterations. It started as an inflexible block of solid plastic; it ended up as an interlocking modular system.

WHAT IT IS: Simpliframe

Supplied in kits, these modular, interlocking plastic parts can be assembled into a variety of configurations and used to frame a soffit, wrap a column, or support and enclose plumbing pipes or HVAC ducts. It's cleaner and quicker than dimensional lumber and leaves a smaller profile. simpliframe.com

No. 825 on reader service card



Simpliframe started as a solid piece of plastic and, after more than 100 changes, evolved into a snap-together modular system.

The Notaros' main advice to inventors is to carefully guard their intellectual property. "File a provisional patent right away, or risk losing your international patent rights," Frank advises. "You will have a year to file a full patent." When talking with potential manufacturers and other business partners, they also require a nondisclosure agreement. "It's a critical document that stands up in court," he says. One way to find an attorney is to network with other inventors. The Notaros belong to the Suffolk County Inventors Association, and two or three patent attorneys usually show up for the meetings.

Like all the inventors we spoke with, the Notaros chose a local manufacturer for their first products. "We made close to 100 changes," Sam says. "We were constantly on the phone with the manufacturer and had to visit quite a bit, so having them close by made it a lot easier."

As for marketing, they say that it's important to understand that most remodelers want to touch and feel a new product before buying. That's why the Notaros connect with their market by exhibiting at trade shows and visiting lots of lumberyards and contractors. "We carry a suitcase with product samples and 3-foot high columns," Sam says. "This gives people a chance to try it."

Frank has a notebook with about 200 invention ideas in it, but he and Sam have also tuned their antennae to unexpected opportunities. "Someone came to our trade show booth and asked if he could use Simpliframe to enclose a lally column," Frank recalls. "We hadn't considered that, but Sam ran over to the lally column booth and it fit. So we came up with a package for that application."

WHAT IT IS: Smart-Bracket Staging

This OSHA-compliant staging system includes wall brackets that hook over the top plate to provide support for standard aluminum staging planks, and railing brackets that hook onto the planks. A pair of brackets is load-rated at 1,000 pounds. smartbracketstaging.com
No. 826 on reader service card

Fall Stopper

Colchester, Vt., contractor Eric Kurtz has been in construction all his life, including stints as a U.S. Navy Seabee and a pipeline welder. Today he and his wife, Laurie Goldstein, manage a local design/build remodeling business, where Eric focuses on computer-aided design.

Those skills came in handy when he came up with the idea for Smart-Bracket Staging, an OSHA-compliant wall and rail bracket system. "I just opened my laptop and started designing it in CAD," Kurtz says. "Then I went out to the shop and started welding."

He conceived the product as a time-saver. "With a conventional bracket, you have to drill through the wall, you need a guy on the inside to tighten the bolt, and you only get a 250-pound rating," Kurtz says. "With Smart Bracket you can hook it over the top



plate and be done." Each bracket is rated for 500 pounds.

The first version was too heavy, so Kurtz had to scale it down. Doing so halved the manufacturing price. After talking with potential customers, he reengineered the bracket so that it can be raised to serve as a catch platform at the edge of a roof. When combined with rail brackets on the plank and eaves, this relieves roofers from the need to wear harnesses. Other ideas are also in the works, he says. "I'm going to keep looking for ways to make jobs safer."



WHAT IT IS: SkyLift Roof Riser Hardware

The SkyLift is an alternative method for attaching patio roof framing to an existing roof. The hardware consists of a riser tube welded to a mounting bracket that is fastened to the top plate of the main house framing. After flashing the riser with a standard pipe boot, the saddle slips over the top and is bolted into position to accept the patio roof framing. skylifthardware.com

No. 827 on reader service card

Sowing Seeds

Doug Lethin believes remodeling experience is good background for an inventor. “As a remodeler I have always been solution-oriented,” he says. “So when I looked at the contraptions people use as patio covers, it wasn’t difficult to imagine a better way.” The result was SkyLift, a steel riser bracket that elevates the patio roof well above the surface of the main roof.

Lethin is on the State of Oregon Structural Board, so he knows a lot of building officials. “They were encouraging,” he says. It only took a month to get from concept to the first prototype, but an engineer who looked at the prototype pointed out some possible issues with seismic and lateral loads. “He helped me design a heavy-duty version, which I then prototyped again.” The final product was tested for lateral loads and uplift at Oregon State University.

Marketing has proved to be the biggest challenge. Although Lethin understands the distribution system and the required margins—he once managed a hardware store and lumberyard—he met

some initial resistance from both contractors and dealers. He says that several dismissed the product at first, but came around after seeing how simple it was to install.

Lethin’s approach to marketing is to make lots of connections and to talk with lots of people—what he calls “sowing seeds.” “I’m constantly calling contractors, lumberyards, and others in the industry,” he says. The secret to getting a receptive ear is to start the conversation as a question. “I’ll [call the lumberyard and] ask if customers have asked about alternate ways of building a patio cover,” he says. The answer is usually yes, which starts a conversation. “Once they go to my website, they see SkyLift as the solution.”

Lethin’s advice to would-be inventors? “Be patient and persistent. Find an adviser who challenges you rather than just agreeing with you.”

He’s also a believer in reaching out to fellow inventors. “When I see their products in industry publications, I call them up. At first they’re kind of shocked, but then are really open to talking with me.”

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WHAT IT IS: Mosely Infinity Level

This is a modular system of 1- and 2-foot spirit levels that can be linked together end-to-end or at 90-degree angles in two dimensions. When fastened to a wall (while installing cabinets, for example), the bubbles can be adjusted to level with built-in cam knobs, then serve as a temporary ledger. infinitylevel.com

No. 828 on reader service card

Going All In

Once Michael Lueck was convinced that his Mosely Infinity Level would be a winner, there was no turning back. “We sold our home and invested the equity,” recalls the former San Jose, Calif., contractor and building inspector. The plan was to move the family to a less expensive city, until the stars suddenly aligned. “There are no rental homes in the Bay Area for less than \$3,000 per month, but a friend found us one for \$1,900.”

The idea for the Mosely (named after Lueck’s young son) Infinity Level came to Lueck while he was watching his tile installer. “I wanted to find a faster way to level the courses on adjoining walls,” he says.

The biggest surprise was the number of setbacks. Lueck and local machinist Russ Borg—who Lueck credits as co-inventor—built early prototypes by putting custom-milled connectors on the ends of standard levels, but after a year of work, the tolerances still weren’t tight enough. “Some people told me we would never get there,”

Lueck recalls. But he and Borg worked closely with a local manufacturer to refine the design.

At one point, the money ran out and things stalled for six months. “Then my father-in-law came in as an investment partner,” Lueck says. In April 2015, three years after he got the initial idea, the company started taking pre-orders. The first levels will ship this month.

The next challenge is to reduce manufacturing costs. The eventual goal is for the company to own a CNC machine, but that may have to wait until sales are strong enough to support a bank loan or attract a manufacturing partner. But Lueck is not waiting to push ahead. “The biggest mistake I made was doing nothing for months while I had no money,” he says. “Then when my father-in-law came in it took another two months to get restarted.” Now he’s actively looking for investors. “It doesn’t cost anything to talk with people.” **PR**

Charlie Wardell is a freelance writer and former remodeler in Tisbury, Mass.



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The Skinny on LEDs

With initial cost for bulbs coming down, there just aren't any good reasons left for not making the switch to LEDs

By Doug Walter

The promise of LEDs is that if you change your light bulbs today when your child is, say, starting kindergarten, they won't need to be changed again until he or she is a couple years out of grad school.

Commercial success stories abound, but what's the payback for the average homeowner? How can you justify paying three or four times the cost of a "normal" light bulb for this newfangled, strange-looking LED bulb, which you know little about? Many consumers can't see beyond the low initial cost of incandescents, ignoring the energy payback and replacement cost savings inherent in LEDs. It's time to change that thinking.

When I started doing the math for light bulb operating and replacement costs, the results floored me. I thought payback may occur in three or four years, but if you're replacing incandescent or halogen bulbs, in most cases you can recover your increased investment *within the very first year* (see "What's the Payback?" on page 48). After that, there are at least a dozen additional years of pure savings. Bernie Madoff couldn't have gotten away with promising anywhere near that return on investment.

Are incandescents bad? No, they're not bad, they're *horrible*! Why would you cling to a lighting technology that delivers just 10 percent of the energy used as light and converts the rest to heat? An incandescent bulb is really just a very expensive and inefficient space heater. We cling to them because they're what we know. But it's time that we learn some new "tricks."

What about fluorescents? Fluorescent bulbs arrived on the scene commercially in the 1940s and took off in the 1950s, especially in offices, schools, and institutions, mostly because they were three to four times as efficient as incandescents. Eventually, they worked their way into homes. The sole light source in the kitchen of our New

Jersey home in the 1950s was an unshielded circline fluorescent. (Maybe that's why I'm so obsessed with good lighting today.)

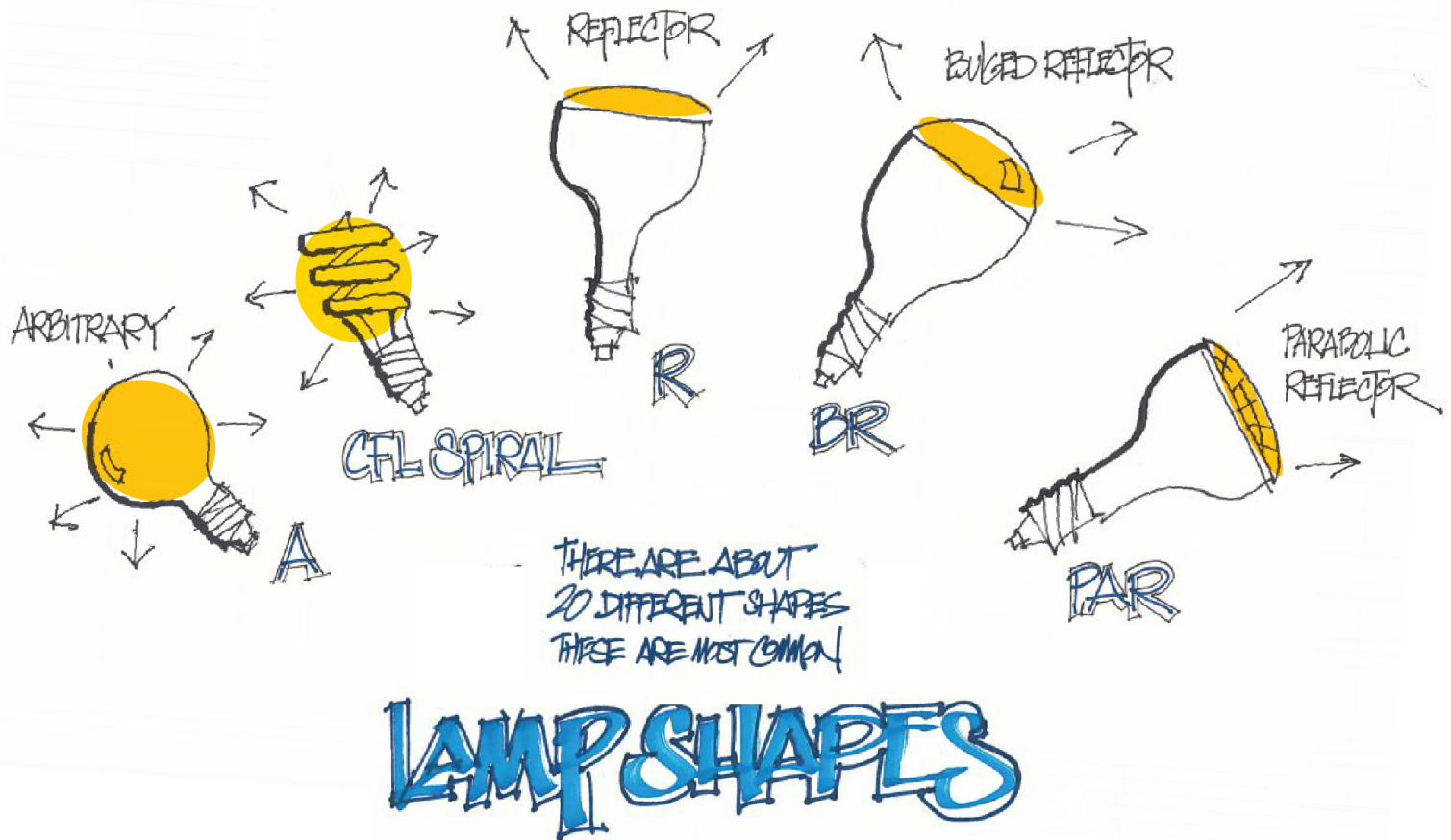
Personally, I think fluorescents of all types, including CFLs, will be gone within five years because LEDs outperform them in so many ways. For starters, fluorescents take time to reach operating temperature and full output. Plus, cold weather and frequent switching reduce lamp life, and it's difficult to find dimmable models. Fluorescents also contain a little bit of mercury, a known toxin, which means that a broken bulb poses a health threat, and even an intact bulb is a disposal problem. There are also lingering concerns about slow flickering from old or malfunctioning fluorescents triggering epilepsy.

Did I mention poor light quality? I've used fluorescent recessed fixtures (R lamps—basically a CFL inside a reflector) on only one kitchen project, but I wasn't happy with the light quality and went back to halogen. I still use fluorescent tube fixtures in garages, basements, laundry rooms, and closets, but I suspect that within a year there will be several good LED equivalents available (Costco already has one). All that has prevented the substitution so far has been the price difference.

Cost & Risk of Relamping

One aspect in the LED debate that has so far received little attention is the safety of the light source itself. Skin starts to burn at about 140°F, but standard incandescents can easily reach 200°F. CFLs are a bit better, reaching about 160°F, but an MR16 halogen accent light, used widely in decorative pendants and lamps, burns at a scorching 400°F. LEDs, by comparison, run at a relatively cool 120°F. If I had toddlers or a live-in senior parent, I wouldn't hesitate to choose safer LED bulbs on this basis alone.

Hard-to-reach fixture hazards. Another often-overlooked but very real safety issue is the difficulty in replacing some light bulbs. This point



was driven home to me when I had to accompany my mother-in-law to the emergency room to get a gash on her leg stitched up after she slipped off the chair she was standing on while trying to replace a burned-out bulb.

Hard-to-reach fixtures aren't just a problem for seniors. Many newer homes have grand entrances with 18-foot-high ceilings or vaulted staircases or family rooms. In many cases, some genius decided to light those spaces with recessed cans. When it comes time to relamp them, you have two choices: hire an electrician with a really tall ladder or scissor lift, or invest in a wobbly aluminum extension pole with an attachment on the end that you will use to try to grab the burned out lamp without breaking it off in the socket. (If you fail at this arcade-like game, you will need to hire an electrician with a really tall ladder. ...)

I talked with Sean Howell, owner of Advantage Electric, in Denver, who has seen plenty of smashed lamps and trims knocked loose by homeowners with poles. He has stepladders up to 24 feet tall, but to safely erect them, it takes three men, so a service call like this would run about \$300. For more extensive relamping, Howell brings out his own scaffolding, but he says homeowners should "plan on a \$700 or \$800 bill for that." Hmm. You could buy a lot of LEDs for that kind of money!

Howell also told me that he offers an LED alternative. "But on the service side, there's not much buy-in," he adds. "[Homeowners] will

There are literally dozens of bulb shapes; these are just the most common ones we deal with. Although you can buy recessed cans that are optimized for A lamps, the light still blasts out in every direction instead of mostly down, which is where you need it. The solution: "reflector" lamps, which decrease in beam width from BR to R to PAR to better direct the light. Only a PAR bulb will avoid glare in a recessed fixture, which is why you should avoid recessed cans for ambient lighting. This is also the advantage of a dedicated LED fixture or screw-in retrofit LED kit: The homeowner can't mess it up by replacing a carefully chosen but burned out PAR lamp with a spiral CFL that has none of the characteristics you planned.

wait until the last one burns out to call me. I find that people who are building new are more open to the LED conversation."

Type & Color Temperature Matter

My guinea pig for this article was a colleague, intern architect Don Gibson, who happened to mention to me that his kitchen lights were burning out too frequently. And so, on a recent lunch hour, off we went to the lighting aisle at The Home Depot to learn about new lamp technologies.

The vast array of offerings is a bit overwhelming, so I suggested that we start by finding the bulbs that he currently uses. He picked up a Philips halogen BR 30, which uses 65 watts to put out 620 lumens; it has a 2,700K color temperature, a lamp life of 2.3 years, and a price



BULB TYPE	LED	CFL	HALOGEN	INCANDESCENT
	PAR 30	PAR3 0	PAR 30L	BR 30
COST (EACH)	\$15.97	\$7.66	\$9.47	\$3.99
LUMENS	750	630	620	950
LAMP LIFE (YEARS)	13.7	5.5	2.4	1.4
WATTS	10.5	15	50	65
ANNUAL USE (HOURS) *	1,825	1,825	1,825	1,825
ANNUAL KWH USED	19.2	27.4	91.3	118.6
COST/KWH *	\$0.115	\$0.115	\$0.115	\$0.115
ANNUAL ENERGY COST	\$2.20	\$3.15	\$10.49	\$13.64
13-YEAR COST OF BULBS	\$15.97	\$22.98	\$47.35	\$39.90
13-YEAR OPERATING COST	\$28.65	\$40.93	\$136.42	\$177.34
13-YEAR TOTAL COST	\$44.62	\$63.91	\$183.77	\$217.24

* GOVERNMENT-MANDATED "LIGHTING FACTS" ON LED PACKAGING ESTIMATES 3 HOURS OF USE PER DAY AND 11 CENTS PER KWH

WHAT'S THE PAYBACK?

The table at left compares initial cost and operating expense for a single LED PAR 30 bulb with the equivalent CFL, halogen, and incandescent bulbs. Given that many of the numbers used here are more conservative than those in the government-mandated "Lighting Facts" table found on lamp packaging, this table represents a "worst case" scenario.

For example, bulb life for LEDs is typically based on 3 hours of use daily; I believe that 5 hours is a more realistic number. The cost of electricity also varies widely geographically. I've used current cost in Denver, where I live, but the national average is about 12 cents per kWh. Idaho is lowest at 8 cents; Hawaii, highest at 33 cents,

of \$3.99 each. The LED version was a Philips BR 30 65-watt equivalent, using 9.5 watts to produce 730 lumens; the price was \$16.97. But a BR 30 has an extremely wide spread of about 75 degrees (see "Lamp Shapes," on page 43), so it has much more potential for glare and doesn't deliver enough foot-candles (fc) to the countertop (20 fc, more or less, in an 8-foot ceiling). As an alternative, I suggested the Philips PAR 30 LED, which has a tighter beam spread (about 30 degrees) and delivers about 39 fc to the counter. This lamp uses 10.5 watts and puts out 750 lumens, with a 3,000K color temperature and a lamp life of 22.8 years. The price (gulp!): \$22.97 apiece.

The next morning, Don reported that he very much liked the neutral whiteness of the LED, but that his wife preferred the warmth of the old halogens. So after living with the 3,000K LED over the weekend, he headed back to the store on Monday to swap it for a 2,700K version. He borrowed my light meter and reported that the LED delivered 37 foot-candles to the work surface—coincidentally, that's about 37 percent more than the 27 fc delivered by the BR 30 that he had previously been using.

Name brands vs. off brands. A recent report I saw from a British trade publication talked about a shipment of LEDs that was seized by customs. Three-quarters of the bulbs tested were found to be unsafe or noncompliant with European energy regulations. The takeaway here: Stick with brands you know. These manufacturers have reputations to uphold and will be around to honor their warranties. Also, name brands use "binning," a process that groups like-color outputs together. It adds cost, but it creates more consistent color lamp to lamp.

The truth about dimming. I'm a huge fan of dimmers, whatever the light source. I think it is far better to "over-light" a space and provide dimming than it is to under-light a space. In my last kitchen remodel, we had five circuits of lighting, and the only ones that we typically ran full-strength were the decorative pendants and undercabinet fluorescents. Everything else usually ran at about half-strength.

If LEDs have a downside, dimming is it. John Quade, senior lighting consultant with MH Lighting, in Denver, says, "If you thought dimming fluorescents was complicated, try dimming LEDs." According to Quade, phase-cut dimming works well with resistive loads such as incandescent or halogen, but not necessarily as well with electronic loads like CFLs or LEDs. Consequently, sophisticated LED dimmers often cost more than standard dimmers, even though they are the same size. (They also run cooler because they handle far less load.)

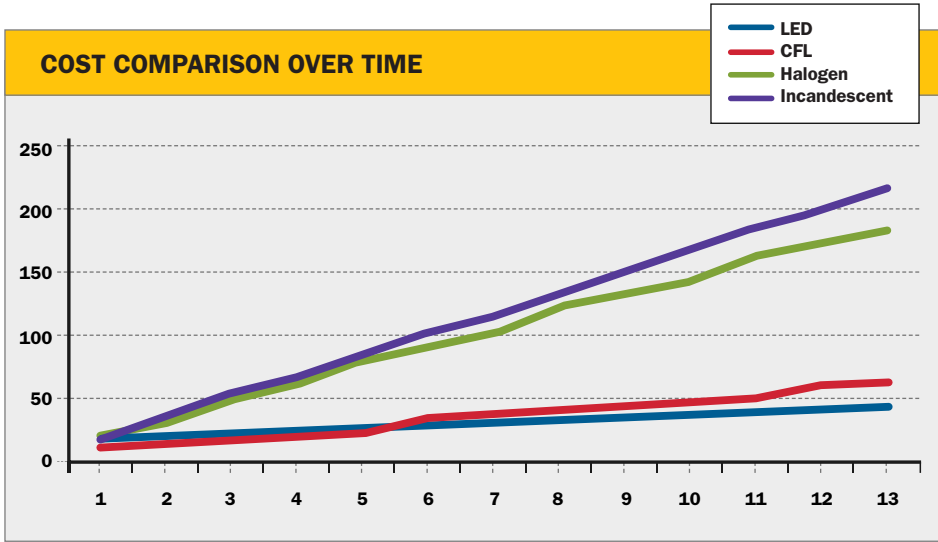
In addition, not all dimmers designed for LEDs will work with all types of LED lamps. The problem seems to be confined to dedicated LED fixtures.

Advantage Electric's Sean Howell has seen plenty of problems with dimmer compatibility, but says, "Fortunately, most LED replacement lamps you buy are very compatible with incandescent dimmers." But, he adds, it's important to make sure that the lamp says it is "dimmable" and to what extent. Most LEDs dim nicely down to 10 percent but may not go to zero, like an incandescent bulb can.

with many states, such as New York, at around 18 cents. Obviously, the higher the rate per kWh, the quicker the payoff for LEDs.

Keep in mind that the costs shown here apply to just one bulb of each type. But the average new home or whole-house remodel uses nearly 100 surface or recessed fixtures. When I do that math, the savings over halogen or incandescent bulbs is about \$16,000 over the 15,000-hour (13.7-year) estimated life of the LED. The savings over CFLs—which are second only to LEDs in efficiency and bulb life—is about \$4,000.

But remember, that the 15,000-hour LED bulb life estimate is itself conservative. In a fixture specifically designed for LEDs, bulbs can last two or three times longer (40,000 to 50,000 hours).



The table (opposite) compares initial expense and annual operating cost for one bulb of each type. The graph above compares total cost over the 13-year estimated life of an LED bulb. Costs include 1 LED and initial and replacement costs for 3 CFLs, 5 halogens, and 10 incandescents.

The Hybrid Solution

For several years now, remodelers have been specifying standard incandescent recessed cans but equipping them with screw-in LED lamps. And until recently, that's exactly what I have been doing.

But there are two problems with that approach. First, it shortens the life of the lamp. LEDs already last a long time—about 15,000 hours (13 years at 3 hours per day). However, lighting manufacturers have told me that this estimated lifespan is deliberately conservative because they don't know the heat-dissipation characteristics of the fixture it will be used in. So if you were to specify a dedicated LED fixture, which has the lamp built in, the rated hours jump to 40,000 (about 36 years) or more. That's because the entire fixture has been engineered to optimize lamp life and performance.

The second problem is that when it comes time to relamp a standard recessed fixture, the homeowner might not know or be able to find the correct replacement. If your carefully chosen LED spotlight gets replaced with an A lamp or a CFL, it undermines the photometrics intended in the original design.

A better solution: plug-in modules. To accommodate the millions of recessed cans currently in use, manufacturers have developed LED modules that screw into a standard Edison base. I saw four brands at The Home Depot, with prices between \$17 and \$29.

For example, a Halo retrofit baffle with a built-in LED fits 5- or 6-inch recessed cans. It installs easily and converts the can to an airtight, IC- and shower-rated unit. As a bonus, it's rated for 50,000 hours—triple the rating of screw-in LED replacement lamps. The HALO retrofit

baffle is available with LED lamps in 2,700K, 3,000K, 3,500K, and 4,000K color temperatures, and a CRI (Color Rendering Index) rating of either 80 or 90, depending on which model you choose.

Stop Making Excuses

Good lighting is subjective; what works for me may not work for you (or your spouse). If you haven't had real-world experience with LEDs, I recommend that you first experiment, the way Don did.

Pick up three or four LED bulbs that you think may work. Where you shop matters. The big-box stores have a broad selection, and a lighting showroom will have live dedicated LED fixtures on display. Choose several color temperatures between 2,700K and 3,500K.

Back home, try for a side-by-side trial by replacing your kitchen incandescents with the LEDs (save the packaging because some of them are going back). You can even use a free light-meter app on your smartphone to compare light levels. Live with the new lamps for a weekend, keep your favorite, return the others, and buy more of the winner. If the bulbs perform as advertised, you won't have to buy lamps again for at least 13 years. But save the receipt; every now and then an LED experiences early failure. **PR**

Doug Walter is senior architect at Godden/Sudik Architects, in Centennial, Colo. An active member of the NAHB, AIA, NKBA, and the Illuminating Engineering Society, Doug has specialized in residential remodeling since 1979. He currently manages from 15 to 20 clients at any one time, all of whom need major upgrades to their lighting.

A modern kitchen with vintage-inspired elements. On the left, a large white range with a stainless steel backsplash and a tall, dark grey cabinet above it. The kitchen features light green cabinets, a dark countertop, and a stainless steel oven. A large window provides a view of the outdoors. In the foreground, a wooden dining table with four chairs is set with a vase of flowers. A chandelier hangs from the ceiling, and three pendant lights are visible near the sink area.

Vintage Done Right

*Creating aesthetically relevant retro designs isn't just a matter of slapping up
a wall of beadboard and calling it a day*

By Erika Taylor, Chief of Content



PHOTOS: WHIT PRESTON

This home was built for the owners of an organic farm in East Austin who wanted a modest space reminiscent of a vintage farmhouse, but without a dated feel.

“The idea was not to do a historical replica,” says Eric Rauser, the home’s architect. “This isn’t some sort of theater where we’re presenting ‘The Old House.’ We wanted scale and materials that harken back to a traditional farmhouse, but with modern touches that allow us to be less referential.”

That concept starts at the front door. Typical suburban homes generally have a foyer, but an old farmhouse has no need for that formality. Rauser placed the entrance right at the kitchen to both create a vintage feel and maximize space.

The small kitchen table is sometimes used for canning, or as a place to sit while keeping the cook company, but the owners mostly eat outside in a dining area on the porch.

Whenever possible, the clients selected locally made products. One striking example is the 100-year-old loblolly pine (also known as Southern yellow pine) floor used throughout much of the home. Reclaimed by a local millworks company, the floor was made from beams 18 inches wide by 30 to 40 feet long; true showstoppers in the current era where 15 feet is considered “extra long.” There were bolt holes at the ends of each piece, but rather than saw those sections off and scrap them, the ends were repurposed into side tables and other furniture for the home. The clients love the floor’s character, and part of the design’s intent was to create a space that showcases the timber’s knotty beauty and variegated shades of warm brown.

The cabinetry was locally made as well. Its distinctive color is inspired by the soft hue of the eggs that arrive daily from the farm’s chickens. The honed soapstone counters were left unfinished so that they will show the history of use over time.

One unusual aspect of the project is its layout. Rather than adhering to the classic kitchen work triangle with stove, sink, and refrigerator serving as the three points, Rauser wanted to highlight the separate phases of food preparation: prep work, cooking, and cleaning up.

“People begin with things like chopping, and that can be done while chatting with someone,” Rauser says, adding that that’s the perfect use for an island or peninsula. “Next comes cooking,” he says, “and there you start to get a little bit serious. That’s better against the wall, with materials around you.” The final space, he explains, is a spot to stack dirty dishes away from the prep and cooking areas. This configuration is more useful than the traditional triangle, Rauser believes, because it allows for differences in the function of each area and lets cooks easily move between one section and the next.

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

CONTRACTOR: Matt Risinger, Risinger Homes

ARCHITECT: Eric Rauser, AIA, Rauser Design

INTERIOR DESIGNER: Chris Browarski

LOCATION: Austin, Texas

WEBSITE: risingerhomes.com



Incorporating Modern Appliances

Marrying contemporary products with a vintage design is always a challenge. One solution is to just live with the uneasy clash of styles, but Rauser didn't like that idea. "You see the whole kitchen as soon as you walk in the front door, and I didn't want people to immediately be smacked in the face by a very modern refrigerator," he says.

Another possibility was to purchase new appliances that are made to appear vintage, but Rauser feels that those products have a self-consciousness that can set a false tone.

His answer to the melding of old and new: "Hide" some of the modern appliances so that they're not as prominent. To that end, the refrigerator is tucked off to one side, opposite the first of two sinks. (Also see cover image.) A microwave drawer was created to avoid the "appliance tower" common in many modern kitchens

that feature a wall oven, microwave, and coffee maker built into the cabinetry.

Another tip of the hat to tradition is the woodburning stove set behind the kitchen. The house is efficiently warmed with a heat pump, but the farmers knew that they would be out working the fields on cold mornings and wanted to be next to a direct source of heat to warm their hands. The stove also offers the emotional appeal of being a cozy reminder of a simpler time.

The clients wanted two sinks, one for dishes and a "starting sink" right off the garden. Nearby, the pantry is stocked with all the necessary prep items. From there, cooks move to the cooking zone around the stove, and eventually migrate to the other sink to clean up and put away dishes.

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Double-Duty

The vintage stove looks almost incandescent and serves as the kitchen's focal point, fulfilling dual roles as appliance and art piece.

The property already had a house on it built during the 1950s with an old-school chambered stove. Rather than buy a new one, the clients sent the old stove out to be refinished and equipped with modern safety features.

"As with the entire kitchen, it's all about 'editing,'" Rauser says. "We wanted the range to have the feel of something old, but not actually fool anyone."

To that end, he added a locally made contemporary rangehood designed to resemble a commercial installation. The boxy, industrial-style hood and the stainless steel backsplash create a strong counterpoint to the old stove. "The idea was to have a vintage piece framed by something clearly new and modern," Rauser says.

The painted tongue-and-groove pine walls were purposely left unadorned to further highlight the stove's beauty.

Some design considerations were more functional than aesthetic. Back in the day, stove heights tended to be low, and the clients are tall, so steel panel legs were installed to raise the rangetop. The countertops are higher as well.

The large butcherblock to the left of the stove is an eye-catching and practical detail that also visually ties in the countertop to the warm wood tones of the floor. **PR**





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BATH MATH

By Bill Millholland

Time was when a master bath and a hall bath for the kids was sufficient for most families. Some households also had a first-floor powder room, but many got by with just the hall bath. Lately, though, more and more clients are asking to add bathrooms. Whatever the reason—so the kids don't have to share, or a guest suite can have its own private bath—bathrooms are popular right now.

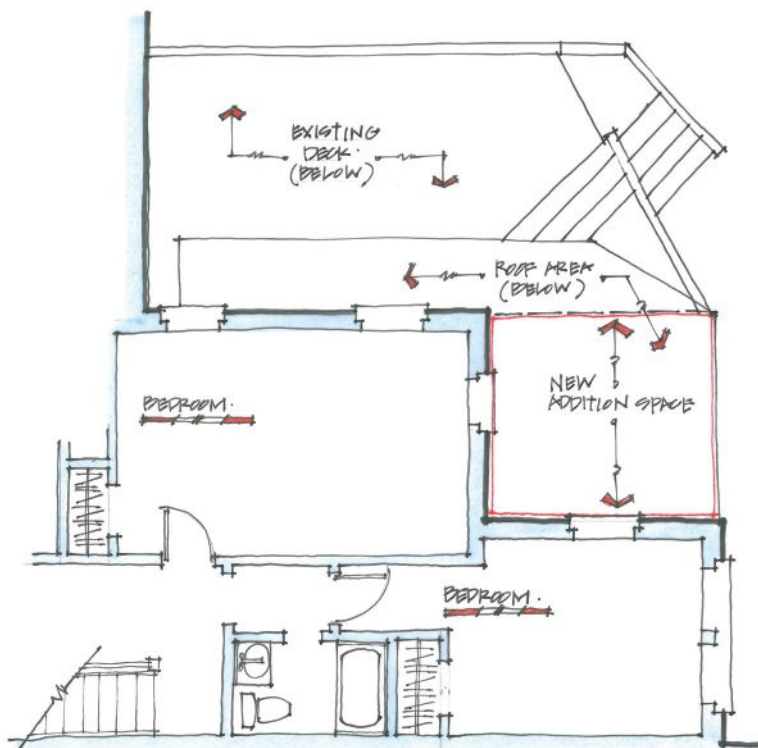
In this case, our initial concept is more of a straw man, but it spurs conversation that leads to other options. Which idea will make the most sense for this client? They are leaning toward a variation of Option C that incorporates a few ideas they liked from the other schemes.

There's just one problem: All of this talk of bathrooms has muddled the waters. The master bath is now in the mix. **PR**

Bill Millholland is an executive vice president at Case Design/Remodeling, in the Washington, D.C., area. bmillholland@casedesign.com

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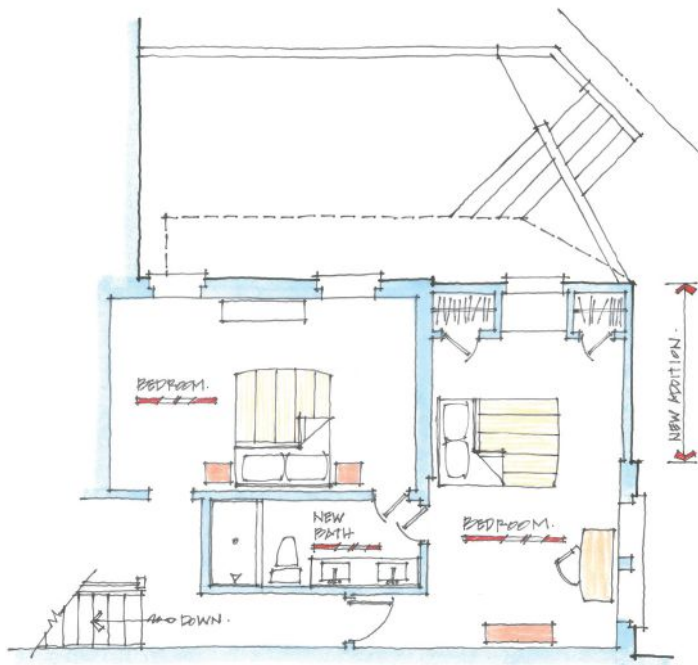
Problem: Provide a Bath for Each Bedroom

Our challenge here is to add a bathroom to the second floor. The three-bedroom house currently has a master bath and hall bath on this level, but the clients have two children, a boy and a girl, and there are storm clouds on the horizon as the teen years approach. They hope to head off any time-sharing squabbles by adding another bathroom. The fact that the home is in an area where this type of project adds significant value to the house makes this decision a little easier.

In the existing home, the area we are addressing is at the top of the stairs. A shared bath is located off a short hallway that leads to the smaller of the two hall bedrooms. We plan to add space above a portion of one-story addition and deck that were added off the rear of the home by a previous owner.

Now that we have our program requirements and an idea of where we are going to add the new space, it's time to start sketching out a few ideas.

One bath used to be the rule, but these days one bath per bedroom is the trend. A second-floor addition is the answer, but it takes three tries to help clients work through the problem.



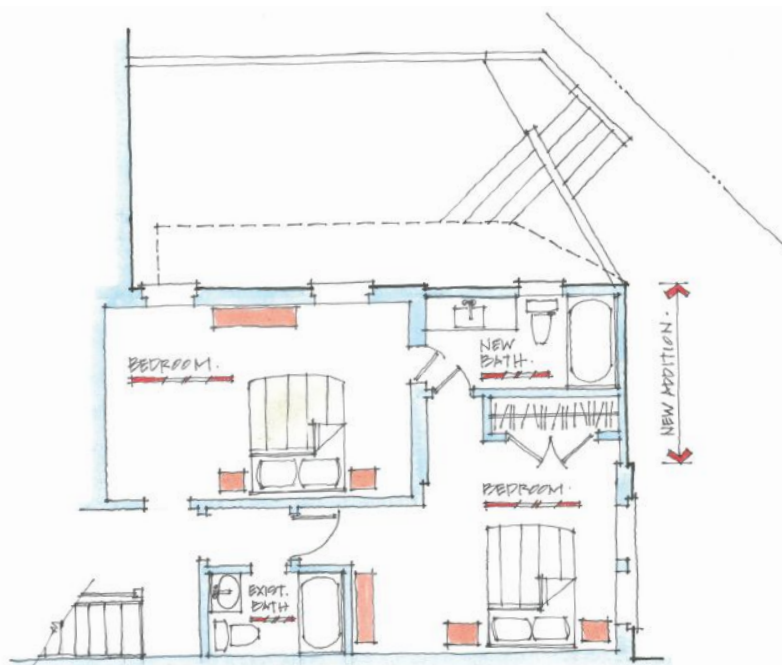
Move Existing Bath and Share It

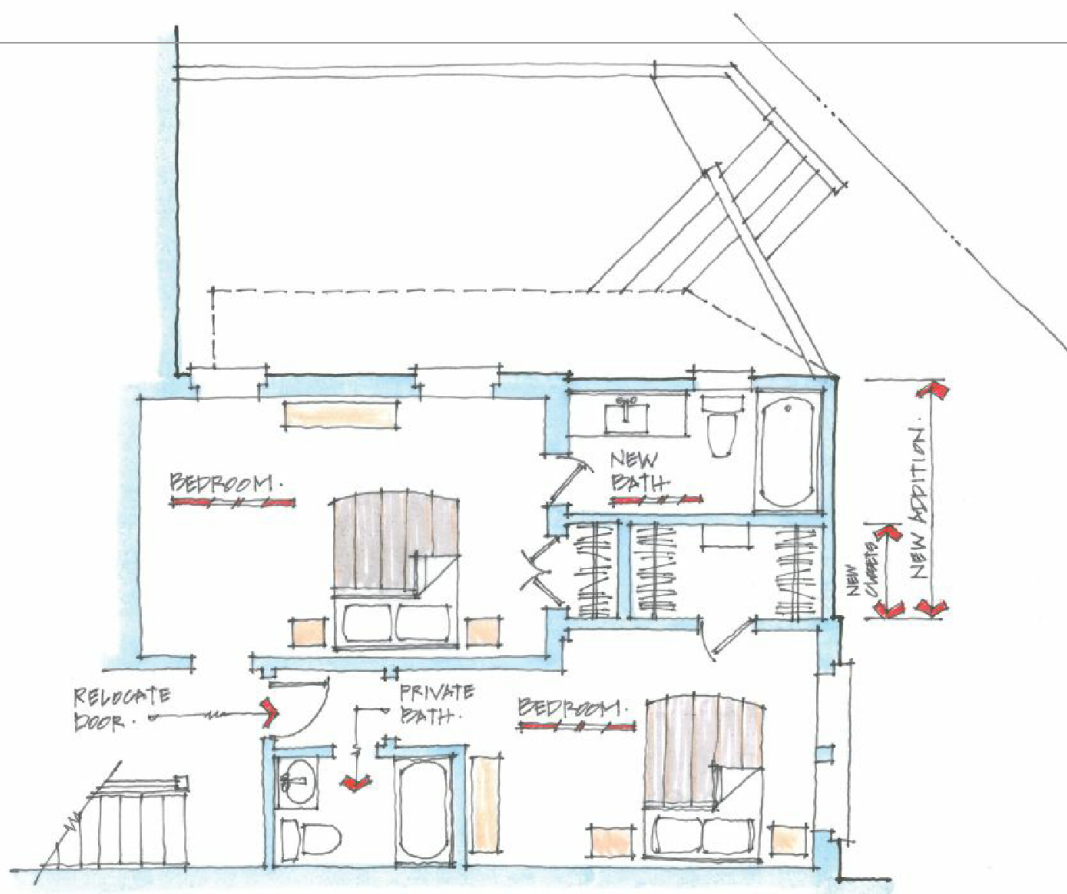
One topic that came up in discussions with this client was the desire for the bedroom sizes to be more similar. Our first scheme is almost certainly not the one the client will choose, but it helps us to start to tell the story. Here we have relocated the existing bathroom, made it bigger, and included access from both bedrooms. The bedrooms are now similar in size but the bathroom will be shared. Hmmm ... maybe the rooms need to be of adequate size rather than equal? The salvaged space may give us the room we need for another bathroom.

Shared Bath Addition

Here we maintain the existing bath in its current location and show a new three-piece bathroom in the addition. The client has the option of leaving the existing bath as-is or remodeling it. The new bath has access from both bedrooms, but could easily be changed to a private bath. And the bedrooms, while not exactly equal, are close enough in size to keep everyone happy. We have also shown a new closet in this scheme.

From a basic plan, we added a few amenities in our second scheme and now look to build on these ideas for our last option.





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Separate Baths and More Closets

In our final scheme, we have captured the existing hall bath into the smaller bedroom to create a private bath. This was a very simple change—we just relocated the door into the bedroom. The bedroom is not any bigger, but this space now has a private bath and a walk-in closet, plus enough room for furniture.

The other bedroom benefits from a new private bath as well. This plan shows the vanity and toilet on the outside wall. It's configured this way so that we could use the existing window opening for the doorway. When we start to study the exterior of the new space, we may find we need to move the bathroom window to make the elevation work. If we do, we will just flip the vanity and toilet to the other wall and move the opening. We were also able to add a small amount of closet space, too. (You can never have enough closet space.)

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METAL ROOFING'S

Stalled by recession, can metal roofing resume its rapid grab of residential re-roofing marketshare?

By Professional Remodeler staff

Late last January, about 100 Florida roofing contractors gathered for several days in Miami for The South Florida Metal Roofing Conference, a two-day series of presentations organized by a local distributor.

Most attendees were new to metal and were accustomed to installing the types of material you're likely to see on a Florida roof: cement tile or asphalt shingles. Yet they were all there for the same reason: to learn more about a product that continues to rise in popularity.

"Most of the time when you get to a homeowner, they're asking for metal," says Frank Istueta, owner of Istueta Roofing, in Miami, which began installing metal eight years ago. And, Istueta says, "roofing con-

tractors who aren't doing metal are losing a big chance to get the job."

Metal appeals to homeowners for a variety of reasons, but the top one may be longevity, experts say.

Five years ago, the Metal Roofing Alliance (MRA) data-mined a list of 35,000 households that had purchased metal roofs. The research showed that the typical customer is in the 45-to-55-year-old age group and plans to stay in the home a long time. "[They] want a permanent solution to the roofing situation," says Bill Hippard, the association's executive director.

The data also revealed that metal roofing buyers tend to be in higher income brackets with more expensive homes. This makes sense considering that the product retails at a significantly higher price point.

Additionally, the study found that 45 percent of the houses in the U.S. will never be in the market for a metal roof.

Growth Track

Metal roofing is an “old” product. Galvanized steel panels have been around since the middle of the 19th century, and metal (usually copper) has been used on roofs for thousands of years. (See *Above All, You Need a Great Roof*, a recent book published by the MRA.) But metal has been revitalized by new demand. That started in the 1990s, when metal’s share of market, chugging along at 3 percent or so, began a steady uptick, driven in part by new products that replicate the look of mainstream roofing (shingles, shakes, tile, and slate), and by MRA marketing. By 2008, metal had a little more than 10 percent share of the 5 million to 7 million residential roofs that will be replaced every year in the U.S. Then, in the wake of the reces-

The other component, Miller suggests, is leads. That’s not a big problem for asphalt-shingle roofing companies: it rains, the phone rings. But, by contrast, customers for metal roofing research the product and the contractor before picking up the phone. They buy to spare themselves the time and aggravation of ever having to replace the roof again, and they often don’t wait until the existing roof fails before getting someone in to re-roof. “It’s not uncommon for us to replace roofs that have four or five years of life left in them,” Miller says. “These are proactive homeowners who have the money to pay for the product.”

Johnny-Come-Latelies

Homeowners may also have other reasons—compelling ones—for wanting metal. For instance, seven major hurricanes hit southern Florida during 2004 and 2005. “What we learned with those direct

hits,” Kelly says, “is that roofs with metal on them performed exceptionally well. Zero damage, no issues. Roofs with tile or asphalt shingles on them did not perform so well.”

BIG COMEBACK

sion and the housing market’s collapse, that share diminished to between 8 percent and 9 percent, where it remains today.

Barriers to Entry

Due to the nature of the material and the tools and skills needed to work with it, it’s the installation of metal roofing that’s a big barrier for asphalt-shingle contractors who want to enter the metal roofing business. So is sales. In selling asphalt-shingle re-roofing, price typically trumps all. But metal roofing can easily cost twice as much as asphalt shingles, so newbies to the market are going to have to learn how to sell the project to homeowners as an investment. They’ll need to explain the life-cycle cost, as well as persuade their customers to believe in the company’s ability to correctly install a comparatively sophisticated product. “Each detail is hand-formed,” says Ken Kelly, president of Kelly Roofing, in Naples, Fla. “There’s no way to hide your ineptitude.”

And that precision comes at a cost.

“Ninety-nine percent of the time, you’ll get a price objection,” says Todd Miller, president of Isaiah Industries, an Ohio manufacturer of three separate brands of metal roofing. “And you have to know how to get through that.”

That awareness has led to escalating demand for metal roofing by Florida homeowners, industry members say. Miami’s Istueta Roofing, for instance, does five or six asphalt shingle jobs a year; the rest are tile or metal. At Kelly Roofing, jobs in 2014 were 26 percent tile, 22 percent metal, and 8 percent asphalt shingle (not including repair or flat-roof assemblies).

Realm of Possibility

It’s the homeowner, the one who intends to stay in the house anywhere from seven to 20 years who’s ramping up demand for metal roofing.

Isaiah Industries’ Miller, who is a metal roofing distributor as well as a manufacturer, says that he would be happy to see metal reach a 12 percent share of market during the next five years. He estimates that the material will ultimately absorb about a 20 percent share of the re-roof market.

Hippard cites a test that the MRA conducted before the recession in which, for 18 months, the organization poured marketing dollars into three cities: Harrisburg, Pa.; Eau Claire, Wis.; and Birmingham, Ala. The result: The market share of metal roofing more than doubled in those locales, Hippard says. **PR**

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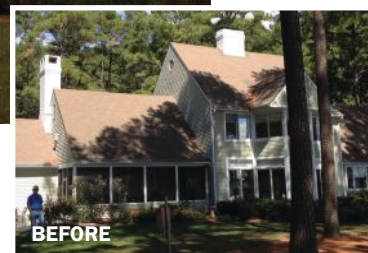
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↓ Drexel Metals Metal Roofing

The manufacturer offers any number of mechanically seamed metal roof and wall systems in a variety of profiles that can accommodate many roof configurations and architectural styles from low to steep slope. Available in an abundant range of finish choices, the installed product provides a look that ranges from subtle elegance to modern sophistication. drexmet.com

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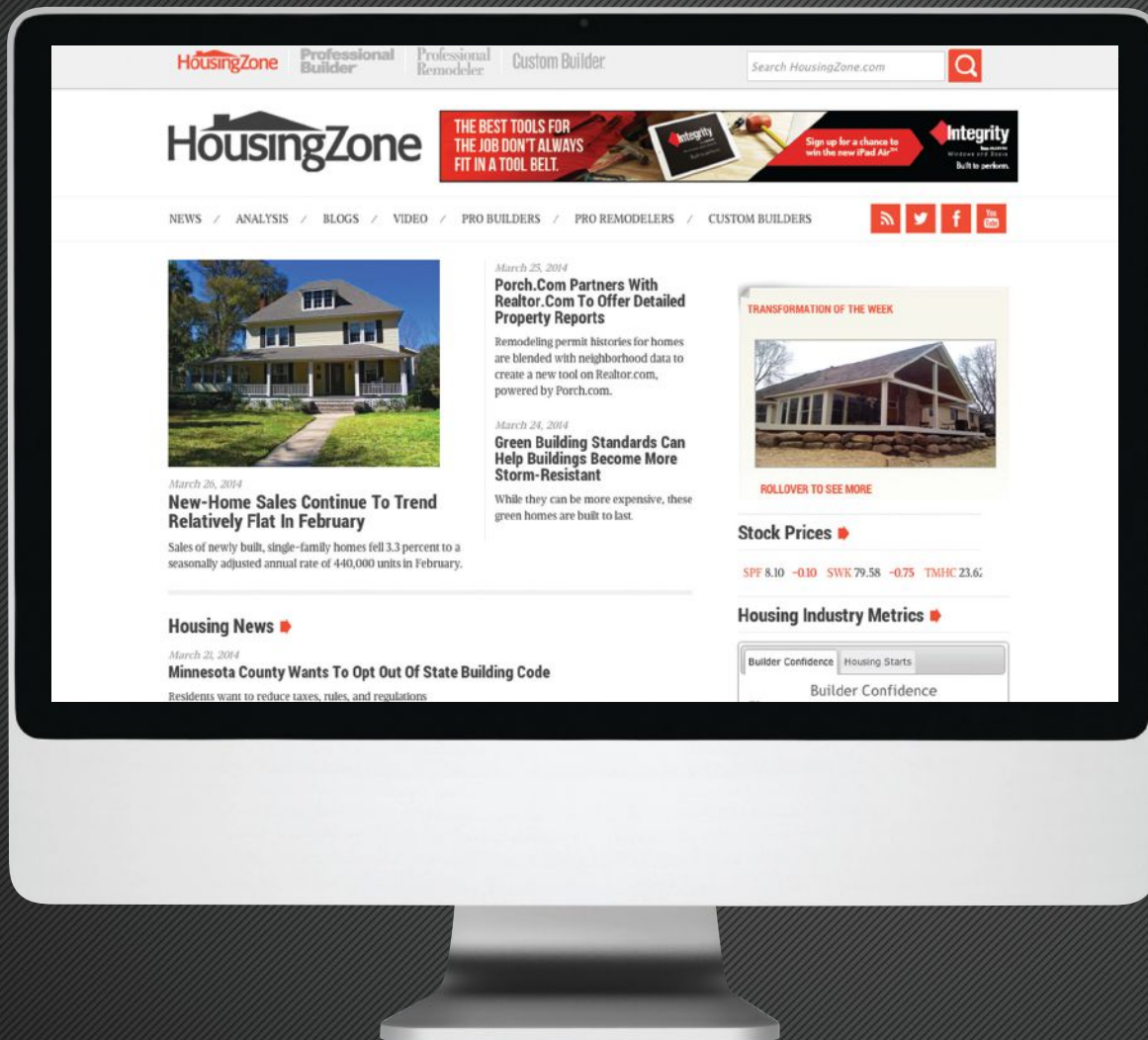


← Atlas Roofing WeatherMaster Polyseal Underlayment

Featuring a soft-surfaced polyester face that allows for direct-to-deck application, this tough, slip-resistant, self-adhering roof underlayment is specifically engineered for metal roofing and provides metal roofs with a resilient barrier to storm damage, UV degradation, and moisture. Engineered to retain exceptional thermal stability under heat—it has a 260°F melting point—while at the same time offering cold-temperature adhesion, the underlayment can be applied to a dry roof deck surface in dry weather at temperatures above 45°F. atlasroofing.com

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Product Introductions

1



1 Tapco Grayne Engineered Shake & Shingle Siding

Providing the look of aged cedar in a composite, Grayne siding offers a weather-resistant surface that won't absorb moisture. By replicating the cutting process used for making cedar shingles, Grayne's plain sawn shingle profile features realistic grain patterns, with natural wood grain textures visible on all surfaces. The color palette includes six pre-finished cedar colors. grayne.com **No. 805 on reader service card**

2



2 Eldorado Stone Sanderling Marquee Limestone Veneer

This stone veneer comes in 12-by-24-inch rectangles, making it the largest profile available through Eldorado Stone. The veneer replicates the look of natural-cut limestone, with proprietary molding techniques, high-quality materials, and hand painting adding to the design's sophisticated look. eldoradostone.com **No. 806 on reader service card**

3



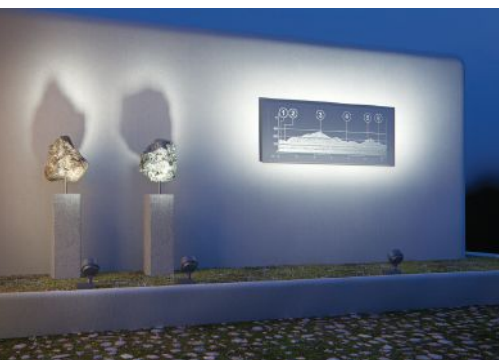
3 American Standard VorMax

With VorMax flushing technology, American Standard claims to have reinvented the flush toilet. Rather than using the traditional small holes around the bowl's rim to carry water during a flush, VorMax delivers one powerful water jet to scrub the entire bowl clean using just 1.28 gallons of water per flush. The CleanCurve Rim omits the rim overhang and holes inside the bowl where dirt can accumulate, and EverClean antimicrobial finish adds to the clean experience. VorMax is available in four new toilet styles (Optum, shown here). americanstandard-us.com **No. 807 on reader service card**

4 ERCO Luminaires

Two new lighting products from ERCO give façades and entrance areas greater emphasis. Gecko is an outdoor luminaire that combines the latest LED technology with maximum glare control in a minimalist design. Visor + Lightmark luminaires can illuminate pathways, open areas, and entrances with as little as a 6-watt load. erco.com **No. 808 on reader service card**

4



5 KitchenAid Multi-Door Refrigerator

With a five-compartment design, KitchenAid's new fridge breaks the mold. The upper portion has two side-by-side sections, similar to a French door style. Below are two external, side-by-side drawers, with a soft-close feature; the left drawer offers five preset temperatures. The fifth compartment, a bottom-mount freezer drawer, has a three-tier design to help keep items organized. Available in stainless steel or a black stainless steel finish. kitchenaid.com **No. 809 on reader service card**

5





6

6 SolarDefense Reflective Technology From Mastic Home Exteriors by Ply Gem

This patent-pending technology—reflective polymer ingredients are molecularly bonded to an outer PVDF layer—provides protection for bold siding colors against fading and heat distortion. SolarDefense is currently available on the manufacturer's Ovation line in the five colors shown. mastic.com

No. 810 on reader service card

7



8



7 Formica 180fx

The natural detail of wood and stone is now available at an affordable price with Formica's addition of four new patterns to its 180fx laminate line. The new stone patterns come in a gloss finish and include strata olympico, marbled cappuccino, and ferro grafite, while the new wide-planked walnut pattern comes in a natural grain finish. Application of Formica's Elite-Form surfacing technology allows gloss finish surfaces to be used in a wider range of applications, including countertops. formica.com **No. 811 on reader service card**

8 The Galley Kitchen Workstation

Designed to allow prep, serving, cleanup, and entertaining to all happen in one place, indoors or outdoors, The Galley workstation is available in six sizes, with features that include colanders, cutting boards, bowls, and drain racks. The Galley can also be special ordered in custom sizes. galleycollection.com **No. 812 on reader service card**

9 Valley Craft Industries Pro Vault

The Pro Vault on-site storage chest provides a portable solution for securing equipment on jobsites. Constructed of 16-gauge steel with fully welded seams and a full-length piano hinge, the chest is built to withstand the elements and resist break-in attempts. Gas-assist cylinders provide easy opening. Options include heavy-duty casters, a custom logo decal, and manual door props in lieu of gas-assist cylinders. valleycraft.com **No. 813 on reader service card**

10 YesterTec Kitchen Modules

As an alternative to standard built-in cabinetry, YesterTec offers solutions that can conceal all of the typical kitchen appliances, allowing the kitchen to blend into adjacent living spaces. Three lines are available; the Stealth Kitchen Module is shown. All feature a patented UL-listed technology that allows the hot appliances, such as ovens and cooktops, to be safely concealed from view when not in use. yestertec.com **No. 814 on reader service card**



9



10

HVAC



1 EcoNet Controls Z-Vent EV100

Compatible with most Z-Wave controllers and Z-Wave Control software, the Z-Wave Z-Vent EV100 allows homeowners to automate temperature regulation and airflow of their HVAC system. Five standard vent sizes are available. Air flow can be shut off to rooms when they're unoccupied, or vents can be partially opened or closed to balance airflow. econetcontrols.com

For more information, No. 815 on reader service card

2 Delta Products SIG80MLED

The SIG80MLED bathroom ventilation exhaust fan with LED light and motion sensor features an adjustable delay timer and continuous low-speed controls. It boasts 80 cfm air flow, virtually silent operation at less than 0.3 sones, uses less than 9 watts to power the fan, and has a 70,000-hour DC brushless motor and a 30,000-hour LED light. deltabreez.com

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3 Westinghouse EarthDirEx Geothermal Heat Pump

According to Westinghouse, what sets the Y1SA model apart from other geothermal heat pumps is its all-refrigerant design and reduced need for drilling, lowering installation costs. Because the system is 100 percent refrigerant, there's no earth-to-water heat exchanging component needed, allowing for more efficient heat transfer. The EarthDirEx offers 19+ EER cooling and 3.8+ heating and is available in 2-, 3-, 4-, and 5-ton capacities. westinghousehvac.com

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4 Panasonic Exteriores E

The 23 SEER Exteriores E system (available in 9K, 12K, 18K Energy-Star certified models, and a 24K model) offers a sleek design and combines two of Panasonic's leading innovations: its Inverter and Econavi technologies. The inverter constantly adjusts the compressor rotation speed to provide optimum performance, enabling quick cooling or heating while reducing power consumption. Econavi (human detection) technology automatically adjusts temperature settings for optimum operation. The Exteriores E can be remotely controlled using Panasonic's Internet Control Adaptor. panasonic.com

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5 Magnum Energy Solutions Root Thermostat

The Root is a Google Android-based thermostat that, with third-party app integration, works as the central portal of the home, seamlessly interfacing with other energy-management devices as well as related home automation and security platforms including Sonos, Alarm.com, ADT, Comcast, and Nest Protect. The unit has a 7-inch capacitive touchscreen, and its Google Android core allows the Root to control nearly anything with an available app in the Google Play store. rootthermostat.com

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Plumbing



1

1 Udonor ProPEX Lead-Free Brass Ball Valves

Udonor is offering an industry first: code-listed, lead-free brass, PEX-to-PEX, full-port ball valves in sizes from ½ inch to 2 inches. The valves allow installation of an inline, PEX-to-PEX solution anywhere in the system and feature blow-out-proof stems. Stem extension kits for insulated piping applications (accommodating up to 2 inches of insulation) are also available. Both sides of the valve feature Udonor's ProPEX fitting system that holds tight with 1,000 pounds of radial force for a secure connection. udonor-usa.com **No. 820 on reader service card**



3

2 General Electric GeoSpring Pro Hybrid Electric Water Heater

Using heat pump technology to absorb the heat in ambient air and transfer it to water, the U.S.-made GeoSpring is, GE claims, 69 percent more efficient than a standard electric model. First-hour delivery provides 92 gallons of hot water. Electronic controls feature five operating modes, including vacation mode. The unit has an energy factor of 2.9 and includes the same water and electrical connections as a standard electric water heater. geospring.com **No. 821 on reader service card**

2

3 Nexus eWater NexTreater

The NexTreater is a home-scale solution to clean shower, laundry, and other drain water to "near-potable" quality for storage and approved reuses such as lawn irrigation and toilet flushing. According to Nexus, homeowners who install the NexTreater can expect to reduce their water consumption by as much as 30 percent while also cutting their sewer flow by up to 70 percent. The NexTreater meets all requirements set by the California Plumbing Code. nexus-e-water.com **No. 822 on reader service card**

4



4 Heatworks Model 1 Tankless Electric Water Heater

This unit pairs the small footprint of a tankless unit with a unique energy transfer technology, to provide a reliable hot-water supply, even at low flow rates. Because it lacks traditional heating elements, the unit requires minimal maintenance, and can be used in conjunction with existing water heating systems. The Model 1 provides up to 40 percent energy savings and 10 percent water savings, according to the manufacturer. myheatworks.com **No. 823 on reader service card**



5

5 Reliance Worldwide SharkBite PVC Transition Fittings

SharkBite PVC transition fittings connect PVC pipe to copper, PEX, CPVC, or PE-RT pipe, eliminating the need for soldering, clamps, unions, or glue. SharkBite's variety of fittings include transition couplings, slip couplings, tees, and male adapters in sizes ½, ¾, and 1 inch. sharkbite.com **No. 824 on reader service card**

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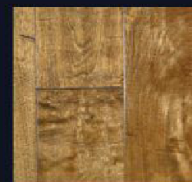
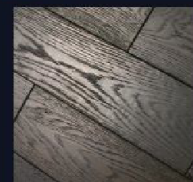
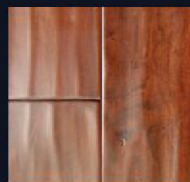
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At Your Best

WHY IS IT THAT SOMETIMES EVERYTHING JUST CLICKS? WE ASKED OUR PANEL TO THINK ABOUT WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE WHEN THEY ARE AT THEIR BEST. HERE'S WHAT WE LEARNED.



POSITIVE VIBES

When I'm operating at my best, I find that I'm in a positive state of mind. I'm feeling healthy and strong, and I'm interacting well with team members as well as with friends outside of work. And, of course, I'm also interacting positively with my family. The end result of this is that the positive vibes are projected to those I come in contact with. Situations

are less stressful and solutions come more easily, so clients and team members all benefit. All these things together make working at my best much easier.

Jay Cipriani, President

Cipriani Remodeling Solutions, Woodbury, N.J.



PEAK PERFORMANCE

I thought about the things I'm doing when I'm at my best. I also asked a few senior managers in my company to explain what they see from me when I'm operating at my best. Here is some of what we came up with.

- When I am at my best, I am open-minded and see things from different perspectives. I'm allowing others to affect me and I'm affecting others by seeing their

point of view. Whether or not I agree with their point of view is another issue. But when people see that you're open to their perspective on things, it creates another level of cooperation and a willingness to follow your lead.

- When I am at my best, my confidence level is at its peak. I am self-assured in how I approach situations, in the decisions I make, and in

my relationships with those I work with. But there's a fine line between strong self-confidence and arrogance. Open-mindedness helps to temper confidence without undermining it.

- When I am at my best, my attitude is contagious and positive. This creates a can-do atmosphere in which everyone gets more done because there is very little room for negativity and doubt. Is there room for dialogue, questions, and differences? Yes, but not for negativity.

- When I am at my best, I am dealing from strength, never from weakness. I am mindful of the great reputation we have built and all of the great people and trades we work with that put us in the driver's seat.

- When I am at my best, I am interacting more frequently with my people and I'm not buried behind a desk with my nose in a computer. Computer and desk time are important, but as the leader of my organization, interaction with employees at all levels is vital. The same is true of interaction with clients.

- When I am at my best, I am out in the world representing my company, whether it's in the business community or in the political, nonprofit, or industry communities. I am accessible and visible, promoting and representing my company in a positive way. And as a result, I am both learning and teaching and creating opportunities for those around me and for my company.

These are some of the things I do when I'm operating at my best. What do you do? Can you reach even higher levels of performance? Knowing what peak performance is and the outstanding results you get at that level will keep you going back for more.

Sal Ferro, President/CEO

Alure Home Improvements, Plainview, N.Y.

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