

# Professional Remodeler®

THE CRITICAL EDGE FOR HIGH-PERFORMANCE REMODELERS



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# Professional Remodeler

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**REMODELERS**

## Editorial

By **Paul Deffenbaugh**, Editorial Director

## What's new?

I hope you noticed that something has changed at *Professional Remodeler*. We have redesigned and reformulated the magazine in response to a rapidly changing industry. First, the number of very sophisticated remodelers has increased significantly since we launched more than 10 years ago. Second, the information needs for our audience have evolved.

The result? We created a magazine that offers serious information for high-performance remodelers who want to have a critical edge over their competition.

We want to challenge the top of the industry, not try to raise the bottom. After all, they put airbags in Cadillacs first, not Pintos.

There is another reason for this change. I believe the remodeling industry associations, especially at the local level, do a fabulous job of helping the new remodeler get his ship in order. The certification programs that the National Association of the Remodeling Industry and the NAHB Remodelers operate are ideal for the kind of mentored, hands-on approach development and education at this level require.

But most importantly, the information needs of the top of the industry have changed, and the remodelers I've known for nearly 20 years now are looking for answers to problems that are much more sophisticated than what they encountered when we all started out. So, the new driving force behind *Professional Remodeler* will be our desire to inform, challenge and inspire the very best in the industry. We want to form a community of these remodelers, so you'll

hear their voices in our magazine, newsletters and online. One of the things I've always admired about this industry is its openness and willingness to share.

Our new attitude pervades the magazine from the front cover to back. You'll see sharper, deeper articles that mimic discussion you find between superior remodelers. You'll also find far more proprietary research supporting our information on business practices, the market and products.

Yes, you'll see more text and fewer il-

**The new *Professional Remodeler* provides the critical edge high-performance remodelers want.**



lustrations. Consider it a measure of our seriousness and respect for your desire for real, not superficial, information. You won't find an article in *Professional Remodeler* on how to figure mark-up. We know you already know your costs. But how good are you at pricing a project to gain a strategic advantage in your marketplace or to take market share from your toughest competitor?

Even our products coverage has evolved. We understand you have two basic questions about products. "What's new?" and "Why should I switch to a different product?" Our coverage will answer those questions by giving regular updates about what the newest products on the market are, and then investigating product categories and reporting on what's working and why.

Please take a moment to dig into our new magazine. Then, take a moment to let me know what you think.

*Contact me at*

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# Need-to-know stimulus info

**W**hen the stimulus package was announced earlier this year, the energy efficient tax credits caused some confusion. Here are common questions the editors of *Professional Remodeler* have fielded and the answers.

## 1. What types of projects are eligible for the tax credit?

The new tax credits cover a wide variety of energy-efficient aspects of remodels: windows and doors; insulation; geothermal features; solar panels; water heaters; wind energy systems; roofs; HVAC; fuel cells; and biomass stoves. Energy Star-rated appliances that don't fall into any of those categories, such as dishwashers and refrigerators, are not eligible.

## 2. How large are the tax credits?

The credit is 30 percent of the cost — up to \$1,500 — for most products. However, for geothermal systems, solar panels, solar-powered water heaters and wind energy systems, the credit is 30 percent with no cap. Fuel cells are capped at \$500 per .5 kW of power capacity, but there is no limit on the total credit.

## 3. How long do the credits last?

The credits for most projects (those capped at \$1,500) are only available in 2009 and 2010, but the credits for the products with no lifetime caps (those categories listed in question 2) last until 2016.

## 4. Are products that were installed before the stimulus package passed eligible for credits?

Yes, as long as they were put into service this year. Any product that met the tax credit standards in place at the time is eligible for the full credit. Be sure to contact any clients you worked for before the stimulus passed to make sure they're aware of their new windfall.

## 5. Are installation costs included in figuring the tax credit?

That depends. For most products, installation costs are included to calculate the 30 percent credit, but they are not for windows, doors, insulation and roofs. For those categories, only the cost of materials is eligible for the credit. This means you'll need to provide a material cost to your clients for those



CHARLES WALLER

projects if they want to receive the credit.

## 6. How do I know which products qualify for the tax credits?

One of the most confusing thing about the credits is that not all products — not even all Energy Star products — qualify. There are minimum requirements in each product category.

For example, windows must meet a higher standard of a U factor and a Solar Heat Gain Coefficient (SHGC) of less than .30. For a full list of product standards, visit [www.energystar.gov/taxcredits](http://www.energystar.gov/taxcredits).

## 7. Can the credits be used for vacation homes, new construction or rental properties?

For most product categories, homeowners can only receive the credit for improvements to their primary residence. However, geothermal systems, wind energy systems, solar panels and solar water heaters are eligible when installed in a vacation home or in new construction projects. Fuel cells are eligible when installed in new construction, but only if the home is being built as a primary

residence.

Almost all rental properties are not eligible for any credits. The only exception is a vacation home that the owner occupies for part of the year and rents for the rest of the year. In that case, the owner could take a pro-rated portion of the credits for the four product classes mentioned above.

## 8. Can homeowners receive the credits if the new products are installed in an addition?

Yes. While it initially seemed that additions would not be eligible for the credits because the products would not be an "improvement" to an existing building, the IRS recently confirmed that products used in an addition can be used to claim the full tax credit.

## 9. How many times can a homeowner take the credit?

For the products that are capped at \$1,500 (windows, insulation, etc.), homeowners can get a credit on multiple projects, but they can only claim a total of \$1,500 combined in 2009 and 2010. Two unmarried people living in the same household can each take the \$1,500.

The products that are eligible for the 30 percent credit with no total cap (solar, geothermal, etc.) can be taken as many times as a homeowner installs eligible products through 2016.

## 10. What do remodelers need to provide clients so they get the credits?

You should give your clients a detailed receipt, along with what the IRS is calling a "Manufacturer's Certification Statement." This should include the name and address of the manufacturer; identification of the type of product; make, model and any other identifiers of the specific product used; and a statement that the product is eligible for the tax credit. The homeowners do not need to file the statement or receipt with their taxes but should have them for their records in case of an audit.

— JONATHAN SWEET, SENIOR EDITOR

For more stimulus coverage, visit [www.HousingZone.com/stimulus](http://www.HousingZone.com/stimulus)

# Should remodelers invest in Facebook and Twitter?

**S**ocial media has seen explosive growth over the last year (see graphs), but that doesn't necessarily translate into business success.

According to a Knowledge Networks survey released in May, 83 percent of consumers 13 to 54 participate in social media, 47 percent on a weekly basis.

For the echo boomer generation, the numbers are even more stunning: 99 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds have a profile on at least one social media site, according to a Participatory Marketing Network survey from June.

Social media is no silver bullet to solve your declining sales, but it should be part of an overall marketing strategy — another way to market to

a client that is increasingly difficult to reach, says Scott Kolbe, owner of KolbeCo Marketing Resources in Dardenne Prairie, Mo. KolbeCo has many clients in construction and remodeling and specializes in helping small businesses market themselves better.

Marketing and advertising used to be all about “big hits” — messages that reached as broad an audience as possible. Now, businesses have to focus on the “small hits,” reaching out to the audience through a diverse number of methods, Kolbe says.

“We believe it's not an alternative for us not to participate,” says Ed Cholfin, president of Advanced Kitchens in Marietta, Ga. “You can only do so much repeat business. We have to look for ways to grow.”

Advanced Kitchens uses LinkedIn and Twitter to drive traffic to its Web site by posting articles that would be of interest to consumers, such as how they can use the stimulus package. That strategy has led to increased traffic to the company's site, but Cholfin can't point to any specific project that came from social networking. In that way, it's similar to traditional networking: a way to build relationships that Cholfin hopes will eventually pay off in future business.

## MIXING PERSONAL AND BUSINESS

A key decision a remodeler has to make is how much they want their personal and business lives to intersect in the social media world.

A reluctance to have his personal life open to the masses is one reason Cholfin waited as long as he did to get involved in social media. It's also why he doesn't use Facebook — and why the company's efforts on Twitter and LinkedIn are identified as the company and not “Ed Cholfin.”

Taking a different approach is Greg Rittler, president of Kanon Group in Towson, Md. Rittler and his employees post updates on

Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn regularly, as well as maintaining several blogs to keep its customers

informed about what's going on.

“I'm friends personally on Facebook with many of our customers,” Rittler says. “I'm not at all worried about that. I think in a healthy relationship the two always mix anyways.”

Rittler believes that personal relationship helps the company because clients see him

as a friend, not just as someone they do business with.

“I find it just engages people with us,” Rittler says. “We can't talk to everybody on the phone every week, but we can post things on these social media outlets.”

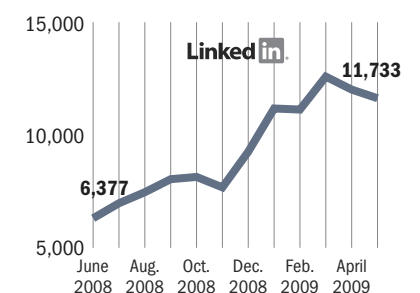
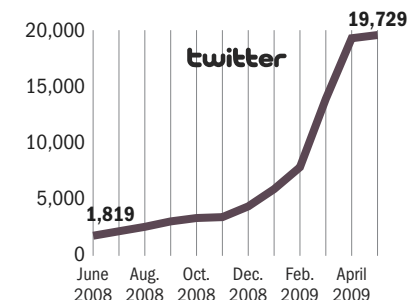
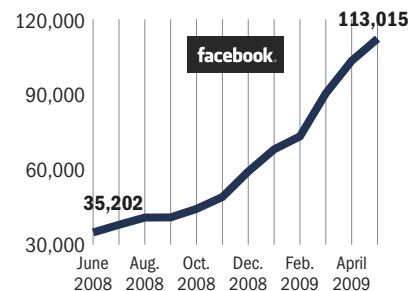
Besides being a way to reach potential clients, social media sites, especially business-focused ones such as LinkedIn, offer a

*Continued on page 11 >>*

Visit [www.HousingZone.com](http://www.HousingZone.com) for a podcast with David Alpert of Continuum Marketing Group on how remodelers can craft a social media strategy.

## Social media site traffic growing quickly

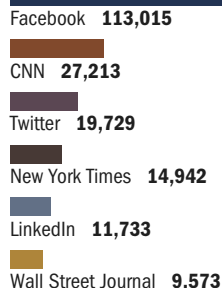
(Unique visitors to social media sites in 000s)



SOURCE: COMPETE.COM

## Social media surpassing traditional media

(Unique visitors, in 000s, May 2009)



SOURCE: COMPETE.COM

*The major social media sites now draw more visitors than most traditional media outlets.*

*Social media sites have grown rapidly over the last year.*





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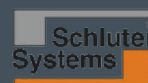
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## Social media

<< Continued from page 8

great networking opportunity, Cholfin says. Members can join groups and exchange questions and answers about common problems. There are dozens of construction-related groups on LinkedIn, including the *Professional Remodeler* group, NARI and NAHB.

### DO YOU HAVE THE TIME?

To get the most from social media sites takes time and effort. The sites may be free



to use, but there is a commitment in staff time to execute a successful strategy.

"A lot of people log on, use it for a day, then never use it again," Rittler

says. "It's only going to be as effective as what you put into it and the time you spend developing a community."

In Rittler's case, it's something he spends several hours a week working on. Although he feels it is important to his company's success, remodelers need to make sure they are willing to make that commitment if they are going to do it.

"My advice is first figure out what your capacity is," he says.

It's been a significant investment for Advanced Kitchens, as well. Cholfin spends five to 10 hours a week on social media sites for business but also has a full-time employee that spends 90 percent of her time working on the company's Web site and social media efforts.

— JONATHAN SWEET

*You can follow Advanced Kitchens on Twitter at @AKRenovations and Greg Rittler at @grittler and @kanonclarity. Rittler is also on Facebook.*

*You can follow Senior Editor Jonathan Sweet on Twitter at @SweetEdit or join our Professional Remodeler groups on LinkedIn or Facebook.*

## How to capture the affluent client

**A**ffluent clients are different from homeowners in other income brackets, and not just because they can afford to hire anyone they choose. Their expectations are higher, and it takes some finesse to sell them on using a particular company.

For SilverLining Interiors, a New York firm that specializes in apartment renovations, getting "face time" with potential clients is crucial. SilverLining participates in charity events, such as a show house for the Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club, a group that raises money for schools in the South Bronx. They also try to meet with prospects weekly to show the company's portfolio, says Josh Wiener, president, adding that most of the firm's business is generated by referrals from architects, designers or past clients.

It's all about relationships, says Deborah Malone, president of JP Malone Construction, a custom builder and remodeler in Scottsdale, Ariz. "We've started doing cross-marketing with other high-end businesses that have nothing to do with construction. For example, we're partners with a company that does turf installation — the little putting courses for homes." If a homeowner wants a putting course or a shelter for a swimming pool, Malone gets the referral for the pool shelter.

JP Malone recently hired a golf pro at a local course to act as a salesperson. The pro donned a JP Malone golf shirt, armed himself with company brochures and coached a foursome of prospective clients through the course.

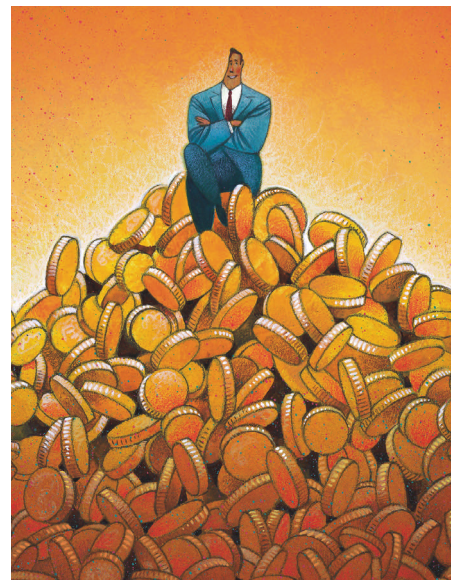
Just as golf is practically a religion in Scottsdale, horse shows and steeplechases are a mecca for the wealthy residents of Philadelphia's Main Line. HP Builders of West Chester, Pa., meets past customers and prospects on their own turf by purchasing sponsorships and hosting tailgate parties at these events.

Much of Benvenuti and Stein's business comes from real-estate agents. "We have a very good reputation," says Geno Benvenuti, president of the Evanston, Ill.-based company. "When a home we've remodeled goes on the

market, our name is included in the ad."

The company regularly holds wine tastings and cooking demonstrations at its Winnetka, Ill., design center.

"We'll invite 16 to 24 people to these events," says Benvenuti. "We always mix past clients with potential clients." Sometimes the company captures new clients by catering a dinner party at a home it just finished remodeling. The homeowners invite 16 of their closest friends. One or two couples from Benvenuti and Stein are also pres-



GREG HARGREAVES

ent. "Our best salespeople are our previous clients, plain and simple," he says.

Wiener advises against using the hard-sell approach with affluent clients. "If you start to push too hard, they see you as desperate. I think you have to be a little soft-sell, to imply that you'll do fine with them or without them."

HP Builders President Terry Keenan prefers to match his style to the client's. "If a client is laid back, we're laid back, especially in the sales cycle. You could call it mirroring their behavior and not putting too much pressure on them. I don't make my problems their problems; I build their trust."

— SUSAN BADY, SENIOR EDITOR, DESIGN

# Successful brand-building marketing

**T**he most successful companies have immediately recognizable brands. How can you build your remodeling company into a brand in your market? Professional Remodeler's Tom Swartz talked to two companies that have successfully done that in two competitive markets. Some excerpts of that conversation appear here. To listen to the full discussion, visit [www.HousingZone.com/remex](http://www.HousingZone.com/remex).

**TOM:** *How is brand building different than traditional marketing?*

**ORREN:** Because most builders do grassroots marketing only. That's why they have great reputations in their towns that they do work in. The less work they do in the outlying community, the less brand they have. What their brand is, is word-of-mouth and the sign they put on a home site.

How do you do it? You've got to spend some money. The best money spent is on a PR firm that's going to get the press talking about some great stuff you do. You've got to do a little advertising, too, which is expensive.

**TOM:** *Scott, in branding marketing, how is it different when you go after branding your name rather than just traditional marketing?*

**SCOTT:** I backed into an awareness of branding because of the radio show and the difference of advertising and lead generation from top-of-mind awareness or brand. It drives a lot of what we do. For example, being at a home show or not being at a home show is branding. We have the biggest consumer home show in North America as part of our HBA, so if you're not there, there's a message. If you are there, there's a message. So being there on a recurring basis — and it's expensive — is branding.

## This month featuring:

### Scott Mosby, President

Mosby Building Arts, St. Louis

Scott Mosby is the second-generation owner of Mosby Building Arts, a design/build firm founded by his father in 1947. The company has 65 employees and had 2008 revenues of \$10.5 million.

### Orren Pickell, CEO

Orren Pickell Designers & Builders, Lincolnshire, Ill.

Pickell is a custom building and remodeling firm with 47 employees and \$40 million in 2008 revenues, with about \$7 million of that coming from remodeling.

**TOM:** *What is the radio show exactly?*

**SCOTT:** I've been doing a radio show called the KMOX-AM Home Improvement Show for 13 years. It's a call-in format, and I'm the perceived expert. On Saturday mornings, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., we have 50,000 to 75,000 listeners during that time slot.

**TOM:** *Aside from your time, do you pay KMOX-AM a lot of money to do this?*

**SCOTT:** Not for the radio show, but this is exactly my point. I pay them a lot of money to advertise and make the phone ring. Being well-known is branding. Converting that into consumers who realize, "Hey I need a job. Call me," that's a different point of view. That's the difference between lead generation and advertising and being on the radio, a well-known name. Until I started

advertising, the phone did not ring much.

**TOM:** *[In your advertising,] do you use brand name manufacturers in conjunction with your company name?*

**ORREN:** Yes, and I would highly suggest this to anyone getting started trying to brand. You can get sharing on all of your advertising. They'll typically share 30, 40 percent

if their logo is on your advertising and your literature. If you don't have a brand and you want to be thought

of as quality you want to be affiliated with those manufacturers, you want to be aligned with the very highest of quality.

Once your brand is well-enough-known by the market you're trying to target, you can actually start dropping that, because it clutters your image, having a bunch of names associ-

ated with you.

**TOM:** *Does branding of your company bring a stigma of you being high-priced?*

**ORREN:** Your competition can always find things to say about you, and arguing price is always one of them. There are some guys out there with brands and their brand is they're cheap. You can brand anything you want. In my case and Scott's case, we've branded a quality experience, a quality product and a quality future for your family.

**TOM:** *Last few words of advice?*

**ORREN:** Don't confuse your marketplace. You've got to have a vision of what you want to be in the marketplace for yourself, for your employees and for your customers, and if you keep spasming all over the place and confusing the message of who you are as a company, you're never going to get a brand. You have to decide who you want to be to the world and be it.

**SCOTT:** Everybody's got a brand, everybody's got a reputation. Your customer service or lack of customer service is a lasting memory and it is shared with the public, so creating a brand is staying true to ... a set of values. It comes back to whom do you want to be — be that and expand that. The PR, the marketing, the advertising, is just a magnifying of an already existing truth.

For a podcast of the full conversation, visit [www.HousingZone.com/remex](http://www.HousingZone.com/remex)





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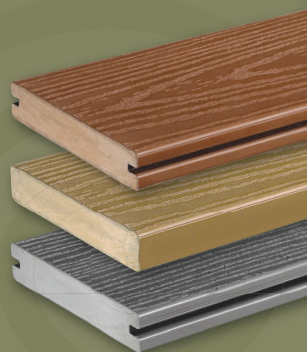
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President and CEO,  
Blackdog design/build/remodel

## If the employees don't own it, your clients don't get it

I am not a million-mile flyer, but over the years I have been on a lot of flights and have learned things that are directly applicable in managing my company. Unfortunately, with the exception of one airline, most of what I have learned falls under the what-not-to-do category.

have become “victims” of management. No longer do they look for ways to improve and do better. Instead, they spend time complaining to each other and now to paying customers. Is it any wonder this airline's on-time arrivals are poor, customer satisfaction is low and profit does not exist?

kids and have them distribute the snacks. None of this stuff is rocket science or expensive, but it makes a difference and it can't be faked.

Here is the takeaway: Southwest is an employee-owned company. That is to say there is a palpable difference in how its

people perform because they feel what they do is important to you, which is important to Southwest, which ultimately is important to them. You can't program people to be caring if they don't

**You can't program people to be caring if they don't care. ... They are only as effective as their belief in the company.**



Late last year I was on an airport parking shuttle bus and, being a friendly guy, struck up a conversation with an employee from a major airline. I asked her about a new policy her employer had just announced — a fee for all checked bags — and whether there had been much backlash from customers.

Well, that was all it took. The floodgates burst open and out came a torrent of company bashing that I would have only expected from someone who just got fired. The person launched into a diatribe about how foolish management is and how they never listen to the employees. This went on for a while and concluded with her recounting a complaint she lodged about the cleanliness of the airline's food trays and the management's response that 200 (yes, 200!) such complaints were required before they could take action.

Now here is the key. She had been with this airline for a long time and, until relatively recently, had felt company loyalty and a sense of ownership. (I know this because I asked.) Now she and many of her coworkers

Now contrast this with Southwest Airlines. I am not trying to endorse them, but the company is a great example of how to do it right. I actually go out of my way to fly them, because their employees want me to be on their plane, and they let me know it every time.

Southwest turns planes faster than anyone because all the employees pull together. There are no prima donnas; everyone is willing to pitch in. Not only that, but they enlist my help. They ask me to take my trash with me, and — guess what — I do it. They make irreverent jokes during boarding and safety announcements. They keep my attention, ensure my safety and make me laugh during a part of the flight that other airlines drone through with the creativity of a single-cell organism.

Southwest employees greet me, talk with me and thank me with sincerity. If I have a connecting flight, they make sure to tell me where it will be. On some flights they play games. On some longer flights they grab

care. You can give them guidelines and rules and train them, but they are only as effective as their belief in the company. I am not suggesting you become an employee-owned company, although that idea has merit. I am suggesting you apply the same principals in your company as Southwest does in theirs.

Start with some different thinking from the top, and then ask your employees to use some different thinking too. Then

listen — really listen — to their thoughts, the good and the bad.

So, what thinking will make a difference in your organization? What message will you deliver to your people? When your people OWN client satisfaction your clients will actually experience it.

*Dave Bryan, CGR, CAPS, is the president and CEO of Blackdog design/build/remodel in Salem, N.H. He is also a facilitator for Remodelers Advantage. Contact him at [dbryan@blackdogbuilders.com](mailto:dbryan@blackdogbuilders.com).*

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## Wealth and wisdom in today's economy

**W**e have all met or heard of people with great financial wealth who are very unhappy. They are busy yet truly unfulfilled and are often lonely, with or without a family living at home with them.

Most of us are in need of financial stability, and many are desperate for it right now. This is an easily understandable need and desire. Yet, we could miss something even more important than this if we do not pause and take inventory of what else makes us happy.



successful franchisees during this economy and prior are those that have a reputation of being prudent and financially frugal. Today they are considered very wise, whereas they are often perceived as too conservative during a good economy.

It is amazing how wisdom shows up over the long haul, but is often missed

Don't waste the pain and challenges you have been living through. Rather, benefit from the true wisdom that is before you. Seize it and invest it in your future plans, whatever they may be.

With recovery now around the next corner for most, let's not miss taking the time to reflect while the lessons are fresh and the door

**With recovery now around the next corner for most, let's not miss taking the time to reflect while the lessons are fresh and the door is open for a quantum leap in our personal and business lives.**

in the sprint or short-term. During these times, I have picked up distinctions I don't think I could have except through some of the significant challenges of the current economic time.

Another translation of the proverb I previously referenced is stated in more current terms: "Prefer my life-disciplines over chasing after money, and divine knowledge over a lucrative career. For wisdom is better than all the trappings of wealth, nothing you could wish for holds a candle to her. I am lady wisdom, and I live next to sanity; knowledge and discretion live just down the street."

How much is sanity worth? It is like those commercials say: "Priceless!"

We each have a huge opportunity living through today's economy to gain great wisdom if we surrender to the fact that the lessons are more valuable than the money or financial wealth lost. This creates an even greater ability to attain wealth, honor and a treasure-filled, abundant life.

is open for a quantum leap in our personal and business lives.

As a community of entrepreneurs and remodelers, we need to encourage one another and hold each other up. Make an extra call to a business associate today and plant a good seed of optimism, share your faith

in them and your belief that financial blessings are coming their way.

S. Truett Cathy, founder and chairman of Chick-fil-A and a mentor of mine, often says, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches." He has strived for this his entire life and, today, he not only has this, but is also recognized as one of Forbes 400 richest Americans.

You may discover you are wealthier than you ever imagined, albeit not all financial wealth, but in wisdom that has longer lasting value to you and those you care about.

*Doug Dwyer can be reached at [doug.dwyer@dreammakerbk.com](mailto:doug.dwyer@dreammakerbk.com).*

For more of Doug Dwyer's columns, visit [www.HousingZone.com](http://www.HousingZone.com).

# Leadership from the Industry's

*Remodeling's leaders discuss  
the essential traits of leadership  
and how to develop them*

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By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor

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Some are born leaders. Others have leadership thrust upon them, to borrow a phrase. Whatever your case, there's always something more to be learned about what makes a good leader. Even the best leaders never stop learning – that's what makes them great.

Leadership can be a nebulous concept. What makes a great leader and how someone becomes that great leader isn't easy to put a finger on, but there are some common characteristics among the best, as well as similarities in how they became the leaders they are today.

*Professional Remodeler* talked to leaders in the remodeling industry, as well as leadership experts from outside the industry about the leadership conundrum.

## **The 5 essentials of leadership**

Someone who wants to become an effective leader in their company needs many skills ranging from the personal to business. These are the ones that our experts identified as being particularly significant to those in the remodeling industry.

JIM FRAZIER





# Lessons Best

**1. Communication** – Probably the most important skill is the ability to be clear and consistent with what you expect from your employees. Without that clear guidance from above, most companies will not succeed.

“You better be able to say things that make sense,” says Ben Crawford, president of Crawford Renovation in Houston. “You better be able to clearly articulate your positions, your ideas, what you’re trying to accomplish.”

That doesn’t mean you have to be a great orator, says Josh Baker, president of BOWA Builders in McLean, Va. Having the discipline for consistent communication and follow-up is crucial. When starting out, it may be necessary to start by scheduling that communication on a calendar.

“I’d look at it as, ‘These are the times, the opportunities; I’m going to have to communicate the message I want.’”

**2. Interpersonal skills** – Some call it presence, others likeability, but the key thing is that you can interact with your employees on a daily basis, building trust and rapport. If your employees don’t trust you, they won’t follow you, says Jeff Gibson, vice president of consulting at The Table Group, a firm that helps business leaders grow their companies.

**3. Fearlessness** – Leaders can’t be afraid to take chances, or they won’t make the necessary changes in business. Many

## 3 common leadership mistakes

**T**he Table Group consults with organizations large and small in a wide variety of industries. Whether they’re running a small remodeling company or working for AT&T, there are some common mistakes new leaders make, says Jeff Gibson, vice president of consulting.

1. They want to be involved in everything.

“Not only are they doing themselves a disservice because they’re not using their time effectively, they’re doing a disservice to the people they’ve hired to fill that role.”

2. They don’t encourage conflict.

“More often than not, leaders look at conflict as a negative when conflict is what you want on your team. It can get a little uncomfortable, but ... that level of discomfort is important to make sure you’re getting the best ideas on the table.”

3. They try to maintain a sense of invulnerability.

“When a leader doesn’t admit when they’re wrong ... it actually demonstrates to a team that they shouldn’t make any mistakes, either. In reality, what you want is a team that when they make mistakes, they ask for help.”



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## Leadership lessons

times, company owners can be leery of doing that because their own personal wealth is at risk, Gibson says.

"There needs to be an element of fearlessness but not recklessness," he says. "You've got to take risks from time to time."

That doesn't mean taking stupid chances. You just can't be so paralyzed by the fear of failure that you never grow, he says.

**4. Delegation** – It's the old "work on your business, not in

your business" strategy. A micromanager not only overworks himself, he also has unhappy employees and a company with limited growth opportunities. The best leaders know when it's OK to not be in charge, says Joy Kilgore, president of Executive Business Approach, a consulting firm that works with several large remodeling companies throughout the country.

"We have to have the right people and let them handle things,"

says Gary Marrokal, president of Marrokal Design & Remodeling in Lakeside, Calif. "Leaders oversee — we touch all the areas — but to be successful we've got to surround ourselves with people that are sharper than we are."

**5. Decisiveness** – A great leader has to be able to

make difficult choices, Crawford says. Especially in the current economic climate, a leader has to make tough calls, such as cutting staff.

"We are always looking to cull our bottom 20 percent," he says. "You can't be afraid to get rid of the deadweight."

### Nature vs. nurture

One of the biggest debates in the study of leadership is whether leaders are born or made. There are academic studies that weigh in on both sides, and plenty that come down somewhere in the middle.

Neuroscientists and psychologists have even gotten into the game. In a study published in Harvard Business Review last year, Daniel Goleman and Richard Boyatzis write that leaders who display empathy can literally affect their own and their employees' brain chemistry. In other words, the greatest leaders have brains that are highly developed in the area that deals with social interactions (essentially the other end of the spectrum from those with autism or Asperger's syndrome), they argued.

Count Crawford among those who believe leadership is innate — and that it's an ability that less than 1 percent of people have, he says.

"There's a very small percentage of the population that has the ability to be a leader," Crawford says. "People will argue that with me, but either you have it or you don't."

While Gibson agrees that some people are born with gifts that may predispose them to being a leader, leadership skills can be learned.

**"You better be able to say things that make sense. You better be able to clearly articulate your positions, your ideas, what you're trying to accomplish."**

— **BEN CRAWFORD, CRAWFORD RENOVATION**

## 4 books every leader should read

**W**e asked our sources for their advice on the best books for an aspiring company leader to read. These four came up more than once:

• **"Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't"** by Jim Collins — How do companies truly excel? In this classic book, Collins and his research team explore how 11 companies made the difficult transition from just good to great and the important role the company's "Level 5 Leaders" played in that transition.

• **"High Altitude Leadership: What the World's Most Forbidding Peaks Teach Us About Success"** by Chris Warner and Don Schminke — The authors (both mountain climbers) use scaling the peaks as a metaphor for building a business, focusing on eight psychological mindsets that can paralyze companies.

• **"The Orange Code: How ING Direct Succeeded by Being a Rebel with a Cause"** by Arkadi Kuhlman and Bruce Philp — Kuhlman, the founder of ING Direct, and Philp, the branding consultant who helped him build the company, write about how Kuhlman's unconventional approach to business helped the online banking company become a global force.

• **"The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You"** by John Maxwell — Maxwell has written more than 30 books on leadership. This one, which has sold more than 1 million copies, focuses on the key "laws" every leader should follow.

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## Leadership lessons

“Some people are born to be charismatic, more demonstrable, but it doesn’t necessarily mean they’re going to be successful as leaders,” he says. “It can be learned, but you have to have an openness and a willingness to take feedback and advice, and some ‘natural leaders’ aren’t willing to do that.”

Marrokal believes that while leadership can be

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“Leaders oversee — we touch all the areas — but to be successful we’ve got to surround ourselves with people that are sharper than we are.”

— GARY MARROKAL, MARROKAL DESIGN & REMODELING

learned, it has to also be a passion for a potential leader. If someone doesn’t want to be a leader, you can’t make them one. That’s why some remodelers are happier running either very small companies or working for someone else, even if they have the ability to run their own company, he says.

### Learning from other leaders

**P**eer networking groups are one of the most cited resources for remodelers who are trying to learn to be a better leader. All of these groups count some of the industry’s great leaders among their current or former members.

**Business Networks** — Started in the 1980s by former remodeler Les Cunningham, Business Networks offers peer groups and business coaching. [www.businessnetworks.com](http://www.businessnetworks.com)

**Remodelers Advantage** — Like Business Networks, Remodelers Advantage matches remodelers with similar, non-competing remodelers throughout the country. The company, run by founder Linda Case and President Victoria Downing, also offers various consulting services. [www.remodelersadvantage.com](http://www.remodelersadvantage.com)

**Remodeling 20 Clubs** — Available to NAHB members, these groups are another opportunity for peer networking with other remodelers. [www.nahb.org](http://www.nahb.org)

**PRIME** — Started less than a year ago, this group run by Executive Business Approach has strict membership requirements and includes some of the largest remodeling firms in the country. [www.executivebusinessapproach.com](http://www.executivebusinessapproach.com)

### Learning to lead

Whether or not someone is predisposed to leadership, they’re not going to get there without work. The best leaders are those that have a willingness to learn, Kilgore says.

“I find that it’s the most talented leaders who are trying to improve their leadership skills,” she says. “The least talented are just trying to get through today.”

Even after 40 years in the business, the last 28 as a business owner, Marrokal says he still makes time to learn.

“I think you can never stop learning,” he says. “The educational opportunities out there are outstanding.”

To develop his leadership skills as well as those of his managers, Marrokal attends seminars and frequently brings consultants and other remodelers to his company. He’s also an avid reader and keeps extra copies of many business books on hand (he’s a big fan of “Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don’t” by Jim Collins) so he can share them with other remodelers.

Marrokal has learned a lot over the years from other remodelers, both in formal peer networking groups and informal relationships.

“When you see someone standing out, doing well, go introduce yourself to them,” he says. “Most people like to talk about how they got that successful.”

Crawford says finding good mentors has been a key reason for his success growing Crawford Renovation to Houston’s largest remodeling firm with a projected \$18.5 million in 2009 revenue. Crawford started the company only eight years ago after a career in the corporate world, most recently with a GE portfolio company.

“I’ve always been blessed with great mentors, but I’ve also sought out the most powerful people I could latch onto,” he says. “I look for the guys who are great leaders because I want to be able to talk to them peer-to-peer and compare notes.”

Even as a consultant, Gibson says that finding a mentor or other peers to learn from is the best way to become a successful leader.

“It’s by far the most effective,” he says. “(Peer groups) are great assets for leaders to learn about different people’s

styles and approaches.”

There's no single answer that's going to be effective for every person, Baker says. Even at BOWA Baker and his co-founder, CEO Larry Weinberg, have two different ways of learning, with Weinberg being more of a student — attending seminars and reading books — and Baker spending more time talking to other remodelers.

“Larry and I have different personalities, different skill sets,” Baker says. “I'd like to think that we're both good leaders.”

However someone chooses to learn, the commitment to being a leader is the most important part of it.

“You have to have that discipline to do it day in and day out,” Crawford says. “You can go to all these self-help things, read books, but if you're not going to take time to implement it, every day of the year, it's worthless. You've got to commit to it.”



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# Large projects, high-level marketing lead way to growth

*Largest companies rely on whole house remodels and custom new construction for a significant portion of their business*

By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor

Remodeling is an industry dominated by small companies. Depending what source you listen to, there are somewhere between 500,000 and 1 million “remodelers” in the country, but the vast majority have revenues below \$500,000 a year and no employees.

So what separates the large companies from the small?

In our annual Business Results survey, we found that the biggest differences occur in project size and marketing methods. We examined companies and divided them into four categories, based on 2008 remodeling revenue: Less than \$500,000; \$500,000 to \$1 million; \$1 million to \$3 million; and more than \$3 million.

## Larger companies = larger projects

The starkest difference was in average project size. Companies with less than \$500,000 in 2008 revenue had an average job of only \$5,248, compared with \$18,512 for companies at \$500,000 to \$1 million, \$22,225 for companies from \$1 million to \$3 million and \$77,687 for companies more than \$3 million.

The project mix explains much of this difference. Kitchens were the top remodeling project for every company size, but after that there were some significant differences. Most notably, the smallest companies (less than \$500,000) generated 10 percent of their revenue from home repair or handyman projects, which carried an average price tag of only \$1,938. No other group of companies generated more than 5 percent of their revenues from home repairs.

For all but that smallest group, whole house remodels were a



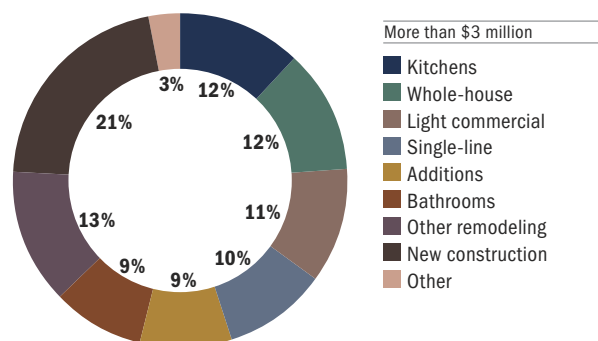
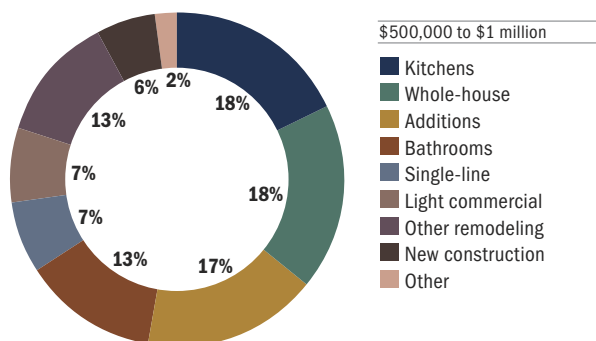
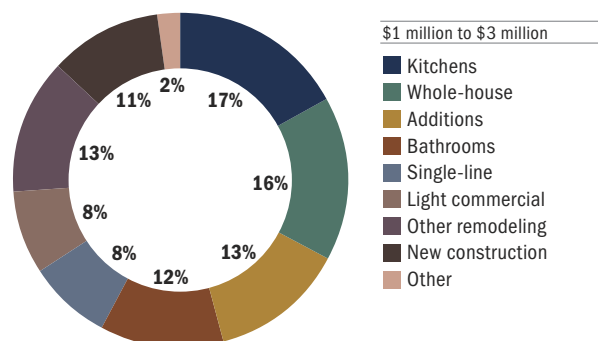
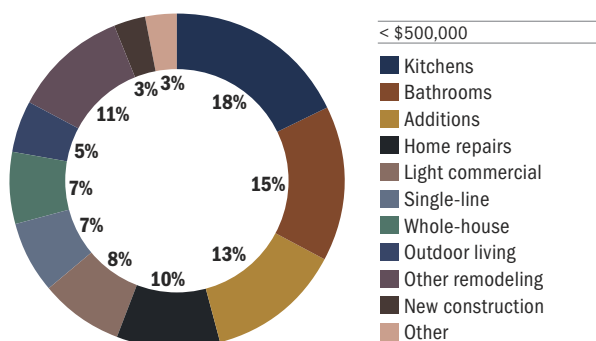
NICK HENDERSON

major source of revenue. Companies less than \$500,000 only generated 7 percent of business from whole-house remodels, with an average price tag of \$92,500. Whole-house remodels accounted for more than 15 percent of business for other firms. Those projects were also larger, with an average job price of more than \$170,000.

Finally, companies above \$1 million in revenue found a lot of

## Top project type by company size based on revenue

Percentage of revenue generated by project type



SOURCE: 2009 PROFESSIONAL REMODELER BUSINESS RESULTS SURVEY

While kitchens are the top remodeling project regardless of company size, job mix varies greatly after that.

business from building custom homes: 11 percent for companies from \$1 million to \$3 million and 21 percent for those with revenues of more than \$3 million. The average company in those groups builds three custom homes a year with an average price of nearly \$600,000.

## Different approaches to marketing

Regardless of company size, the average firm spends between 1 and 2 percent on marketing. But the smallest companies were much more likely to report spending nothing on marketing — about half of companies with less than \$1 million in 2008 revenue compared with a third of companies above \$1 million.

That said, the biggest differences in marketing were how they spent the money. The largest companies spent their marketing dollars on more methods and were more likely to spend on sophisticated methods that take more time and money. (See chart) For example, they are much more likely to use the Web to market. More than 70 percent of companies with revenues more than \$1 million have Web sites, compared with less than half of those with revenues less than \$1 million. A quarter of the larger group use e-mail marketing compared with only 10 percent of smaller firms.

To see the full results of our Business Results survey and listen to podcasts about local market conditions from some of our Market Leaders, visit [www.housingzone.com/bizresults](http://www.housingzone.com/bizresults).

## Most successful marketing tactics by company revenue

	<\$500,000	\$500-\$1m	\$1m-\$3m	>\$3m
Job/truck signs	65% (55%)	74% (52%)	79% (45%)	78% (45%)
Web site	38% (30%)	55% (28%)	65% (31%)	79% (28%)
Organization membership	34% (34%)	47% (31%)	55% (27%)	62% (38%)
Print advertising	33% (18%)	42% (13%)	63% (35%)	55% (15%)
Direct mail	29% (15%)	36% (15%)	44% (17%)	49% (15%)
Yellow pages	29% (18%)	39% (22%)	34% (6%)	38% (10%)
Home shows	11% (4%)	25% (18%)	33% (12%)	42% (25%)
Web referral services	23% (15%)	22% (10%)	24% (11%)	25% (7%)
E-mail	13% (9%)	8% (0%)	19% (4%)	29% (6%)
Radio	3% (1%)	4% (3%)	14% (5%)	16% (5%)

SOURCE: 2009 PROFESSIONAL REMODELER BUSINESS RESULTS SURVEY

Depending on average revenues, companies find different marketing methods to be successful. The first column for each company size indicates what percent of firms use that marketing method; the second shows what percent ranked that method as one of their two most effective methods.

## Methodology

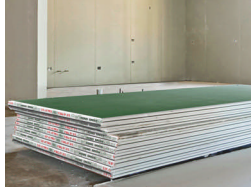
417 remodelers completed the survey via the Internet. Data were collected from January 9 through February 6, 2009. Survey invitations were sent to random samples of subscribers to *Professional Remodeler* magazine and eNewsletters as well as to members of Remodelers Advantage.



# Stat Sheet

The need-to-know on the latest products to hit the remodeling industry

By **Nick Bajzek**,  
Products Editor



## Temple-Inland GreenGlass

**Applications:** Interior gypsum  
**Attributes:** Faced on both sides with mold-resistant fiberglass  
**Sizes/Options:** 1/2 and 5/8 in. thicknesses, 48 and 54 in. widths and lengths of 8, 10 and 12 ft.  
**Environmental Traits:** Contains 90 percent recycled content  
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[www.templeinland.com](http://www.templeinland.com)



## Capital Safety/DBI-SALA Rollgliss R500

**Applications:** Controlled descent, self-rescue, emergency evacuation  
**Attributes:** Also has lifting capabilities  
**Sizes/Options:** 25-ft. increments between 50 and 1,000 ft.  
**Complies with:** OSHA and ANSI Z359.4-2007  
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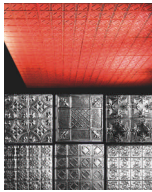


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**DHCT5**  
**Applications:** 2x1 Cat-5e to HDMI Converter  
**Attributes:** HDMI 1.3 and HDCP Compliant  
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[www.centronics.com](http://www.centronics.com)



**Cifial**  
**Techno M3 floor-mounted tub filler**  
**Applications:** Bathrooms  
**Attributes:** Six individual body sprays  
**Sizes/Options:** Floor mounted with handshower  
**Finishes:** Polished chrome, satin nickel, polished nickel  
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**Architectural Products  
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**Decorative Stamped Steel  
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**Attributes:** Includes 4-ft. cornices  
**Sizes/Options:** Corresponding series of decorative backsplashes  
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**Monte Carlo Fan Company**  
**Extreme Green Ceiling Fans**  
**Applications:** Ceilings  
**Attributes:** DC powered motors  
**Sizes/Options:** Avanti model shown  
**Environmental Traits:** Energy Star qualified  
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**Applications:** Masonry, stone, wood and metal  
**Attributes:** 750 in./lbs of torque, 2,140 RPM and three speeds  
**Sizes/Options:** Hammer Drill/Driver or Drill/Driver  
**Warranty:** Lifetime service agreement  
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**Trimline**  
**Tri-Vent Rolled Vent**  
**Applications:** Roofing, ventilation  
**Attributes:** For off-peak exhaust, lower intake or shed (clerestory)  
**Sizes/Options:** 20-ft. roll  
**Other:** Also works on flat or barrel tile roof applications  
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[www.trimline-products.com](http://www.trimline-products.com)



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**ARMOR Water Heaters**  
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**Attributes:** Stainless steel heat exchanger, 5:1 modulating turndown  
**Sizes/Options:** Inputs ranging from 150,000 to 800,000 Btu/hr  
**Environmental Traits:** Operates at 98 percent thermal efficiency  
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[www.Lochinvar.com](http://www.Lochinvar.com)



**Bruce Hardwood Floors**  
**American Originals Line**  
**Applications:** Flooring  
**Attributes:** Genuine hardwood with cross-ply engineered construction  
**Sizes/Options:** 3/8 in. thickness, 5 in. wide  
**Warranty:** 25-year residential finish and lifetime structural integrity  
**Materials Used:** Oak, maple or hickory  
<http://pr.hotims.com/23743-260>  
[www.bruce.com](http://www.bruce.com)



**Rotozip**  
**Tile Dock**  
**Applications:** Tile  
**Attributes:** Quick-clamping system  
**Sizes/Options:** Can be mounted on table or sawhorse  
**Materials Used:** Constructed from structural foam  
**MSRP:** \$89.99  
<http://pr.hotims.com/23743-261>  
[www.rotozip.com](http://www.rotozip.com)



**Mapei**  
**Ultrabond Eco 220**  
**Applications:** Multi-purpose flooring adhesive  
**Attributes:** For high-traffic areas  
**Sizes/Options:** May be used in both direct and double glue-down installation methods  
**Environmental Traits:** Eco-friendly formulation  
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[www.mapei.com](http://www.mapei.com)



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**Puget Sound Collection**  
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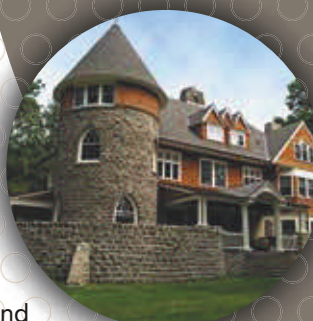
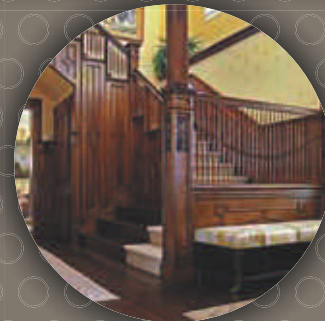
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# Windows and Doors

AAMA offers advice to make sure key building components are chosen and installed properly

## 6 tips for specifying and installing windows and doors

By **Dave Barista**,  
Reed Construction Media

**W**hen it comes to controlling moisture and increasing energy efficiency in homes and buildings, windows and doors are among the most vital components in construction. Improper or insufficient design details and shoddy installation can lead to air infiltration, moisture intrusion and poor overall performance.

To promote consistent, high-quality installations of windows and doors, the American Architectural Manufacturers Association has issued a 317-page installation manual geared toward the commercial building market. Lessons learned here are applicable to the remodeling industry as well. And in this economy, many remodelers are taking on replacement projects in commercial and multifamily construction. The publication, AAMA Standard Practice for the Installation of Windows and Doors in Commercial Buildings, addresses the installation of window systems and exterior glass doors — including hinged and sliding-glass doors — for both new construction and replacement projects.

The manual offers hundreds of

how-to tips, lessons learned and advice on designing, specifying and installing window and door systems. We've highlighted six of the best tips for remodelers below; see the sidebar for more errors to avoid.

**1. Install only** those products designed to meet the performance levels expected on the job. Comparing the water performance capabilities of the products intended for the job with the project specifications can greatly reduce the potential for water damage due to improper product selection. Use products only on projects that have performance requirements less than, or at most equal to, the rated performance of the product.

"Where products are subjected to increased risks of wind-driven rain events, they will typically be expected to have achieved a higher design pressure (DP) rating and water penetration resistance test," says Ken Brenden, AAMA's technical standards manager. "All products have limitations when it comes to their performance ratings. Placing a product with a relatively

low DP and water resistance rating in a structure located in an extreme weather environment will certainly lead to problems."

**2. Make sure to rebalance** HVAC systems when installing energy-efficient windows and doors in existing structures. When new energy-efficient windows and doors are installed in existing buildings, the HVAC system should be rebalanced to accommodate the reduced levels of air infiltration through the windows and doors.

If you don't rebalance, negative pressures can be created within the building because the HVAC unit is still trying to draw

make-up air from the existing spaces, yet there is less volume allowed from around the windows

and doors. When the allowable air infiltration is reduced in volume, a higher pressure (negative) is created within the structure. That make-up air must come from someplace else, typically from other small holes or cracks in the building envelope. This can lead to whistling and howling noises and water infiltration in places that had never

occurred in the building before, says Brenden.

**3. When installing exterior** glass doors in multifamily dwelling units, consider these building code pointers and cautions:

- Doors must have a minimum clearance width of 32 inches (measured from the face of the door to the stop of the door while open 90 degrees) for wheelchair access.

- Exterior door thresholds and sliding door tracks typically should not exceed 1/2 to 3/4 inch high. Thresholds and changes in level at these locations are to be beveled with a slope no greater than 1:2.

- Minimum clearance width for an accessible route inside the unit is 36 inches.

- If a balcony or patio has doorways leading into two or more separate rooms, all doors must be wheelchair accessible.

Note: Always consult with the local building code official to determine the applicable code requirements.

**4. Keep windows flush** with the face in surface barrier applications. In surface-barrier wall systems that don't include a water-resistive barrier behind

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the exterior skin, such as poured concrete walls or CMU without wall cavities, do not allow the windows to extend beyond the exterior face of the building or beyond the exterior water barrier.

"It's imperative that sealant continuity be achieved between the drainage plane of the window/door and the adjacent construction," says Brenden. "This crucial area forms the primary defense against air and moisture intrusion."

**5. Never take action** inconsistent with the manufacturer's

installation instructions without consulting all appropriate parties. The manufacturer is most familiar with how the product should be installed to function properly and meet the terms of the warranty.

"Installation is not a one-size-fits-all solution," says Brenden. Each product has unique design characteristics, including method of fabrication and assembly, hardware, sash operation and recommended maintenance.

These factors often dictate how the manufacturer requires its

product to be installed to meet its performance requirements.

**6. Know when safety glazing** is required. While not as common in residential construction, remodelers taking on commercial work would be well advised to heed the IBC 2003 rules governing safety glass. It is required in any operable window or fixed panel adjacent to a door where:

- The nearest exposed edge of the glazing is within a 24-inch arc of either vertical edge of the door in a closed position

- The bottom of the exposed edge of the glazing is less than 60 inches above the walking surface

Exception: Safety glass is not required when there is an intervening wall or other permanent barrier between the door and the glazing. In addition, it's not required for glazing in walls that are perpendicular to the plan of the wall the door is in.

When designing rooms that include operable windows or individual fixed panels not adjacent to doors, safety glass is required where:

- The exposed area of an individual pane is greater than nine square feet
- The exposed bottom edge if the glazing is less than 18 inches above the floor
- The exposed top edge of the glazing is greater than 36 inches above the floor
- One or more walking surface(s) is within 36 inches horizontally of the plane of glass

Exception: Safety glass is not required when a protective bar 1½ inches or more in height and capable of withstanding a horizontal load of 50 lb. per linear foot without contacting the glass is installed on the accessible sides of the glazing 34-38 inches above the floor. In addition, it's not required in the outboard lite in an insulating glass unit or multiple glazing where the bottom exposed edge of the glass is 25 inches or more above any grade, roof, walking surface, or other horizontal or sloped surface adjacent to the glass door.

*This story originally appeared in our sister publication Building Design+Construction.*

## Avoid These Common Installation Mistakes

**AAMA's manufacturer members** identified 40 common installation miscues. Here's a summary of the most crucial:

- Never block weep holes with sealant or any other material that will keep water from draining properly.
- Don't drill through window or door frames to apply alarm systems. Doing so may allow water to penetrate into places where it can't get out.
- Don't apply film to the glass without first consulting the window or door manufacturer. Film may lead to heat buildup and glass breakage.
- Don't block the drainage path (weep holes) at doors when used in conjunction with patios involving brick, stone or concrete pavers. When necessary use a starter sill, or shim the door high enough to clear any obstructions.
- Don't block breather holes with sealant on dual-sash units. Breather holes are there to allow air circulation.

- Be careful when welding after installation. Shield the glass and frame from weld flash to avoid damage.
- Seal metal-to-metal joints. Also, make sure end dams are sealed properly on sub-sills.
- Use compatible sealants that are meant to allow for movement due to expansion, contraction or displacement between stories. Also, know the sealant maker's guidelines for maximum and minimum temperature when applying sealant.
- Don't use the finished window or door opening as an access for the delivery of materials. This often results in the build-up of debris inside the frame and can cause damage to window frames and door thresholds.
- Make sure the framing surfaces are protected from corrosive materials such as mortar or sulfuric acid, which are commonly found in many external cleaning solutions.



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# Home Automation

As project budgets take a dip, there's a corresponding shift toward energy-saving products and interoperability

## Electronics association says home automation projects down 10 to 15 percent

By **Nick Bajzek**,  
Products Editor

**T**he Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association says the association's clients are cutting budgets by 10 to 15 percent of the total construction cost, including electronics. Many clients are also pre-wiring their home to upgrade later if they want.

"It is clear that across the board we are seeing a much higher level of sensitivity to budgets with clients paying close attention to costs," says Matt Carter, CEDIA Registered Outreach Instructor and CEO of Encore Technology + Design in Raleigh, N.C. The association consults clients to support their long-term electronic goals.

### INTEROPERABILITY NOW A MUST

New products with structured wiring or newer wireless technology and other high-end bells and whistles are making great gains, but interoperability is top of clients' mind. Greg Antonioli, president of Out of the Woods Construction & Cabinetry in Arlington, Mass., calls it the secret to success; it simply won't do, he says, to have great technology nodes



*Controls such as this touchpad by Control4 allow users to set lighting, HVAC and security while they do the dishes.*

that can't communicate with each other.

Carter says that new technology allows those interested in automating their home to do so without the cost of installing new cables. This

is good news for clients who want to upgrade an existing home and great news for vendors wanting to take advantage of the retrofit market. Wireless products also mean greater flexibility during

installation and mobility of devices.

### AUTOMATION TRENDS

Sam Lucero, practice director for M2M Connectivity at research firm ABI Research, divides the market into four channels: luxury, mainstream, DIY and managed home automation. The luxury market, which normally weathers downturns fairly well, has seen a marked decline in terms of units shipped. ABI reports about 144,000 systems shipped globally in 2007; that number dropped to about 93,000 luxury-priced systems shipped in 2008.

For 2009 the numbers continue to decline. Lucero predicts about 88,000 home automation systems will be shipped.

"The mainstream market is looking at using software and standard space communication technology to bring a significant degree of automation. The industry has been trying to reach home builders and contractors to address this rather large potential customer base," he says. "From that standpoint, we think the market will grow to 138,000 systems shipped by the end of 2009."

### What's the 'Next Big Thing' in home automation?

**Matt Carter, CEDIA's registered outreach instructor** and CEO of Encore Technology + Design, says there are two developments that are exciting to watch. The first is the appearance of pre-designed home automation packages. Pre-designed systems, he says, represent the maturation of the industry toward branded offerings that are attempting to simplify technology solutions for consumers. The second is the development of the smart grid and the intention by the energy industry to connect the home to the utilities to manage energy consumption and get rid of "vampire" appliances.



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# Outdoor Living

The American Society of Landscape Architects quarterly business survey shows sustainable projects, alternative design elements are gaining popularity

## Demand rises for low maintenance outdoor living projects

By **Nick Bajzek**,  
Products Editor

**T**he American Society of Landscape Architects' Business Quarterly survey shows there's more demand for sustainable outdoor-living projects. "It's a bit of a mix of smarter projects. There's a big lean toward more built-in sustainability," says ASLA Executive Vice President and CEO Nancy Summerville. After all, she notes, the First Family recently planted a vegetable garden. "(Outdoor living) has gone mainstream. It's stylish now, for example, to grow your own vegetables." The survey found that more than 10 percent of contractors have been asked to clear spaces for gardens.

Demand for traditional turf grass or lawns on recently completed projects has dropped by almost 33 percent in favor of alternative design elements. The survey points to 58.7 percent of contractors who have been asked to plant regionally appropriate, non-invasive vegetation in place of grass expanses. Almost 38 percent of respondents reported incorporating water harvesting el-

ements such as a rain garden; 35 percent indicated incorporating a variety of hardscapes, including permeable surfaces.

### WHY THE TREND?

The reasons for these upticks, says Summerville, are varied. Almost half (45 percent) of contractors reported their clients were looking to lower the time and effort it takes to maintain expansive outdoor living areas. They also want to make the most of government rebates. "People are willing to pay a bit more for outdoor living projects, but most clients want a project that might help them receive government-backed stimulus or tax break money," says Summerville.

Contractors and landscape architects notice more clients want sustainable elements as well. "We recommend, or are asked for, composite decking materials and railings, PVC materials, and basically anything that is rot-proof on our projects," says Diane Kelly from Atlanta-based Mosaic Group Architects & Remodelers.



*Streams, koi ponds and other water-based projects are also on the rise, says the American Society of Landscape Architects.*

The company has already turned its attention toward energy efficiency of the outdoor living space by incorporating screened porches with skylights and solar lighting for patios. Kelly says her clients are still looking for other options for living spaces. "These buyers," she stresses, "still want a transitional space, especially in Atlanta, where an outdoor room could conceivably be used more than nine months out of the year."

John Mills Davies, director of design for San Diego-based Marrokal Design & Remodeling, says that although sustainability has caught on, the big difference he's noticed is that projects are scaled back. Davies says that his clients aren't looking to cut corners; they just crave a better bang for the buck. "(Our) projects have changed with smarter design. We are making more efficient use of space and design features such as fire, water, heat and light," he says.

### The Green Act

**The recently re-introduced Green Act**, penned by Representative Ed Perlmutter (D-Co.) and part of bill HR 6899, the Comprehensive Energy Security and Consumer Protection Act, passed The U.S. House of Representatives in September 2008. The Senate, however, did not act on the bill before the end of the legislative body's session.

The bill aims to allow more off-shore oil and natural gas drilling and more investments in alternative fuels and energy-efficient communities. Interestingly, it also includes a provision to require the Department of Housing and Urban Development to consult with the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) to mandate smarter and more sustainable practices to outdoor living projects.



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**Professional Remodeler** (ISSN 1521-9135) (GST #123397457) Vol. XX, No. X is published monthly except for December by Reed Business Information, 8878 S. Barrons Blvd., Highlands Ranch, CO 80129-2345. Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier, is located at 360 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10010. Tad Smith, CEO; John Poulin, Chief Financial Officer. Circulation records are maintained at Reed Business Information, 8878 S. Barrons Blvd., Highlands Ranch, CO 80129-2345. Phone 303/470-4445. Periodicals Postage Paid at Littleton, CO 80126 and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to **Professional Remodeler**, P.O. Box 7500, Highlands Ranch, CO 80163-7500. Rates for nonqualified subscriptions: U.S.A., \$89.99 1-year; Canada, \$109.99 1-year; Mexico, \$109.99 1-year; all other countries, \$149.99 1-year. Single copies are available for \$10 US and \$15 foreign. Please address all subscription mail to Professional Remodeler, 8778 S. Barrons Blvd., Highlands Ranch, CO 80129-2345. Professional Remodeler is a registered trademark of Reed Elsevier Properties Inc., used under license. Printed in U.S.A. Reed Business Information does not assume and hereby disclaims any liability to any person for any loss or damage caused by errors or omissions in the material contained herein, regardless of whether such errors result from negligence, accident or any other cause whatsoever. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: RCS International, Box 697 STN A, Windsor Ontario N9A 6N4

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