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THE CRITICAL EDGE FOR HIGH-PERFORMANCE REMODELERS



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REMODELERS

Editorial

By **Paul Deffenbaugh**, Editorial Director

Data needed

Data reported on the remodeling industry has never been solid. Permit reporting by the U.S. Census Bureau was hampered by wildly divergent permitting requirements in different states and localities. Eventually, the permit tracking was dropped because of its unreliability.

The famous “C50 Expenditures for Residential Improvements and Repairs” report the Census Bureau produced quarterly was based on the same survey that generated the Consumer Price Index, so it focused primarily on small purchases, such as toothpaste. Consequently, the numbers reported on remodeling repairs and improvements were highly volatile. Even so, the “C50” would come out long after the end of the quarter — sometimes as long as 6 months after — so its usefulness in getting a true picture of the remodeling industry was suspect.

Much more accurate is the biannual American Housing Survey. This is a detailed study of all the spending American households commit. Very accurate. Very detailed. An excellent study. The downside? It’s only done every other year and requires another year of number crunching to report the details. So, we get a very nice picture of the remodeling industry from 3 years ago.

The Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University’s Remodeling Futures program has developed a leading indicator of remodeling activity that imputes a considerable amount of information in a weighted and balanced index number. It is very useful for a high-level assess-

ment of the industry but lacks significant breadth or subtlety. Knowing the industry is trending up over the next three months is valuable but does not give anyone in the industry — remodelers, manufacturers or other service providers — the details they need to make decisions about where to commit resources.

In contrast, we have detailed information about the housing industry from June. We know the number of permits for new homes; new homes sold by market and type; and

The remodeling industry lacks reliable, consistent, deep data.



existing home sales. Everyone has a smart sense of what’s going on and where we’re going.

So, what can we do? As a professional industry, we need this information to conduct our business, operate more efficiently and attract capital investments. The Census Bureau steadfastly refuses to serve as a marketing arm for private enterprise.

Nonetheless, we need to pressure our Commerce Department to fulfill its role of providing reliable information about a nearly \$300 billion industry.

At *Professional Remodeler*, we’re doing a small part by making surveying and data collection a larger element of our own enterprise. Check out www.HousingZone.com soon for our monthly surveys of the industry. These short, quick-to-complete surveys focus on business issues and product information. Be a part of the solution. Put our surveys on your monthly to-do list.

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5 ways to protect your company from green litigation

Major litigation over green remodeling hasn't come to the residential market yet, but it's probably only a matter of time. There has already been legal action on the commercial side, with more likely to come, says attorney Chris Cheatham, LEED AP.

The most prominent case has been *Southern Builders v. Shaw Development*, which was settled out of court last year. There were many disputed issues in that case, but a prominent one was the developer's suing the general contractor for more than \$635,000 in lost tax credits when the building failed to achieve a silver LEED rating.

"Residential is lagging behind commercial in terms of green remodeling," says Cheatham, an attorney with Watt, Tieder, Hoffar & Fitzgerald in Washington, D.C., and author of the Green Building Law Update blog. "You're going to start seeing some of the same legal issues that just aren't there yet in terms of case law on the residential side."

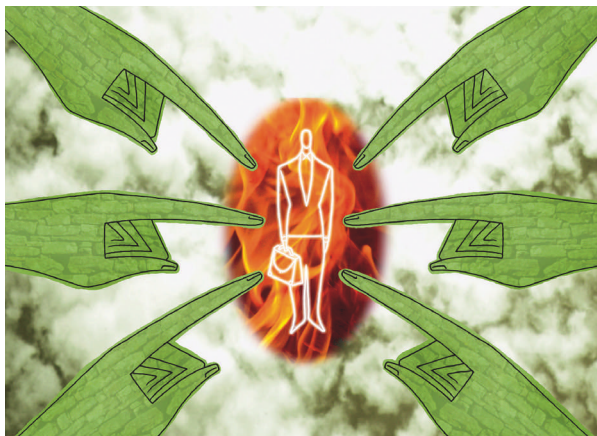
Cheatham suggests five general areas remodelers should think about to protect themselves from potential green lawsuits. Laws and regulations may vary depending on your state and municipality, so be sure to consult with a local attorney if you have concerns about your company.

1. Don't make promises

One thing a remodeler should never do is guarantee a project will accomplish something specific, e.g. "These windows will cut your energy bills \$100 a month." Promises regarding energy efficiency and indoor air quality have led to lawsuits in commercial construction, and that could easily happen in remodeling as well, Cheatham says.

"You don't know how these homes are going to be used after you finish it," he says. "You can tell them what you expect, you can predict what you think energy savings will be, but don't make guarantees."

That rule applies to every step of the project, from the advertising the potential client



KEN ORVIDAS

sees before signing the deal to promises made by a salesperson to get the contract and statements during the design planning stage. Any of those areas could potentially open your company up to litigation.

2. Educate the homeowner

Once you've finished the home, the homeowner needs to run it. Most homeowners don't know how to optimally operate and maintain an energy-efficient home, especially when you throw in complicated systems such as solar or geothermal. The right education could save a lot of headaches.

"The most important part of these green building projects if you want to improve your energy usage is the operation and maintenance, so the residents need to understand how to actually work the system, and that requires education," Cheatham says.

3. Make careful product choices

According to a recent study by Terra-Choice Environmental Marketing, the number of self-proclaimed green products across all product areas has increased by as much as 176 percent. In the same study, the company concluded 98 percent of products were guilty of some form of "greenwashing."

Many green products are new and unproven, and if a product fails, homeowners are going to be looking to you as the remodeler to make it right.

"Chinese drywall isn't a green material, but it really shows how using any material that hasn't been fully tested can get you in trouble," Cheatham says. "There's a potential for a lot of these new green materials to result in defects."

Even if the product is a good one, it could be the wrong product for that application. For example, there have been lawsuits around bamboo and cork floors that warped because of excessive condensation, Cheatham says. Although the product wasn't faulty, it was used somewhere it shouldn't have been.

4. Get your trades on board

Just as with a faulty product, sub-par work by a trade contractor will fall in your lap. Make sure your trades understand the demands of the green project and pass on those requirements to their employees. They need to understand their responsibilities as part of the building team. Requirements should be formalized in an explicit, written contract, Cheatham says. (See No. 5.)

5. Craft contracts carefully

Clearly spell out who is responsible for what. This is especially important if the remodeler is not designing the home and instead executing an architect's plans. If the home fails to meet expectations, is it the architect's fault for a bad design or the remodeler's fault for an improper build?

This becomes an even bigger issue if you're attempting to meet standards for certification, especially in new construction, such as LEED for Homes.

"When projects don't actually achieve the certification, there are extra costs," Cheatham says.

"It's going to mean protracted legislation if the parties end up in court trying to determine who's responsible. The more particular you can be with your contract in regard to the green building strategies, the better off you will be."

— JONATHAN SWEET, SENIOR EDITOR

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4 opportunities to cut your health insurance costs

As healthcare reform works its way through the chambers of the U.S. House and Senate, costs continue to rise for remodeling firms that want to offer insurance for their employees.

The average employer will pay 9 percent more for health coverage for its employees in 2010 than it did this year, according to "Behind the numbers: Medical cost trends for 2010," a report from the PricewaterhouseCoopers Health Research Institute. That follows increases of similar sizes in 2009 and 2008.

Although it's difficult to say what reform — if any — will finally emerge from Washington, the challenges of providing health insurance are unlikely to totally disappear. Here are four tips for cutting your healthcare costs.

1. Provide for wellness

Many people put off annual visits to their doctor to avoid paying the co-pay for the office visit. This can lead to more expensive, long-term problems that cost an employer and employee much more. A medical plan that covers annual visits can help eliminate some of those more serious problems.

It's a growing trend, says Nicole Schmedding, a benefits practice leader at Lockton Affinity, which administers NARI's insurance program. "That's when healthcare costs really go up for individuals, when they don't get those annual exams," she says.

2. Offer a healthcare savings account

A healthcare savings account is funded by the employee, the employer or both. Contributions to an HSA are tax deductible for both the employee and the employer. Employees can use the money in the ac-

count to pay their medical costs. Unused money carries over.

HSAs must be combined with high-deductible health plans that provide lower premiums. HSAs are owned by the employee, so once money is put into the account, it belongs to the employee, even if he or she leaves the company.

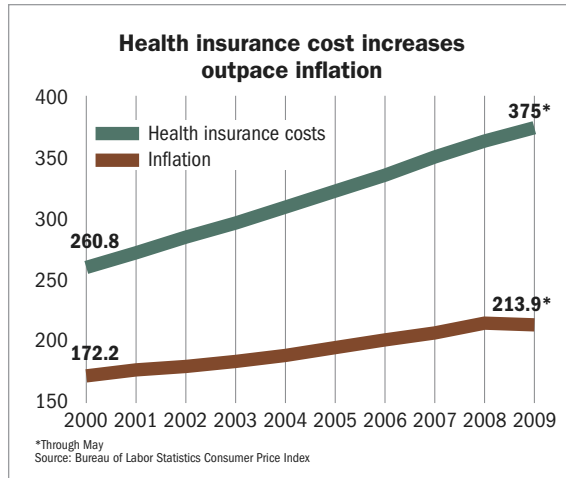
Mark Kinsey, president of PKG Insurance Associates, works with remodelers on implementing HSAs. Kinsey says HSAs are especially beneficial to remodelers because many of their employees are young and healthy and have minimal annual healthcare costs.

Employers can choose how much they want to put into each employee's HSA every year. In fact, some choose to fully fund the deductible and still come out ahead on their healthcare costs, Kinsey says.

Visit <http://www.treas.gov/offices/public-affairs/hsa/> for more information on HSAs.

3. Consider a health reimbursement account

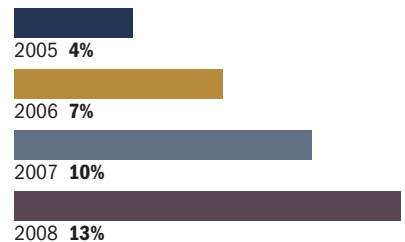
HRAs are similar to HSAs, except that



The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index shows that medical cost increases continue to grow much faster than inflation. The CPI uses an index in which 100 equals 1982–1984 averages.

More companies offering HSAs and HRAs

Percent offering option to their employees



Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers Health Research Institute

HSAs and HRAs are rapidly gaining market share as an alternative to traditional health insurance plans.

HRAs are owned and funded by the employer; the money in the account belongs to the employer. HRAs do not have to be combined with a high deductible plan but often are.

Sun Design Remodeling Specialists in Burke, Va., switched to an HRA this year after facing with what would have been a 24 percent increase in costs on its PPO plan. Sun Design opted to combine its HRA with a high-deductible plan while providing employees with a debit card to use until they hit their deductible. Then, full benefits kick in.

The advantage of an HRA over an HSA is that any unused money will be returned to the company at the end of the year, says Sun Design's director of administration, Sandy Harris. That money can fund next year's premiums to help keep future costs down.

Visit <http://www.bls.gov/opub/cwc/cm20031022ar01p1.htm> for more information on HRAs.

4. Expand your insurance options

You can also offer limited medical insurance plans in addition to major medical. Limited-benefit insurance plans have low premiums and offer coverage for regular doctor visits but often have severely limited coverage of more expensive services. While not optimal, it is better than no coverage at all, Lockton Affinity's Schmedding says.

—JONATHAN SWEET, SENIOR EDITOR

5 Factors Driving Healthcare Costs

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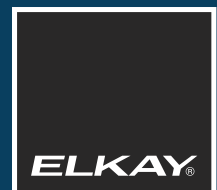


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How to adapt your company for small projects

Almost every company is dealing with smaller projects. *Professional Remodeler's* Jud Motsenbocker talked to remodelers Peter Feinmann and John Todd about how they maximize small projects for their award-winning firms. Highlights of that conversation appear here. To listen to the full discussion, visit www.HousingZone.com/remex.

This month featuring:

Peter Feinmann, President

Feinmann, Lexington, Mass.

Feinmann is a design/build remodeling firm in the Boston area with 14 employees and \$4.2 million in 2008 revenue. Peter Feinmann founded the company 21 years ago and started a home repair division in 2007 to deal with smaller projects.

John Todd, President

Elite Remodeling, Frisco, Texas

Elite is a full-service remodeler in the Dallas suburbs specializing in kitchen and bathroom remodels. The firm has five employees and had \$2.7 million in 2008 revenue. John Todd has owned the seven-year-old company for the last five years.

JUD: *Guys, what are classified as small jobs?*

JOHN: Prior years — before, let's say, July of last year — if the job was less than \$15,000, we would refer it out to one of our handyman partners. But now, with the way the economy has turned, we are looking at small jobs now that are probably \$5,000 to \$7,000.

JUD: *Peter, what about you? Have you gotten into any small projects?*

PETER: Our handyman work is really focused on our past clients. So when we started this division two years ago, an average small job for us is what we'd say \$5,000 to \$25,000. We have found that trying to

go ahead right now and be a handyman for everybody on the street is not necessary the business we want to be in at this point. That doesn't mean we won't consider it, but it doesn't necessarily fit our market profile.

JUD: *Why do you not want to be in that business, Peter?*

PETER: You are going to say that is a whole different business. If you want to be in that business, you better have a couple of very strong administrative people who can handle phone calls and be able to move a group of people in and out of people's homes in a very efficient fashion. So, to me it's administrative: how

you price it, how you organize it. We've tried it — we actually have done some leads on those — but we have found that they have not been the best projects for us or the best margin.

JUD: *John, have you had to find or adjust trade contractors — in other words, you have an electrician and he wasn't used to doing small jobs — or did you find an electrician who would work on those small jobs? How have you adjusted your trade contractors?*

JOHN: Not at all. I would say the trades that we have working for us now are the same trades we had four or five years ago. We try very, very hard not to switch them around. We have two electricians; one plumber; two crews that do everything from light

carpentry to paint, glaze and tile; one glass company; two wood floor companies; and two cabinet companies. We haven't changed any of them.

JUD: *Peter, in the cases where you were used to doing large design/build projects, and then you call that same electrician and/or plumber*

[to do a small job], were they receptive to that?

PETER: The longer this recession gets its teeth into all of us, it has been amazing how behavior is changing. ...They're receptive because pain creates change, discomfort creates change. We have always had a kind of a small electrician that we use, and a small plumber that we use and a small painter that we use just because they couldn't do the big projects anyway, and I have used them for small projects.

JUD: *Do you agree that it does take more supervision to do this?*

PETER: I think there's a lot more supervision, and I think you have to evaluate cost

effectiveness if you bring that extra person or two into your company to do this. You'd

almost be better off developing a separate budget — allocating certain rent and bookkeeping time and administrative time to this division and saying, now is this possible or not? There is this kind of unknown marketing advantage, which is, even if it is a break-even event, you are staying involved with

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JUD: *I think we need to bring that up — that it is almost better to totally separate these smaller projects as far as administration is concerned because the administration number, the dollar cost on a smaller project administration-wise is considerably higher. And so, when we look at the profit and loss statement and try to figure out what our margin or markup is going to be, that number's going to be considerably different. I think we need to make sure we get across to our readers that the margins are totally different. If you are used to building a house or you are used to design/build projects — and big ones — your numbers are totally different than what we do in these smaller projects. What other challenges in handling small projects have you found that we haven't covered?*

PETER: I think that the biggest challenge has been with the way we do remodeling. It is challenging to be equally as thorough and make a profit on small projects, and because of that, there is a potential of missing a key detail that could cut into margins very quickly.

JUD: *John, how about you: what other challenges have come around?*

JOHN: I think the one that Peter hinted at just then is, whether it is a \$4,000 or \$40,000 job, you still own the warranty responsibility, and we provide two years labor and material warranty on anything we do. I think he hit it right on the head that you have to be thorough and you have to make sure that you fully understand it, because you own that job for the next couple of years and you want that cus-

tomers to feel comfortable to call you and say, "Hey, there is an issue." You've got to make sure the little ones are handled the same way the big ones are or you will find yourself doing warranty work more often than not.

JUD: *Have you changed your marketing attack to get these small jobs? Have you tried even though you aren't real thrilled with [small jobs]?*

JOHN: It's a fair question. I wouldn't say that we have changed our marketing, but because we have started to see some slowdown, we have reinvested money. There are three areas: one is our showroom. No. 2 is we've made changes to our Web site; we have added some additional features to it. We have added some different e-mail opportunities to it. Thirdly,

I would say from a pure marketing perspective, we are trying to touch people more often, and whether it is through postcards, whether

it is through the newsletter, we've gotten involved in some of the local causes that a number of our customers were involved in. We try to get back out and keep our self visible, not necessarily focusing only on little jobs.

PETER: We did some specific mailing just on our home crew division itself, and that precipitated a fair amount of work. Every one of our communication continues to communicate that this small work's available. I spent more hours per week on marketing than anything else. You know, new things, new ideas, new contacts, nurturing Realtors and everything. One thing actually we have kind of played with a little bit is having a relationship with a couple of good Realtors and also communicating that we do have some small-job work that can be done getting a home ready for sale.

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Choose to be a leader

Laying off employees who have given their souls to the company for 15-20 years can rip your heart out. Many of you have had to go through layoffs to survive this recession. Those employees did nothing wrong; there just isn't enough work to support everyone. These decisions are made not just on today's results or today's

increasing our brand awareness. A cornerstone is delivering what we promise to our clients on a consistent basis.

2. Cash Flow: I need to make proactive decisions based upon cash and other key metrics. Yes, it can lead to some tough decisions, but if I don't make them no one will. And our business/everyone will suf-

nothing will get achieved. And by the way, our team includes employees, subcontractors, suppliers and clients.

Since my epiphany, I realize that I can choose to be a victim or I can choose to be a leader. I choose to be a leader. That doesn't mean that I know all the answers or that doubt doesn't ever seep into my thoughts.

But it does mean that I need to develop a plan and act on the plan in a holistic fashion.

Leaders have a uniquely holistic perspective. They see the marketplace as well as the internal workings and support mechanisms



I have a path. It is a path focused on excellence and not on growth for growth's sake.

economy, but on the outlook for the next 12-24 months. While we have seen elements of our economy stabilize in the last several months, few think this winter is going to be robust for the remodeling industry. And most think that when the economy does turn around, that it will be a slow, gradual climb; not a race back up to the times we knew 3-4 years ago.

So I woke up the other day with an epiphany. I need to either lead or get out of the way. Our team needs a true leader they can trust will take them (and thus their families) through these turbulent times intact. They need someone who is looking out 12-24 months and making moves today to proactively respond to that outlook. They need someone who instills stability and confidence during times when they aren't getting that from others.

I have a path. It is a path focused on excellence and not on growth for growth's sake.

1. Market Share: I am going to find ways to capture more market share by marketing to new clients, leveraging past clients and

fer as a result.

3. Innovation: I am going to find new and innovative ways to differentiate Case. How can we bring more value, transparency and consistency to our clients? How can we create a culture that balances excellence with the financial pressures of any business climate?

4. Individuals: Trust is fundamental to any team, business or relationship. In its June 2009 issue, Harvard Business Review

proposes that trust requires predictability, understanding, control and compassion. The more I think about these four elements, I agree — and I want to find ways to give more of them to each individual on our team.

5. Team: I am going to let our team know this path and make them part of figuring out the "how." As the leader, I am focused on the direction and the goal — but the team will determine how we get there. They have better insights than I and without them,

of the business. One day I am greeting a prospective client and discussing their project with one of our consultants. The next day I am visiting projects with a project manager. And the next day I am dealing with accounting, marketing, human resources or technology issues. Compare

that with someone on our field team. They know the craft and how to take care of our clients, but insights on how coding of their

time can affect our insurance rates is not their specialty. We need to work as one team toward one common goal.

Leadership will not allow uncertainty to stand in the way of our team, of our clients or of our business.

Bruce Case is president of Case Design/Remodeling and COO of Case's national franchise organization, Case Handyman & Remodeling. He can be reached at bcase@casedesign.com.

Give your input and continue the dialogue on Bruce's blog at www.HousingZone.com/brucecase.

Is the stimulus

Opinions are mixed on whether the tax credits are making a difference

By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor

When the stimulus package was passed in February, it was greeted as a bonanza for remodelers because of its energy-retrofit tax credits and other funds dedicated to remodeling public and private buildings.

Six months in, the general public's and remodelers' reaction to the stimulus are mixed. Some remodelers say they are seeing great returns from the stimulus, while others say

or will succeed in restoring the economy.

Whatever their opinions, remodelers agree that the most important factor in judging the stimulus's success is whether or not it improves consumer confidence and the economy as a whole. After all, the impact of the tax credits was never meant to be industry-saving. The federal government estimated that the credits would result in an additional \$6 billion in remodeling activity this year and next. That's only a little more

than 1 percent of the total remodeling market based on recent estimates.

“On a \$200,000 project, a few thousand isn't really going to be enough incentive to move forward.”

— MIKE TENHULZEN, TENHULZEN REMODELING

Off the fence?

Until customers feel better about the economy, they won't buy, and no incentive is going to change that, says

it has had no impact at all. That reflects the views of the population at large, as well. Recent surveys show that barely half of Americans think the stimulus package has succeeded

Michael Tenhulzen, president of Tenhulzen Remodeling in Redmond, Wash. (Consumer confidence was also rated by remodelers as the biggest factor in improving the remodeling

working?



DON BISHOP

market in this month's *Professional Remodeler* research. See p. 22 for the results.)

Homeowners "come in, they have an idea, they give us the nod and they just can't reach for their wallets," Tenhulzen says. "Our closing ratio has really suffered because they just can't get their minds around what the future's going to hold for their home, for their investment, for their portfolio."

Tenhulzen Remodeling promotes the tax credits to its past and potential customers through its Web site and e-newsletters, but the efforts aren't generating much business. Although some clients are taking advantage of the credits, they are people who probably would have remodeled anyway, Tenhulzen says. The credits are also not as useful to a design/build company like Tenhulzen that specializes in larger remodels as the credits would be to a window-replacement firm, for instance, he says.

"There are one-line contractors that can go in and knock those things out more efficiently than we can," Tenhulzen says. "On a \$200,000 project, a few thousand isn't really going to be enough incentive to move forward."

Is the stimulus working?

Tim Englert, president of Tim Englert Construction, says most of his clients are taking advantage of the tax credits, although not many of them are undertaking the projects solely for that reason.

The full-service Wadsworth, Ohio, company is selling projects ranging from simple window replacements to large additions.

One problem with the stimulus, Englert says, is that the tax credits for windows are harder for larger remodelers to promote because the credits are for materials only and not labor. That means materials and labor have to be billed separately, making it difficult to get the necessary mark-up on projects and still compete with small operations.

“The stimulus plays a role, but it’s not a major role. In my world, there’re not many calls I get that are motivated by that.”

— TIM ENGLERT, TIM ENGLERT CONSTRUCTION

“It works for the Home Depot guy, but not real remodeling contractors,” he says.

Like Tenhulzen, Englert says the most important thing will be if the stimulus improves the economy as a whole. Once people have more confidence in their jobs and the value of their homes,

Englert says there are basically three scenarios under which he’s getting the tax credit for his clients: large projects where clients can incorporate features, such as insulation or windows, to get the credits; window replacement to reduce energy bills; and window replacement to get the tax credits.

“The stimulus plays a role, but it’s not a major role,” Englert says. “In my world, there’re not many calls I get that are motivated by that.”

remodeling will come back, he says.

That sentiment is echoed by Bob Birner, vice president of Amazing Siding and Renewal by Andersen of Houston. The Tomball, Texas, window and siding firm has benefited from strong consumer confidence and stable home prices in the Houston area. That strong local market has kept the company busy and on track for an improvement over 2008.

Dig Deep into the Stimulus
For more stimulus coverage, visit
www.HousingZone.com/stimulus.

The Stimulus Is Working: An Economist’s View

The economy may not be getting better as fast as people would like, but it is improving. That’s the opinion of Jim Haughey, chief economist with Reed Construction Data, our sister company.

At this point, it’s difficult to say if the remodeling tax credits are having much impact on the industry, he says. There will certainly be some positive movement, but the low limits on many projects will minimize its impact. More important is an overall recovery in the economy which will drive a recovery in housing.

“We’re going to see a positive GDP for this quarter, and the stimulus is going to be a big part of that,” Haughey says. “In terms of economic

impact, it has boosted the economy very greatly. That boost in activity and boost in confidence helps the housing industry greatly.”

Although stories about the failure of the stimulus have dominated the media lately, it’s more a result of people looking at the wrong information, most notably rising unemployment numbers.

“Unemployment was going to go up with or without a stimulus,” Haughey says. “It has probably trimmed the increase in the unemployment rate by a fraction of a percent.”

Reductions in unemployment always trail a recovery, so judging the stimulus by those numbers doesn’t tell the whole story. Tens of thousands of people, especially state employees, kept their

jobs because of the stimulus, Haughey says.

“We’ve got to get employment growing by better than 1 percent a month for unemployment to go down,” he says. “That’s a year, 10 months away.”

Haughey also says that looking at the total amount of money expended thus far by the federal government gives an inaccurate idea of how much money is actually being spent because of the stimulus. That’s because the money is put into the economy by local and state governments before it is reimbursed by the federal government, meaning billions of dollars used on projects such as highways isn’t showing up yet at the federal level, Haughey says.

"If people think that things are financially stable, they'll invest their money," Birner says. "Here their home is the best place to invest it in their minds."

We recorded a podcast with Birner in March of this year, only weeks after the stimulus package passed, in which he said he expected the stimulus to greatly help his company.

(You can listen to that podcast at www.housingzone.com/stimulus.) It's difficult to say exactly why people are choosing to undertake projects, but Birner believes it is one of that factors that has made this a good year for the company.

"We're seeing that it's helping some," he says. "It's probably people that were going to remodel anyway, but it's given them an incentive to do it now."

A difference maker

On the other hand, some remodelers are getting a significant boost for their business from the tax credits.

Richard Ollie, owner of Richwood Additions in Cleveland, says the stimulus has "definitely helped" his business this year.

"It's really picked things up," he says. "We weren't selling much the first few months of the year."

Many clients are opting to expand their projects to take advantage of the credits.

"I'll go out to sell just a patio door, and I'll come back with five or six windows and a front door," he says. "When you go into their home, they figure if they can get some money back they'll go ahead and do some more."

John Larson, vice president

of Ron Boelter Window & Siding, experiences a similar situation, with clients taking projects off hold and opting for more expensive options because of what they see as "free money."

"We have several clients who were indefinite on when they were going to do it saying now they're ready to go," Larson says. "People have applied this tax credit to get maybe a tri-

"We are seeing people who were considering doing a partial home or a couple of windows saying they don't mind doing all of them now because they're going to get that subsidy."

— JOHN LARSON, RON BOELTER WINDOW & SIDING

ple-pane window instead of a double-pane window; some are upgrading to a different line; some are doing more windows. At the same time, we are seeing people who were considering doing a partial home or a couple of windows saying they don't

mind doing all of them now because they're going to get that subsidy."

The company has spent heavily on advertising and marketing to get the message to potential clients as well as targeted past clients who may have only replaced some windows to make sure they're aware of the available money.

"We're putting more money into marketing," Larson says. "I know a lot of companies are cutting back, but now more than ever you've got to spend more. Now's not the time to put the money away."

Window business is up 27 percent this year for the company, and Larson credits much of that to the

The Stimulus by the Numbers

\$6 billion – The amount in remodeling activity that the federal government estimates the tax credits on windows, doors, HVAC systems and insulation will generate through next year. The government estimates another \$1 billion by 2016 for other credits for alternative energy.

3 percent – The potential positive impact on gross domestic product from the stimulus by the end of the year, according to Reed Construction Data Chief Economist Jim Haughey

52 percent – The percent of Americans in a July Washington Post-ABC News poll who said they believed the stimulus will restore the economy

27 percent – The percent of Americans in a July Rasmussen Reports poll who favor a second stimulus package

\$103 billion – The amount of the \$787 billion stimulus plan that had been spent as of July, according to Bloomberg

150,000 – The number of jobs that the White House estimates have been created or saved by the stimulus package. The Obama administration has predicted that 3.5 million jobs will be saved or created by the end of 2010.

Is the stimulus working?

stimulus package. Homeowners are very focused on energy efficiency and reducing heat bills in Minnesota, and the first thing many people think of is replacing windows. Combined with the tax credits, that has made this a great year for the Madison Lake, Minn., company.

"We expect this to continue for the rest of the year," Larson says. "Normally, we see a dive in leads in July, and this year it's the opposite. We're seeing an increase in leads."

The tax credits have helped the company to easily beat its budget for the year after a precipitous decline in business at the end of 2008. Going into this year, the company was budgeting for a "cautious goal" of flat sales compared to last year. Even after the stimulus passed, the company's management team only predicted a 10 percent bump from 2008, a mark they've easily surpassed, Larson says.

Which products count for a federal tax credit?

Not every product that saves a homeowner energy counts for a federal tax credit, so it pays to do your homework. EnergyStar.gov/taxcredits summarizes which products qualify and for how much. Here are the basics:

Tax credits for 30 percent of the cost, up to \$1,500 (in 2009, 2010):

- Windows and doors
- Insulation
- Roofs (metal and asphalt)
- HVAC
- Water heaters (non-solar)
- Biomass stoves

Tax credits for 30 percent of the cost and no limit through 2016 (for existing homes and new construction):

- Geothermal heat pumps
- Solar panels
- Solar water heaters
- Small wind energy systems
- Fuel cells

Source: EnergyStar.gov/taxcredits

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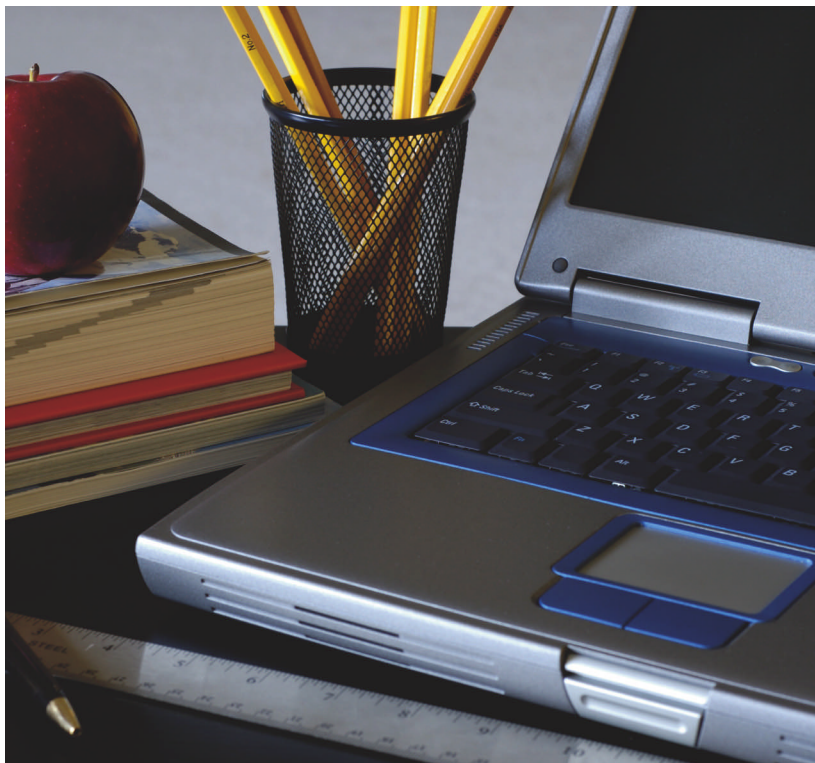
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Remodeling market down, but remodelers expect recovery

Midwest region only holdout in optimism

By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor

Two-thirds of remodelers say their market is worse than it was a year ago, but at the same time they're seeing some relief on the horizon, according to the latest *Professional Remodeler* survey.

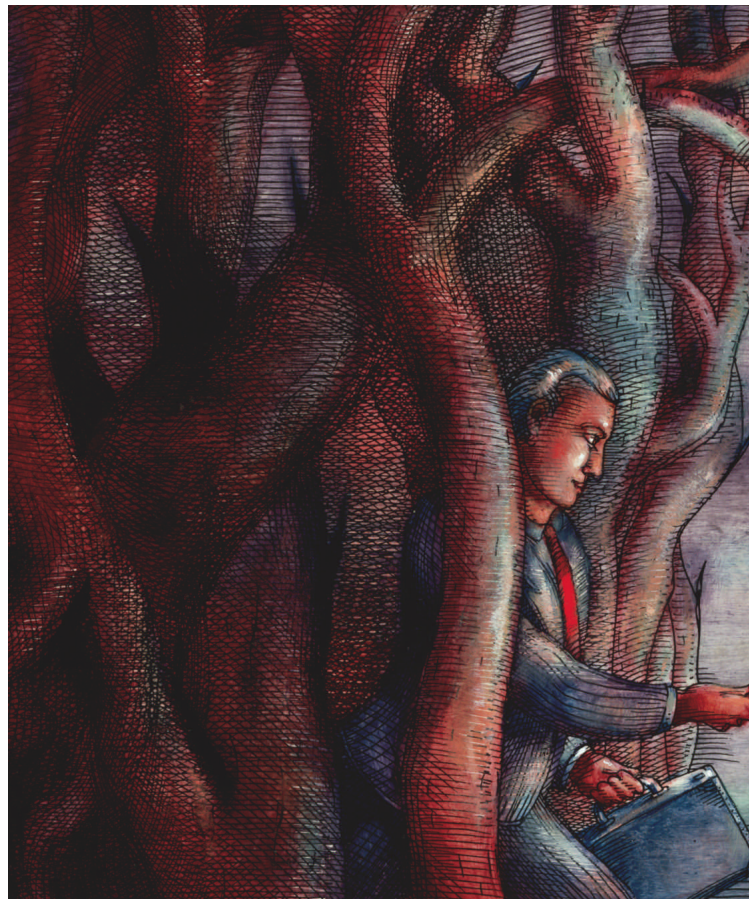
Sixty-seven percent of remodelers said their local market conditions have gotten worse over the last 12 months, compared with 19 percent who said the market was unchanged and 14 percent who have seen an improvement. And that's coming off of 2008, when 50 percent of remodelers had a decrease in revenue from 2007, according to our annual Business Results Survey. (Visit www.HousingZone.com/bizresults for more information.)

Remodelers tend to be an optimistic lot, though, and most are expecting things to get better next year, with 57 percent predicting an improvement in the market and only 11 percent saying things will worsen in 2010.

The lone exception to this optimism is the Midwest. Only 46 percent of remodelers there are expecting a better 2010, and 20 percent say the downturn will continue over the next year. It's the only region of the country where more than 10 percent expect the market to worsen.

Fifty-nine percent of remodelers in the Northeast and West and 66 percent of Southern remodelers think conditions will improve over the next year.

The results are not that surprising when considering the local economic conditions. The Midwest has a 10.2 percent unemployment rate, tied with the West for the highest in the country, and the Midwest has seen the biggest increase in unemploy-



ment over the last year, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The region also includes several states hit hard by the recession, including Michigan, with its national-high 15 percent unemployment rate, and three other states with unemployment of more than 10 percent (Illinois, Indiana and Ohio).

Consumer confidence is key

The biggest factor in improving the remodeling market will be increasing confidence, remodelers say.

We asked remodelers to rank several factors on the importance in driving a recovery in their local market. Consumer confidence topped the list, with nearly 90 percent of remodelers ranking it in the top three. Coming in second was "Consumers' inclination to spend rather than save," followed by availability of financing, increased housing values, higher employment and fewer foreclosures. Not surprisingly, these are all factors that drive consumer confidence.

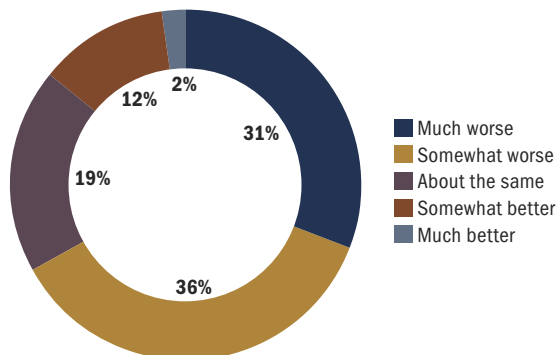
We also separately asked remodelers what was needed to turn their market around, allowing them to provide any answer. More than a third listed some variation of consumer confidence. The only other answer that was close was the more than 10 percent who responded with some sort of complaint about the government.

Smaller jobs, fewer leads drive downturn

Anecdotally, it's not hard to understand why so many companies are struggling this year. Take fewer leads, a lower close rate and smaller job sizes, then toss in increased competition in many markets and you've got a recipe for disaster.

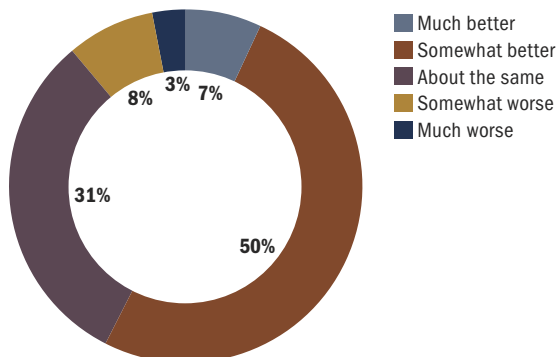
The numbers back the stories. Most remodelers are seeing

Current local market vs. a year ago



SOURCE: PROFESSIONAL REMODELER SURVEY, JUNE 2009

Expectations for next 12 months



SOURCE: PROFESSIONAL REMODELER SURVEY, JUNE 2009

Although 67 percent of remodelers say the market is worse now than a year ago, only 11 percent expect it to continue to worsen over the next 12 months.

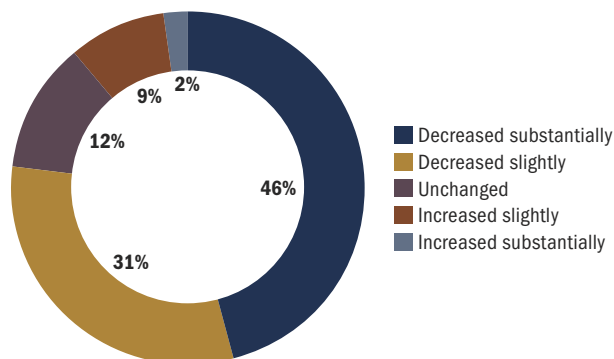
Want your opinion to be heard?

To participate in the next *Professional Remodeler* survey on the stimulus package, visit www.HousingZone.com.



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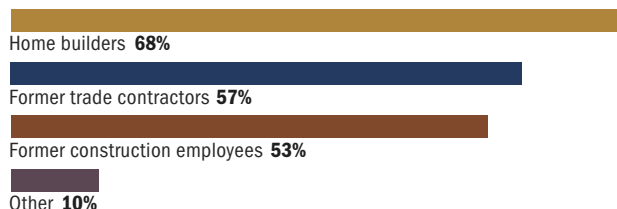
Average job size compared to last year



SOURCE: PROFESSIONAL REMODELER SURVEY, JUNE 2009

Nearly half of companies have seen a substantial decrease in their average job size over the last year, and more than three-quarters have seen at least some dip.

New sources of competition



SOURCE: PROFESSIONAL REMODELER SURVEY, JUNE 2009

More than 40 percent of remodelers report an increase in competition this year, with new construction firms' jumping into remodeling being the top culprit.

significant drops in average job size. Nearly half of remodelers reported a "substantial" drop in average price tags from a year ago, and 77 percent saw at least some decrease. Only 11 percent of firms had an increase in average job size over the last year.

Leads are down for 72 percent of companies, compared with the 15 percent of companies that are getting more leads. And once they get those leads, remodelers are finding it harder to close the deal, with 64 percent saying their close ratio has

Methodology

378 remodelers with 2008 revenues of more than \$500,000 completed the survey online. Data were collected June 8 to June 27, and participants were chosen from a random sample of subscribers to *Professional Remodeler* magazine and eNewsletters.

What will it take to change your market?

We asked remodelers, "What 's the most important thing that needs to happen to turn your market around?" Here's a sampling of their write-in responses:

- "Get the government out of our business."
- "The media and Wall Street need to instill consumer confidence to American people. There is way too much doom and gloom out there, and people are very nervous."
- "The national economy must stabilize and turn around and start growing."
- "Consumers need to feel good about their current and immediate future financial condition and employment outlook. Until confidence improves, even those with the cash aren't going to spend on anything but the necessities."
- "The government needs to have leaders who do what is good for the country instead of political gain."
- "Our market is not bad."
- "[We] need to have more large companies to employ more people."
- "The builders need to go back to building houses. They don't know how to manage remodeling clients and therefore price their jobs way too low."
- "Consumer confidence seems to be the key. People appear to be interested in renovations; however, they are waiting to see if more bad news awaits us. Most of our work is done through discretionary spending. On a political note, I think it would help if the minority in Congress would try to work with the majority and vice versa, showing a united approach to the problems."
- "No turnaround [necessary]; it has never been that bad."
- "Everyone should get busy doing and stop waiting for others, i.e. the government, to do it for them!"
- "The financial sector has to improve a lot. People have to get their investments back closer to what they have lost in order to start spending on their homes."
- "Unemployment needs to stop increasing, and home values need to stabilize. Also, home builders, tradespeople and unemployed professionals need to stop 'trying their hand' at remodeling."

dropped over the last 12 months (although 13 percent did report higher close ratios).

Many remodelers are also seeing more competition. More than 40 percent of companies reported an increase in competitors. The recession also seems to be knocking some companies out of the market, though, as 36 percent of firms said the number of their competitors has decreased.

Of those companies that are facing increased competition, 68 percent are dealing with new home builders; 57 percent, former trade contractors; and 53 percent, former employees of new construction and remodeling firms. Ten percent said they are seeing increased competition from other sources, such as unemployed DIYers and college students.

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Prepare for Disaster

What if your business and its records were literally wiped out tomorrow? How would you pick up the pieces? Whom would you turn to? We've scoured resources to get you prepared in case disaster strikes.

By Mark Jarasek, Senior Editor, Electronic Media

Like a menacing horror movie monster, disaster can morph into many unexpected forms. Hurricanes, tornadoes, terrorism and wildfires have wrought widespread devastation. It's way too easy to become complacent and believe that a disaster, including even the crash of a critical computer hard drive, could "never happen to us." As the old saying goes, \$#!+ happens.

When it happens, it can wreak havoc on your remodeling business. Experts in the field of business continuity and disaster preparedness say that no matter what the cost or effort, it pays to be prepared.

Think about the consequences that a disaster might have on your business technological network. How many pieces of information are generated for each client's remodeling project? How crucial are those contracts, work orders, schedules, payroll and tax records to your business? Imagine the impact if that information were lost.

Are remodeling firms prepared?

No survey has been done to determine the level of preparedness of remodeling or home building firms, but two recent

surveys on business continuity and disaster preparedness indicate that businesses of any size may not be adequately prepared, if prepared at all.

The Ad Council on behalf of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Ready Business group surveyed small businesses in October 2005 and found 92 percent of respondents said they believe it's very or somewhat important for businesses to take steps to prepare for a catastrophic disaster. However, only 39 percent said their company has a plan in place in the event of such a disaster. Why? While many respondents acknowledge the value of preparedness, time, workforce and money constraints prohibit them from developing a plan.

In March 2008, Aberdeen Group, an information technology consulting agency, surveyed more than 150 end-user organizations, and results prove that Best-in-Class IT organizations have infrastructures that support rapid recovery of data and applications with minimal or no downtime. That assures business continuity even in the face of a severe event. While 62 percent of all the companies surveyed experienced between 1 and 5 business interruption events in the last 12 months, only 49 percent of the companies surveyed have had a business continuity strategy for more than 2 years, and 34



TODD DAVIDSON

What does this cost?

The following provides an idea of what it may cost to develop a disaster protection and business continuity plan. Some of what's recommended can be done at little or no cost. Here's a sample from a list on Ready Business that you can use to get started.

No Cost

- Review your current insurance coverage.
- Create evacuation procedures.
- Develop an emergency contact list including employee emergency contact information.
- Put together a list of critical business contractors and others you will use in an emergency.

Under \$500

- Buy a fire extinguisher and smoke alarm.
- Identify emergency supplies the company can feasibly provide, if any, and talk to your co-workers about what supplies individuals might want to consider keeping in a personal and portable supply kit.
- Back up your records and critical data. Keep a copy off site.

More than \$500

- Consider additional insurance such as business interruption, flood or earthquake.
- Purchase, install and pre-wire a generator to the building's essential electrical circuits. Provide for other utility alternatives and back-up options.
- Consider using a security professional to evaluate or create your disaster preparedness and business continuity plan.

percent of those have yet to implement a solution.

"It's hard to imagine that a company wouldn't have a data backup system, but just backing up data alone doesn't constitute a disaster recovery strategy," says Jeffrey Hill, senior research analyst in Aberdeen's Data Management and Storage practice. "In order for a recovery strategy to be effective, it needs to recover the right applications and data in a timely fashion. Put another way, how long an outage can a business tolerate before there is a tangible impact on operations?"

Mark W. Kinsey, president of Kinsey Consulting, based in Doylestown, Pa., is a Certified Remodeling Associate and Construction Risk Insurance specialist. His business focuses on contractors, both large and small. In his years of experience working with remodeling firms, he has found that most "don't have a clue" when it comes to business continuity and disaster preparedness.

"It is absolutely critical to have a plan in place," Kinsey maintains. "Think of your customer service, or your employees. What will they do should any type of disaster occur? Look at the volume of work you do on a daily, weekly or yearly basis. Imagine how much you would lose if your computer systems went out and weren't backed up. What would happen to your plans, your proposals, your jobs completed? How are you going to do your accounting or your ordering? Records are a key component to any business, and they need to be protected."

For business continuity planning purposes, Kinsey has a crisis planning worksheet that he gives to his clients. "It all starts with the basics. The questions are simple, but the answers can be very complex," he says. "Each individual business is different, and the answers to these questions will be different for every business. It boils down to the impact that any type of disaster has on business interruption and business expense." (Go to HousingZone.com for a guide to creating an emergency response program.)

Kinsey says business continuity planning is an exercise that the C-suite (senior executives) needs to go through. "It can be fun but difficult," he says. "It's an exercise of hard decisions and 'what if' scenarios that all business owners should go through."

While having a plan in place might not get you any type of discount on insurance, Kinsey says that having one will put you in a much better light in the eyes of underwriters that provide coverage for businesses. "Having a business continuity plan in place shows underwriters that you are prepared to mitigate any

Prepare for disaster

loss should it occur,” he points out. “And that’s a good thing.” Does Kinsey’s firm have a plan in place? “Yes, we do,” he says. “But we’ve been extremely fortunate. In our 35 years in business we’ve never experienced a major disaster.”

Organizations can help

NARI, the NAHB Remodelers Council and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security can help remodelers prepare their businesses.

NARI: The National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI) currently has plans to create either a Webinar or podcast program on the topic of disaster preparedness/business continuity that will be added to their substantial and ever-growing collection of educational courses for members, according to Gwen Biasi, NARI Director of Marketing & Communications.

NAHB: The NAHB is currently in the process of developing a Business Continuity/Disaster Recovery toolkit specifically for home-building firms. “It will cover everything from A to Z,” says Ken Ford, NAHB program manager, Mitigation and Disaster Assistance. The toolkit will be available to members of NAHB, including those belonging to the Remodelers Council.

Ford says two of the most important things to consider for business continuity are a communications plan for employees in the event of disaster and the safeguarding of all critical documents related to the business, including bank statements, tax records, contracts and accounts receivables.

“If all the records of a business were destroyed or lost, it would be very difficult for a [business] to obtain a loan for recovery from a bank or even from a governmental assistance agency if they can’t show or prove past business activity,” Ford says.

Department of Homeland Security: The Department of Homeland Security created a Web site dedicated to disaster preparedness for businesses. Ready Business contains a treasure trove of free, in-depth information; guidance; and document templates that can help any size business prepare their firms for the worst. Businesses are advised to:

- Be informed. Risk assessment is a sophisticated area of expertise that can range from self-assessment to an extensive engineering study. The size and scope of your individual company will determine your organization’s risk assessment needs.
- Know what kinds of emergencies might affect your company both internally and externally. Find out which natural disasters are most common in the areas where you operate.

Continuity of operations planning

This list on the Ready Business Web site consists of essential elements that a company should think about when developing its plan for business continuity. Go to Ready Business for more on each point.

1. Assess how your company functions, both internally and externally, to determine which staff, materials, procedures and equipment are absolutely necessary to keep the business operating.
2. Identify your suppliers, shippers, resources and other businesses you must interact with on a daily basis.
3. Plan what you will do if your building, plant or store is not accessible. This type of planning is often referred to as a continuity of operations plan, or COOP, and includes all facets of your business.
4. Plan for payroll continuity.
5. Decide who should participate in putting together your emergency plan.
6. Define crisis management procedures and individual responsibilities ahead of time.
7. Coordinate with others, including businesses in your building, emergency managers, suppliers, shippers and others you do business with.
8. Review your emergency plans annually. Just as your business changes over time, so do your emergency-situation needs.

- Learn what to do during a biological, chemical, explosive, nuclear or radiological attack.

The impact of downtime

A white paper, “The Business Case for Disaster Recovery Planning: Calculating the Cost of Downtime” prepared by Iron Mountain, a firm that provides outsourced records and information management services for businesses, warns that virtually every company faces the risk of IT interruptions that can grind business to a halt. The white paper explains:

“One overlooked truth is that downtime costs accelerate. ... If a system fails for five minutes, the costs are fairly low because manual methods of making records or communicating by telephone instead of emails can suffice to conduct business. Over an extended period, however, the volume of work overwhelms the manual process. Business and financial operations increasingly deteriorate, and the rate of dollar losses grows — sometimes to the point of fatally damaging the business.”

Preparing your company to handle a disaster encompasses everything from emergency planning for employees to getting in touch with the right organizations. For more information, visit www.HousingZone.com.

A version of this article originally appeared in our sister publication *Housing Giants*.

Go to www.HousingZone.com
for links to resources that
remodeling firms
use when creating a corporate plan
for disaster preparedness.



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A man's profile is shown in a three-quarter view, looking upwards and to the left. On top of his head, a small, detailed orange and black construction vehicle, resembling a skid steer loader or a small excavator, is balanced. The man has short brown hair and a light beard. He is wearing a blue denim shirt. The background is plain white.

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Stat Sheet

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

By **Nick Bajzek**,
Products Editor



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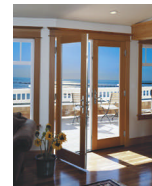
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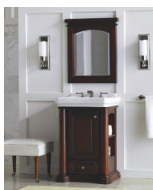
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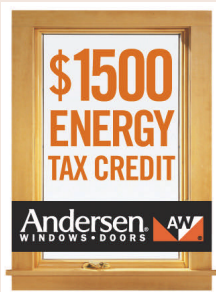


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Product Trends



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Cabinets

Manufacturers participating in a Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturers Association survey report a 35% decline in cabinet sales.

Cabinet sales down, but R&R on its way up

By **Nick Bajzek**
Products Editor

A Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturers Survey found a 35.2 percent decline in cabinet sales between May 2008 to May 2009. Meanwhile, another survey — this one from business-to-customer service and market data provider ServiceMagic — showed online requests for smaller projects such as cabinet re-facing rose in the first quarter of 2009 compared to a year ago. Demand for larger remodels decreased noticeably.

The numbers match trends the National Kitchen & Bath Association's newly minted President-Elect Mark Karas, CMKBD, observes. He expects cabinet sales for remodeling jobs to increase into 2010, particularly for smaller projects. "The remodeling market is a prime target for cabinet companies nationwide. Probably three-fourths of cabinet sales are in R&R now," he says. "So not all the jobs are going away. They're getting smaller and smarter."

WHAT'S IN NOW?

The KCMA survey reported stock cabinet sales fell 34.3 percent, while semi-custom

and custom cabinet sales each declined 34.9 percent. According to the ServiceMagic figures, those who specified what cabinet materials they were using said maple and oak cabinets are most popular.

But Harold Martin, vice president of product design and development for both Quality and Saxton Cabinets, disputes ServiceMagic's market snapshot. Although cherry and maple are still popular, the contemporary style that's used in many markets means some consumers want slightly offbeat kitchens and bathrooms — orders for traditional-leaning red oak have experienced a precipitous drop.

Quality Cabinets, Martin says, has seen an uptick in sales of

Top 10 Cabinet Finishes of 1957

To see how far cabinet trends have come, check out this link for the Top 10 finishes in the St. Charles Cabinetry line, circa 1957: <http://bit.ly/MetalKitchenCabinets>



Maple species, including this Tahoe Square Maple door in Cognac from Timberlake, have consistently been a consumers' top pick.

Cabinet Trends

Jobs Reported	Preferred Material	%
94	Oak	16.4%
104	Maple	18.2%
28	Paint grade	4.9%
49	Cherry	8.6%
11	Pine	1.9%
34	Other	5.9%
213	Didn't Specify	37.2%
32	Laminate	5.6%
7	Glass	1.2%
572	Total	

SOURCE: SERVICEMAGIC SPECIES POPULARITY REPORT 2009, THROUGH JUNE.

quarter-sawn white oak and rift white oak species as well as in rustic cherry. "Rift white oak leans itself a bit more to the contemporary side. We do full overlay for the most part, but that's changing slightly with the transitional market picking up steam," Martin says, adding, "Traditional is going to be around forever. You're always going to sell more traditional in the U.S. But there's more interest in contemporary styles. That's the market we're developing new products for."

Connie Edwards, CKD, CBD, is director of design for American Woodmark Corp. Orders for oak — in all types of cabinetry — have decreased

dramatically for the brand, which counts Timberlake and Shenandoah Cabinetry in its lineup. "No one really has an answer for why oak fell off. Maybe it's a cyclical thing. Today's buyers are looking for something with a tighter grain," she says. The company isn't offering oak in its newer door lines. Factory-applied painted cabinets and off-whites, on the other hand, are coming back.

"People are buying based on what's in their wallet, not necessarily what they really want," says Paul Radoy, manager of design services for the Masco Builder Cabinet Group. Radoy reports the group's No. 1 seller is maple, particularly in the medium-to-light tones. Cherry has fallen to No. 2, which Radoy attributes to the higher price points associated with the wood. "But we did see a spike in the white or off-white cabinets. White is trending back upward a bit at about 1 percent over last year," he says. "It's trendy and cool to mix styles. Casual-contemporary, 'Garage Sale Chic' or whatever you want to call it is probably the fastest growing trend."

PLUMBING SYSTEMS

A water-saving showerhead is no slam dunk. Poor design and improper specs can leave bathers bruised, shivering and even scalded.



AMERICAN STANDARD

Super-low-flow fixtures' design should place the showerhead as close to the user as possible.

What you need to know before going super-low-flow in the shower

By **Shawn Martin**

Technical Director, Plumbing Manufacturers Institute

Low-flow showerheads are a highly tempting proposition for remodelers looking to boost the efficiency and sustainability of their properties. Install a showerhead with a flow rate of 2.0 or 1.5 gallons per minute, rather than the conventional low-flow 2.5 gpm, and — presto! — you have cut water consumption by 20-40 percent at that outlet.

But making the move to enhanced low-flow showerheads is not as cut-and-dried as simply replacing a 2.5-gpm showerhead for a more efficient model. Without careful consideration of proper design, the installation of super low-flow fixtures can lead to performance and safety issues, including scalding and thermal shock.

LIFE, HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

The overwhelming majority of

building codes currently require automatic temperature compensating (ATC) shower valves, which keep water temperatures at a safe and comfortable level, regardless of changes in system pressures and temperatures. This generic term encompasses three types: pressure balance, thermostatic and a combination of the two. The predominant standard is ASSE 1016, which establishes the testing protocol that these valves must meet for certification.

To be fully certified, an ATC shower valve must not permit the water temperature to fluctuate up or down by more than 3.6 degrees at the nominal pressure of 45 pounds per square inch (psi). For example, if someone flushes a toilet, thus diverting cold water from a 105 degree shower, the water temperature may spike uncomfortably high, but only briefly. Within the first

five seconds, the outlet temperature must settle between a safe and comfortable 101.4 degrees and 108.6 degrees.

What does all this have to do with the new low-flow showerheads? The problem is ASSE 1016 was written for showers with a flow rate of 2.5 gpm, and it does not require testing at other flow rates. A shower valve that works just fine with a 2.5-gpm showerhead may not work well with one rated at 1.5 gpm. This, in turn, can lead to thermal shock — a sudden significant change in temperature that may cause the bather to slip and fall — or even cause scald burns.

Still, many current shower valves are able to accommodate showerhead flow rates lower than 2.5 gpm. Which makes and models? No one knows for sure. If you look at a shower valve, you won't likely find reassur-

ing language that "this valve provides temperature compensation protection down to a flow rate of 1.5 gpm." Absent such confirmation, you don't know how low the gpm can go for a given showerhead and still keep the outlet temperature within the ± 3.6 F threshold.

The simplest route to safety is to buy the shower valve and the showerhead in a package from the same manufacturer. That way you know the combination complies with ASSE 1016. Some of the main-line shower valve manufacturers are producing low-flow showerheads, so your chances of getting a pair that work together are improving.

If you decide to mix valve and showerhead products from different sources, and the valve manufacturer's instructions do not explicitly say that the product will work with certain

low-flow rates, call the factory for a clear-cut decision. If that manufacturer cannot accommodate, look for one who can.

When in doubt, change the spec upward and settle for more modest water savings. Your chances that a given valve and showerhead will work effectively together are much greater at 2.0 gpm than at 1.5 gpm.

LOW-FLOW IN AN EXISTING BATHROOM

Going low-flow in an existing bath presents a far more daunting challenge than with new construction. Most of the time, installers have no idea what type of valve is in the wall behind the shower and they have no way of finding out. If the valve is older, it won't likely function properly with a modern low-flow showerhead.

Some retrofit applications don't even have ATC valves because they use two-handle faucets, which cannot protect against changes in temperature and pressure. Now, you may think: Why not go low-flow anyway? In either case, you can't protect against dramatic fluctuations in temperature, but by substituting a low-flow head you'll at least be using less water.

Bad idea. Low-flow means less water is coming out of the shower, so the system has less thermal mass associated with the water for a given period. Consequently, the system's reaction to a given temperature and pressure change will be more extreme — that is, greater and faster. Your likelihood of getting scalded rises, and the thermal shock potential is more serious, too.

The only appropriate way to retrofit a shower with a two-handle faucet is to eliminate the outdated faucet and install a new valve and showerhead.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Low-flow showerheads inevitably impact the size and layout of the showering environment, as well as the positioning of the fixtures and fittings within it. By definition, a low-flow showerhead delivers less heat, in the form of hot water, to the body if the shower water temperature remains the same. Droplet size and aeration also impact heat retention within the shower enclosure. As a result, it is not unusual for

users of low-flow showerheads to complain of being cold.

A major factor is the distance the water must travel from the head to the body: the longer the distance, the bigger the drop in water temperature. Someone who is four feet tall will experience a decidedly different temperature than someone who is six feet. To overcome this heat-loss problem:

1. Place the showerhead as close to the person as possible, or
2. Specify a height-adjustable shower fixture so that the bather can pull the shower closer.

If the bather cannot get closer to the showerhead, the only comfort option is to turn up the hot water temperature, thus using more energy. That's not a tradeoff any green-minded designer, contractor or owner wants to make.

Careful attention should also be paid to the design of the showering compartment. As flow rates drop, air currents within the compartment and from the surrounding environment exert a proportionately larger effect on user comfort. A low-flow showerhead will provide less warmth in a large or open shower area than in a small or fully enclosed compartment.

Low-flow showering technology promises to have a major impact on water consumption in the U.S. during the next decade — certainly a welcome development. But safety and comfort are as equally important as water conservation when it comes to installing super-low-flow fixtures. Proper design and installation will ensure that all three needs will be met.

Shawn Martin is the Technical Director for the Plumbing Manufacturers Institute, the international trade association representing the manufacturers of most plumbing fixtures and fittings used in North America. An engineer by training, Martin is an expert in water efficiency, clean drinking water and green building practices. Contact Martin at smartin@pmihome.org.

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

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Roofing

Metal roofs most popular in the Southeast, a recent report shows

Metal roofing grabs 10% market share — and climbing

By **Nick Bajzek**
Products Editor

Recent surveys show metal roofing continues to gain market share in residential remodeling. The metal roofing market is strongest in the Southeast, accounting for some 14 percent of re-roofing jobs.

Recently released results from McGraw-Hill Construction and Analytics as well as figures from the Metal Roof Alliance (MRA) show metal roofs accounted for nearly 10 percent of the replacement roof market in 2008. The McGraw-Hill survey predicts demand for metal roofing will increase to 1.4 million squares (a square is counted as 100 square feet of roofing area) for new construction by the end of 2009 and 13.4 million squares for repair and remodeling.

Todd Miller, board member and co-founder of the MRA, says 7 million homeowners will look to replace their roof each year, and many need energy-saving options. “Five years ago, you’d speak to your customers, and 70 percent of the homeowners out there thought they’d be moving within five years. People are

less transient now. That, of course, will herald a huge boom for us,” says Miller.

THE TREND WATCH

Miller says his clients see the roof as an extension of the home’s design. But according to the MRA, design isn’t the only concern; 61 percent of homeowners reported



SOUTH TEXAS METAL ROOFING

Although paint or coating can wear out over time, the MRA notes a properly installed metal roof can long outlast the paint applied to it.

choosing metal roofing for its longevity, while 16 percent cited strength and protection. Style popularity is regional. The Southeast, with its high winds, and the West, with its more rustic home designs, are highest in market penetration. The Southeast uses the most metal roofing, with about 14 percent of the market; the

Northeast about 8 percent; and the Midwest lags behind.

METAL MISCONCEPTIONS

The biggest problem with metal roofing’s slow growth in the market, according to the MRA, is that people are unaware of its durability and forget they can be recycled. Metal roofs once had a bad reputation for unattractive colors and a metallic look, but today’s offerings include colors, finishes and profiles to match contemporary homes.

The best way to persuade people to think about metal roofing, says Bill Kirn, RRC, technical director and key accounts manager for the National Coatings Corporation (NCC), is to run the numbers. The NCC, Kirn says, began a “Cool Block Study” pilot program in 2000 to investigate metal roofs and roof coatings as a means of reducing energy costs and providing passive cooling to row homes. Results of energy monitoring as well as roof and interior temperatures proved that cool-roof technology significantly reduced roof and attic temperatures and could reduce overall energy costs to residents.

Skylights and metal roofs

Skylights are a potential weak spot for energy efficiency in a metal or cool roof system. That’s why each roofing application should weigh the benefits of daylighting via skylights versus the negative impact on a cool roof’s performance. If the skylights are a go, it’s important to choose the right type.

“If skylights will be part of a metal cool-roof system, choosing the right heat-reflective glass is vital as well as is choosing skylight framing material. For daylighting to be effective, you need to maximize visible light transmission while maximizing solar heat reflection,” says John Miller of Heat Mirror. Equally important, says Miller, typical Low-E glass skylights can lose up to 30 percent of their ability to insulate against heat transfer. At night and in the winter, this means heat in a home is going out the skylight much more than through the same glass in a vertical window. From a cool-roof perspective, in the daytime, because a skylight acts as a solar collector, heat is moving through that glass in the skylight more quickly than in a vertical window.

When it comes to a cool roof, you need to worry not only about directly reflecting solar radiation, but you must reduce heat transfer via convection and conduction as well.

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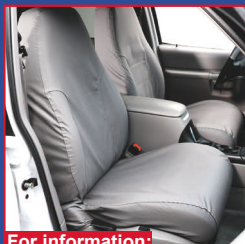
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Truck Review

Roomy, agile and quick, this new-to-America small van could be the right fit for many remodelers.

Transit Connect truck bigger than it looks

By **Tom Berg**,
Contributing Editor

Ford Motor Co. calls this compact van a “game changer,” and it could be true. After all, the first American mini-vans in the early 1960s caused the demise of “panel trucks” — conventional-cab pickups with full steel bodies — that had been around for more than 30 years and a popular choice among remodelers and other contractors. Detroit’s Big Three automakers, responding to the popularity of Volkswagen’s “bus” and Transporter trucks, brought out small vans on purpose-built chassis with small power trains. One was Ford’s Econoline, which evolved into today’s E-series full-size vans that are now best sellers.

Painfully high fuel prices in recent years prompted Ford executives to bring its European-style Transit Connect to America. They claim that since its introduction overseas in 2003, customers in 57 countries on four continents have bought more than 600,000 of them. The recession has more recently pulled down petroleum and fuel prices, but they’re edging up again and sooner or later they’re

likely to go back up. Then this vehicle will make immense sense.

For now the Transit Connect merely makes good sense. The TC, as we’ll call it, has a powertrain familiar to any American who’s owned a front-drive sedan with a transverse 4-cylinder engine and an automatic transmission. A TC is roughly 2 feet shorter and weighs about 1,500 pounds less than an E-150 van. The TC’s high roof makes it roomier than it might look; its cargo area measures 59 inches high by 48 inches wide by 72



Tim Horton, a kitchen and bathroom remodeling contractor in Royal Oak, Mich., says the Transit Connect is “the right size” to haul supplies for his jobs and that it looks green. He said he’d likely buy a window version with a folding rear seat.

inches deep, for a volume of 135.3 cubic feet. Its floor sits less than 2 feet off the pavement for easy loading and unloading, and its rear and side doors allow excellent access. With a fold-down rear seat it can carry up to five people and still a goodly amount of cargo, for a total payload of 1,600 pounds.

The TC is nimble and quick on city streets and can more than keep up with freeway traffic, though I had to put my foot into it to properly merge from on-ramps. This was during a show-and-tell event for news re-

porters at the Royal Oak (Mich.) Farmers Market near Detroit, one of a series of events Ford was hosting across the country.

My assigned TC was set up for a tradesman, with shelves and cabinets along the walls of its roomy rear compartment. Ford has partnered with three upfitters so buyers can specify a wide array of shelving, drawers and boxes. Or buy it bare and arrange your stuff to suit yourself.

The TC’s powertrain — a 2-liter Duratec inline-4 and 4-speed automatic transmission — delivers 22 to 25 miles per gallon of gasoline, Ford says. That’s maybe 5 to 10 mpg better than the hefty V-8s that propel most full-size vans.

TC product developers spoke to hundreds of businesspeople across the country and learned they’d probably buy one to complement larger trucks in their fleets because it’d be just right to haul smaller loads, especially the make-up kind that are needed because somebody forgot to take something out to a job. With the Transit Connect’s starting price of \$21,475, you have reason to check it out.

SPECIFICATIONS

Truck: 2010 Ford Transit Connect, compact high-roof van, steel unibody with subframes, empty weight 3,405 lbs., GVWR 5,005 lbs., wheelbase 114.6 in., overall length 180.7 in.

Engine: Duratec 2-liter (121-cu-in.), double-overhead-cam inline 4-cylinder gasoline, aluminum block, head and pistons, 136 hp @ 6,300 rpm, 128 lbs.-ft. @ 4,750 rpm

Transmission: 4-speed automatic with 1:1 3rd and 0.73:1 4th-overdrive

Suspensions: McPherson independent front, leaf-spring rear

Steering: Power rack-and-pinion, 39-foot turning circle

Brakes: Power disc front, drum rear, w/ABS

Tires and wheels: P205/65R15 on steel discs

Fuel capacity: 15.4 gallons

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Professional Remodeler (ISSN 1521-9135) (GST #123397457) Vol. 13, No. 8 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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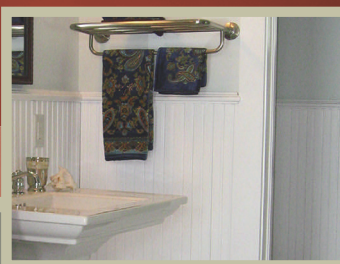
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