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SPOTLIGHT



Using Instagram as a business-building tool

As arguably the most visually-driven social media platform, Instagram can play a major role in successfully selling flooring. But like any other business tool, you have to know how to use it.

PAGE 23

DIGITAL ACCESS IS INCLUDED

See our latest issue at fcnews.net



Tim Baucom



Vance Bell

BELL LEAVING THE BUSINESS IN GOOD SHAPE

(First of two parts)

A transition has begun at Shaw Floors as Vance Bell recently announced his retirement as CEO. Bell remains chairman for a year as Tim Baucom, president, now assumes the added responsibilities of running the business. Bell said the timing is right for a number of reasons, not the least of which is projections of solid business over the next several years. On March 22, Bell and Baucom sat down with Steven Feldman, publisher of *FCNews*, for a wide-ranging interview that takes a look at industry dynamics in general and Shaw in particular

Continued on page 8

Retail outlook

Flooring dealers anticipate a solid second quarter

By Ken Ryan

Following a strong start to 2021, flooring dealers say they see no reason for a slowdown as they enter the second quarter. In fact, many say the best is yet to come as the residential sector in particular continues to fuel a surge in business.

Not even the specter of a supply chain slowdown that has impacted commerce globally can dampen the flooring parade, retailers told *FCNews*. In most cases, retailers say they planned in advance to have fresh stock on hand for any possible shortage.

“My expectation for Q2 is a continuation of strong demand for flooring both residentially and commercially in our markets,” said Greg Loeffler, COO of Pierce Flooring &

Design, with three Montana locations. “Home remodel and new home construction both remain strong and growing with no indication of a reversal to this trend in sight.”



San Antonio-based O'Krent's Abbey Flooring continues to see a brisk pace of sales activity despite the pandemic.

Loeffler's experience was in sync with what others are experiencing from the Pacific

Continued on page 16

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE 2021

Industry leaders, unsung heroes recognized

By Ken Ryan

Factory workers, CEOs, tradeshow organizers and scientists in charge of developing COVID-19 vaccines. These represent a few of the names on *FCNews*' annual

“People Making a Difference” list—a yearly tribute to those who go the extra mile.

The list includes familiar names to the flooring industry—

executives and CEOs—as well as those flying under the radar and even some with no connection to flooring. Regardless of affiliation or title, however, these honorees made a big difference during extraordinary times.

Among those honored is a flooring legend who spent a career creating synthetic fibers and turning them into plush, beautiful carpets and is now taking that same genius to decon-



struct the carpet without it ending up in a landfill. Another honoree tends to the daily activities of the Floor Covering Industry Foundation to help provide benefits to families with life-altering medical crises—certainly apropos in the age of COVID-19. *FCNews* also recognized individuals outside the industry for their roles in developing life-saving vaccines.

Coverage starts on page 10.

AT PRESS TIME

BAMR Holdings to acquire Southwind Carpet

BAMR Holdings, part of a family of companies owned by Lumber Liquidators founder Tom Sullivan, has agreed to purchase the assets and business operations of Southwind Carpet & Hard Surface. The transaction is expected to close in the second quarter of 2021.

Following the purchase, Southwind executives Richard Abramowicz, executive vice president and chief marketing officer, and Richard Hatch, president, will retire. Bret Perkins, currently vice president of hard surfaces, will become president of Southwind. Jason Delves, CEO of BAMR, and Randy Lovelace, currently executive


Continued on page 18



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IN THE NEWS

Informa opens registration link for TISE 2021 show in June

LAS VEGAS—The International Surface Event (TISE) will take place in person June 16-18 at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center. Registration will open this week.

TISE 2021, organized by Informa Markets, is taking a customer-focused approach to its return to the in-person event. As such, it surveyed past attendees via a third-party provider to ensure the decision to hold the event was a community-driven one. Of those who responded, 89% said they were likely to attend in June and 98% viewed the decision as favorable to the industry.



"TISE knows doing business in the flooring, stone and tile industry requires experiencing the products firsthand and building relationships in a face-to-face environment," explained Dana Hicks, show director. "We are confident in our ability to execute a safe event under Informa AllSecure."

Southwest Flooring Market ready to welcome attendees in person

MARIETTA, GA.—The Southwest Flooring Market (SWFM), the second regional in the Flooring Markets 2021 schedule, is set to kick off April 8-9 at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas.



With hundreds of brands exhibiting, it is the largest market to open since the COVID-19 shutdowns. Exhibitors and attendees say they are looking forward to meeting safely in person again and conducting critically needed business. Most exhibitors will also be offering exclusive market specials to market attendees. And, like the Southeast Flooring Market held last month, show organizers have taken great precautions to keep attendees safe.

"We are looking forward to seeing everyone again and being able to network with all of the vendors we normally get to see at market," said Hannah Moix of Moix Carpets, an SWFM vendor.

Pre-registration for the market is still open and can be completed online at flooringmarkets.com.

New Daltile 'Tile Club' program gives dealers tools to sell more

DALLAS, TEXAS—Daltile launched its new Tile Club, something the company describes as another way in which it educates its retailers on the hottest trends and latest performance features in tile. As part of the Daltile Tile Club campaign, a box filled with samples of the most on-trend tile will be sent to the brand's Statements Program Dealers nationwide each quarter.

"Our new Daltile Tile Club will put the hottest looks and products at the fingertips of retailers' in-store customer service reps, so they may see, touch, feel and mix and match these tile sample pieces, equipping them to be more design savvy in their conversations with end consumers," said Pajj Thorn-Brooks, vice president of marketing for Dal-Tile Corporation.

Suppliers announce another round of hikes

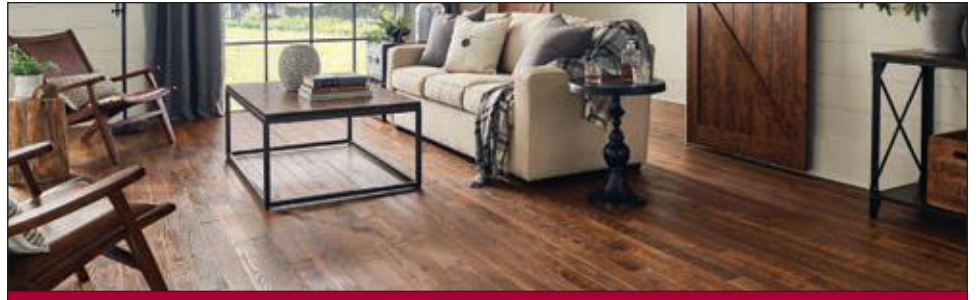
FREIGHT ISSUES, MATERIALS REMAIN THE KEY CULPRITS

By Reginald Tucker

Just as floor covering dealers are adjusting to the last round of price hikes (FCNews, March 15/22), some suppliers are announcing additional price increases slated for April and early May.

AHF Products, for instance, will increase prices on select hardwood and vinyl flooring products in the U.S. and Canada effective with orders placed April 26. Hardwood price increases will average 7%-13% on engineered products produced in the U.S. and Asia (excluding Cambodia), with a 20-cent minimum increase per square foot. Solid products will rise between 8% and 10.5% with a 25-cent minimum increase per square foot.

In resilient, AHF Products has announced hikes of 10% on Classic SPC products (Bruce LifeSeal Classic and Hartco Everguard Classic) out of



Prices on select hardwood and resilient flooring from AHF Products are increasing 7%-13% in April. Pictured is an offering from the Mark Bowe Barnwood Collection.

Cambodia, as well as 8% across Trending SPC products (Bruce LifeSeal Trending and Hartco Everguard Trending), also out of Cambodia.

"We are continuing to experience extraordinary raw material cost inflation on key hardwood flooring components, including lumber, veneers and core materials, which we expect to persist," said Chris King, vice president-sales, AHF Products. "We understand the effort and nimbleness required to manage through these difficult changes, and we appreciate our customers' support of AHF Products now more than ever. We are doing everything we can to keep customers serviced through this

amazing season of tremendous demand and extraordinary constraints."

AHF is not alone. Armstrong Flooring said it plans to raise prices 3%-8% on select residential and commercial products effective May 1. This comes on the heels of a 9% rise in prices announced back in December 2020.

"Armstrong Flooring is committed to our loyal customers and will continue to enhance product quality while working to offer it at competitive prices," said Brent Flaharty, senior vice president, chief customer experience officer. "We continue to experience significant cost increases in transportation and raw materials."

Remote House Call poised to push industry forward

By Megan Salzano

In an effort to continue evolving the Retail Lead Management system and bring advanced software innovation to the flooring industry, Jason Goldberg, founder and CEO of America's Floor Source, has rolled out Remote House Call (RHC). The new software integration is designed to allow retailers and their team members to provide expanded, real-time customer service, installation support and even close sales—all remotely through an advanced video chat forum.



"It really started for us with customer service—to be able to evaluate and assess an issue before we head out," Goldberg told FCNews. "I can't tell you how many times a customer or builder calls in with an issue and what they told us and what the reality is

are two different things. [And] when COVID-19 hit, we realized no one wanted anyone in their homes. Life changed as we know it. The way we run our businesses changed as we know it. So, I asked myself, 'Can we do the business without being in the customer's home?'"

The answer is yes. But the new software is billed as more than your average video call. It is designed to provide retailers the ability to run their businesses more efficiently. For example, it allows flooring dealers to more quickly respond to customer service issues; better prepare for service calls and sales meetings; prequalify potential customers and projects; efficiently answer specific customer questions; and provide support to field techs, installers and others in the field. In addition, the call itself includes special functions specifically designed for the needs of a flooring retailer

during these opportunities, such as video recording, photo tools, note annotation, chat and automatic save and retrieval of all data within the corresponding lead.

Retailers and installers alike told FCNews they see multiple ways in which the new software could support their business and even promote growth. "When Jason first showed me a run-through with the program, I was blown away," said Ken Ballin, owner of West Creek, N.J.-based Skyro Floors and a certified floor covering installer. "I see so much potential on the installation side of things. Imagine being on a jobsite ready to start your installation and you come across some obstacle that you would really like one of your reps to see before you proceed. Having a rep on the other side of that screen being able to see what you're dealing with and provide immediate feedback is incredible."

Ballin added that as a business owner his biggest obstacle is wasting time and not focusing on what generates the most money—something RHC could tackle. "I personally do a lot of high-end tile work, and I try to weed out those customers who aren't

Continued on page 18

OBITUARY

Thomas Meberg, 79

NEW YORK—Consolidated Carpet is saddened to announce the passing of Thomas "Bud" Meberg, who resided in Lakewood, N.J. He was 79.

Meberg was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., on Oct. 14, 1941. He began working for the family business, Consolidated Carpet Trade Workroom, in 1963 after completing college. He was an owner at Consolidated Carpet and worked for more



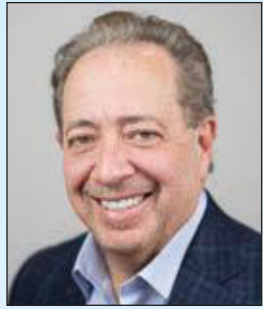
than 50 years before retiring in 2016.

During his tenure with Consolidated, Meberg ran projects from the size of one office to multiple floors—all with the same attention to detail and kindness. A true gentleman, he was highly respected in the flooring and construction business in New York City and beyond. He was also a sharp dresser with a penchant for striped ties and freshly shined shoes.

Meberg was predeceased by his first wife, Alice Meberg (Birkeland), in 2009

and his second wife, Gertrude Conklin (Weber), in 2016. He was a devoted father of Thomas and his wife, Peggy; Peter and his wife, Alicia Sargeant; Mark and his wife, Kristin; and Christopher and his wife, Stephanie. He was a loving grandfather to Tommy, Kevin, Evan, Adam, Ella, Deirdre, Leah, Cole, Audra, Trent, Charlie and Alice.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, Meberg was cremated privately March 15. His sons are in the process of scheduling a memorial service to be held at Trinity Lutheran Church in Tenafly, N.J.



my take

Best of Surfaces: Call for entries and judges

With the recent announcement that the rescheduled Surfaces is “officially” a go for June, it’s time to start making plans. Book your flights, reserve your hotel rooms and register. Even though many of the big names will be taking a pass until next February, there will still be hundreds of exhibitors showcasing their wares. As well, the anticipation of connecting with friends after all this time should have you salivating like Pavlov’s dogs.

I’m expecting things in Vegas to feel much more normal by the time June 16 rolls around. The restaurants are open, and even some shows have restarted. Don’t be afraid; I’m guessing by June 16 about 70% of all eligible people will have gotten at least one shot in their arm. (Time to schedule your appointments if you haven’t already done so.)

I’ve been to a few tradeshow since last fall, and they’ve gone off without a hitch. Sure, the Mohawk Roadshows and the Southeast Flooring Market are regional events, but I have every confidence that the Surfaces folks will do the same by following the requisite safety protocols.

As I think about Surfaces, I want to concentrate on the things we traditionally do during those three days in Vegas, not the least of which is the Best of Surfaces competition we co-sponsor with Informa, owners and operators of the show. Now in its 10th year, Best of Surfaces has become a benchmark for product and program excellence. But the success of the contest cannot be achieved without the help of the industry—both

our suppliers and retailers.

A little background for those new to the industry or who have been orbiting the planet for the last 10 years: Best of Surfaces recognizes those companies whose product, program, service, business practice or booth design are considered to be “best” in their class. But unlike other awards, which are typically handed out by product category, the Best of Surfaces awards are handled a bit differently. Winners are announced in four categories: Innovation, Sustainability, Style & Design and Technology. In addition, there will be two awards for exhibit space: Booth Design (under 1,200 square feet and over 1,200 square feet). The criteria is simple: Products must be making their debut at Surfaces. What’s more, there is absolutely no charge for entering.

For exhibitors, consider this a call for entries. Please enter a product, program, service, business practice or booth in the category you believe to be most reflective of the product’s primary attribute. Suppliers can have one entry per category; I repeat: They cannot have multiple entries in one particular category. Contact Michelle Swayze at Informa at 972.536.6449 or michelle.swayze@informa.com for more information or to enter. To make things easier, you can copy me at steve@fcnews.net when you enter so nothing falls through the cracks.

For the record, winning a Best of Surfaces award can truly drive product success on the retail floor. Winners will receive:

- Recognition on the Surfaces and

- FCNews websites through December
- A customized Best of Surfaces 2021 logo for placement on all advertising
- An exquisite, custom-engraved award presented at the booth by members of show management and FCNews staff
- Coverage in FCNews

That takes care of the entry part. The next thing we need are retailer panel judges who will determine the 2021 winners. It’s a job you don’t want to take lightly because there’s a lot at stake for the manufacturers. If you are a flooring dealer—past or present—who has an understanding of what constitutes excellence in the Best of Surfaces’ four categories, we want to hear from you.

Some criteria: First, you have to attend Surfaces. Second, you must be willing to evaluate some of the submissions in the weeks leading up to the show. Third, you are required to share your thoughts with other members of the panel. After we decide the category for which you will be judging, you and your peers will be given some criteria on what to look for. You will then receive information on each of the entries. In some cases, it will be a description of the entry. The respective panels will then come up with their five finalists, which will be viewed on site on day one at Surfaces. Those interested in judging Best of Surfaces can contact me via e-mail at steve@fcnews.net.

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Jason Goldberg, founder and CEO of America's Floor Source, has rolled out Remote House Call. The new software integration is designed to allow retailers to provide expanded, real-time customer service, installation support and even close sales—all remotely through an advanced video chat forum. Learn more: <http://bit.ly/397KXPI>

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The Real Wood Coalition is launching this month in partnership with Floor Covering News. The goal of the group is to promote hardwood flooring by educating retailers on the value of hardwood flooring and the opportunity it presents for increased sales dollars. Eight major hardwood flooring manufacturers are charter members and include: AHF Products, Mercier Wood Flooring, Mulican Flooring, Indusparquet Int. • Com. de Madeiras Ltda., TORLYS, Mirage, Somerset and Nature Floors. Learn more: <http://bit.ly/3d3pQAw>

Alliance Flooring
Thank you Floor Covering News for sharing a story about our Connect '21 Virtual Product Showcase! #afconnect21 #connect21

Carpet Plus
Thank you Floor Covering News for sharing a story about our Connect '21 Virtual Product Showcase! #afconnect21 #connect21

REMOTE HOUSE CALL
powered by Tethrit

Fuse event links contractors with vendors online

By Reginald Tucker

When it comes to virtual conferences—events that have become much more commonplace in the sequestered, COVID-19 world in which we live—the general rule of thumb is online events typically draw a fraction of people who would normally attend the same in-person event in a normal year. But that wasn't the case with the 2021 Fuse Alliance virtual conference held earlier this month. Show organizers reported more than 680 people registered for its first-ever virtual event—almost three times the amount of contractors who normally attend the group's physical conference.

"We've had, by far and away, the biggest turnout we've ever had," said Geoff Gordon, Fuse Alliance executive director. "Typically, our conferences are attended by leadership and business owners—usually 200-225 people. But this year we had a lot of salespeople, project managers, coordinators, job

superintendents and other office personnel participate. There could very well have been more than 680 in attendance because some of our members held 'watch parties' during the convention. For example, there may have been only one active computer linked to a particular registration, but they may have had 10 people sitting together watching."

The potential benefit of that expanded exposure, Gordon said, is it gives flooring contractors' employees a view into the educational opportunities traditionally available only to managers and higher-level workers. "I think the challenge of any organization like ours is when you're dealing with business owners and top management, you don't know if they are really advising their employees about the benefits of Fuse," he said.



Geoff Gordon, Fuse Alliance executive director, welcomed members and attendees to the group's inaugural virtual conference earlier this month.

"Some probably do but a lot probably don't."

For Fuse Alliance, the prospect of a record-breaking virtual conference was not exactly in the realm of possibility given all that has transpired over the course of the past 12 months or so. "For me, personally, when we made the decision to go virtual, I was so bummed because I love seeing everybody at the show," Gordon told FCNews. "Then, as we started working with the meeting planners, they presented an idea where, if we spent enough money and did it right, we could

make it dramatically different than any other event."

Fuse Alliance said it accomplished that objective by offering attendees not only a forum to network with other members, but also the tools and technology to: view new product demonstrations; take part in virtual round table discussions; and hear informative keynote presentations from sought-after guest speakers.

Strength in numbers

The measure of Fuse Alliance's success goes well beyond strong attendance figures. The group also reported membership growth in a pandemic—during which time several key commercial end-use markets were hammered by shutdowns, postponed contracts or stalled renovation projects. "We added 11 new members in 2020, which is

the most we've ever added in one year," Gordon told FCNews.

Case in point is Raleigh, N.C.-based David Allen Co., which became a Fuse member in the fall of 2020. "We joined Fuse Alliance to partner with other installers to share our knowledge base and learn from this successful and talented body of membership," said Chad Love, director of carpet, resilient flooring and ventilated façade systems. "Being a Fuse member also allows us to enhance our relationships with suppliers and provide quality, continued professional development to our employees."

That was also the inspiration for Braid Flooring, a Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada-based contractor, to join. "Being part of Fuse Alliance gives us access to valuable development resources and an incredible network of commercial flooring experts who will help us to achieve our full potential," said Christian Braid, president. (For more, view the full story on fcnews.net.)

Alliance Flooring kicks off Connect '21 product showcase

By Ken Ryan

Alliance Flooring's Connect '21 Virtual Product Showcase recently brought together retail members and more than a dozen suppliers for three days of new product and merchandising introductions to coincide with the spring selling season.

The event replaced the usual in-person convention that was originally scheduled for early March. Kevin Logue, Alliance Flooring's executive vice president of marketing,

said the virtual event was meant to safeguard members, suppliers and staff until a live, in-person event can take place. To that end, Alliance Flooring said it plans to hold an in-person convention at Rosen Shingle Creek in Orlando during the second half of 2021.

During a welcome address, Ron Dunn, founder and CEO, and his son, Ryan, praised members for their perseverance during the pandemic. "It was absolutely inspiring to see how members pulled together," Ryan Dunn said.

Echoing that point, Ron Dunn added, "Nobody gave up, nobody rolled over. The resolve to drive business in 2020 was very inspiring."

The online event allowed suppliers an alternate pathway to launch new products to Alliance Flooring members for 2021. Participating suppliers were featured in their own virtual exhibit booth, where they showcased products and displays using pre-produced, on-demand video content.

The group continued to grow its ranks in the past year,



During Connect '21, Ron Dunn (left) and Ryan Dunn likened the perseverance of Alliance Flooring members to a toy that always bounces back, no matter how many times it gets knocked around.

welcoming 16 new retail members. In his state of the industry address, Jon Logue, co-founder and CEO, said the group is projecting 5% growth for Alliance members in 2021. Alliance finished 2020 down 5%; however, that was after being down 25% in the second quarter when business was shut for many weeks due to COVID-19.

New product highlights

Happy Feet made news last year when it announced that its Sidewinder waterproof vinyl product would be offered exclusively to Alliance members—a first for the buying group. Sidewinder is back in 2021 with a 12-mil wear layer and 5mm core. Two additional Happy Feet offerings for 2021 are Wheelhouse, offered in a 20-mil wear layer with painted bevel; and Infield, a high-end plank with a bevy of features.

Also available to Alliance Flooring retailers are combined offerings from Shaw and COREtec, which will be offered in the same display. Shaw's hard surface assortment includes 86-inch planks with Max+ technology, which is designed to guard against scratches. COREtec's Sumatra 7 (7 x 48 plank) and Sumatra 9 (9 x 86) represent two members of the COREtec Advanced Plus collection that company executives said rank among the most innovative the COREtec brand has produced.

Engineered Floors is offering members three new products, among them Ensignium, an SPC that provides digital print straight to the core. On the hardwood side, ColorTile waterproof hardwood will include NatureMark Hardwood, a private-label of Mohawk's new UltraWood that features WetProtect technology.

Alliance Flooring recognizes big spenders

Fourteen winners took home Platinum and Gold awards during Connect '21. Platinum winners are recognized for purchases that exceed \$2 million in a year; Gold is for purchases exceeding \$1 million.

Platinum winners:

- Carpet World, Fargo, N.D. (Bruce Kaufman)
- The Langan Group, Davenport, Iowa (Eric Langan)
- Carpetland, Roanoke, Va. (Gene Podell)

Gold winners:

- SP Floors & Design, McMurray, Pa. (Stacey Pape)
- CarpetsPlus ColorTile, Bloomington, Ind. (Mark and MaryAnn Dougherty)

- Carpet World, Bismarck, N.D. (Jon Dauenhauer)
- 3 Kings Flooring, Fort Wayne, Ind. (Todd Ramsey and Jeremy Wings)
- CarpetsPlus ColorTile, Gainesville, Fla. (Josh Elder)
- Floor Craft, Colorado Springs, Colo. (Mark Strauch)
- Arnquist CarpetsPlus, Alexandria, Minn. (Tom and Adam Arnquist)
- Rocky Mountain Flooring, Twin Falls, Idaho (Brent Compton)
- Carpetland, Rockford, Ill. (Kevin Rose)
- CarpetsPlus of Wisconsin, Madison (Michael Peters)
- Jerry's Floor Store, Spring Lake Park, Minn. (Dawn Iversen)

educating the industry

PPP priority for small businesses



BY ROMAN BASI

The Biden administration made changes to the pandemic aid program, aiming to help the smallest of businesses, sole proprietors and minority-owned firms. To that end, small businesses with 20 employees or less are being prioritized for payroll protection program (PPP) loans.

While PPP funding has been instrumental in helping small businesses and their employees since April of 2020, some of the smaller businesses have had trouble accessing these critical loans. The administration is hoping this prioritization will even out the allocations of the loan throughout small businesses.

How it works: An eligible business can apply for a first- or second-round draw of funds. To qualify for the second round, a business must have spent—or plan to spend—all of the first-round loans and show a 25% drop in revenue in any quarter of 2020. For a regular business with employees, these loans are normally two and half times payroll costs, but a one-person firm that doesn't have a payroll may have been at a disadvantage. To address this imbalance, the Small Business Administration (SBA) will be recalculating the loan amounts from gross income instead of net profit, thereby increasing the amount the business will receive.

At the same time, SBA is increasing the maximum amount small businesses and non-profit organizations can borrow through its COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program. Starting the week of April 6, 2021, the SBA is raising the loan limit for the COVID-19 EIDL program from six months of economic injury with a maximum loan amount of \$150,000 to up to 24 months of economic injury with a maximum loan amount of \$500,000.

According to Isabella Casillas Guzman, SBA administrator, more than 3.7 million businesses employing upwards of 20 million people have found financial relief through SBA's EIDL loans, which provide low-interest emergency working capital to help save their businesses. However, the pandemic has lasted longer than expected, and SBA says they need larger loans. In fact, many have called on SBA to remove the \$150,000 cap.

Businesses that receive a loan subject to the current limits do not need to submit a request for an increase at this time. SBA will reach out directly via email and provide more details about how businesses can request an increase closer to the April 6 implementation date. Any new loan applications and any loans in process when the new loan limits are implemented will automatically be considered for loans covering 24 months of economic injury up to a maximum of \$500,000.

This new relief builds on SBA's March 12 announcement that the agency would extend deferment periods for all disaster loans, including COVID-19 EIDLs, until 2022 to offer more time for businesses to build back. In order to shift all EIDL payments to 2022, SBA will extend the first payment due date for disaster loans made in 2020 to 24 months from the date of the note and to 18 months from the date of the note for all loans made in the calendar year 2021.

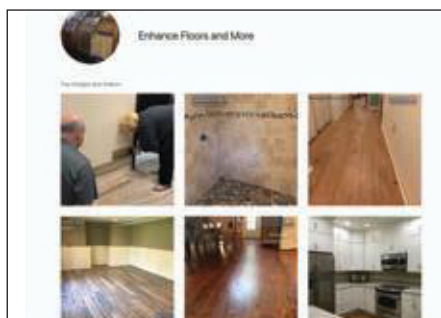
Questions about SBA COVID-19 EIDL and disaster loan payments can be emailed to DisasterCustomerService@sba.gov or directed to SBA's Customer Service Center. Meanwhile, the professionals at The Center for Financial, Legal and Tax Planning can provide advice on reducing your tax burden using proceeds from PPP loans. Please contact us at 618.997.3436.



Roman Basi is an attorney and CPA with the firm Basi, Basi & Associates at the Center for Financial, Legal & Tax Planning. He writes frequently on issues facing business owners. For more information, please visit taxplanning.com.

RETAILERS REACT

Which social media platform is most important to your business



While most flooring retailers rely on Facebook for social media, Enhance Floors and More has sold more jobs through Instagram.

“Currently Facebook is the most important social media platform for us. We can advertise relatively inexpensively and post feel-good projects that reach a larger audience quickly.”

—Mike Foulk, Foulk's Flooring America
Meadville, Pa.

“We get more engagement from Facebook but have sold more jobs from Instagram.”

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

“We have seen a surprising number of leads on our site of late that came over from Pinterest.”

—Sam Locher, A.J. Rose Carpets & Flooring
Burlington, Mass.

“We have an app called Nextdoor, and I live in the community with which it is associated. It actually covers many different subdivisions, but you must live in one to get the approval to be on the website as a resident. I have many customers from that app. I also offer a discount to anyone living in my subdivision, and we have seen many new customers from that.”

We have great reviews so that is a win-win.

—Missy Montgomery, Montgomery's CarpetsPlus ColorTile
Venice, Fla.

“We are most active on Facebook but we are going to get better about Instagram. I feel like it's becoming a lot more active. There's been a lot of controversy surrounding social media as of late; even so, I feel like it's good to get your name out there on both platforms.”

—Penny Carnino, Grigsby's Carpet, Tile & Hardwood
Tulsa, Okla.

CALENDAR

Editor's note: Due to the ongoing coronavirus outbreak, some or all of the events listed below are subject to change. As of press time, the events are as scheduled. Please follow up with the contacts listed below for event confirmation.

April 8-9
Southwest Flooring Market
Regional market, AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas
Contact: Lori Kisner, 770.559.0293, ext. 5; lori@marketmakerevents.com; flooringmarkets.com

April 13-16
NWFA Principles of Wood Flooring
Four-day introductory level course provides a broad overview of the wood flooring industry by combining the basic install with the basic sand and finish courses, West Chicago, Ill.
Contact: education@nwfa.org; 800.422.4556

April 16-17
CFI All Levels Carpet Certification
Two-day certification commercial carpet levels I and II and residential carpet levels I and II, Frederick, Md.
Contact: John McHale, jmchale@cfiinstallers.org; 816.231.4646; cfiinstallers.org

April 19-22
National Floorcovering Alliance
Spring convention, Barnsley Gardens, Adairsville, Ga.
Contact: Lisa Browning, 941.877.1632; lisa_browning@comcast.net; nationalflooringalliance.com

April 23-24
CFI Residential Resilient Certification
Two-day certification; 2+ years' experience required.
E.J. Welch, Louisville, Ky.
Contact: John McHale, jmchale@cfiinstallers.org; 816.231.4646; cfiinstallers.org

May 11-13
NWFA Intermediate Sand & Finish + CP Testing
Three-day course includes in-depth training on general equipment maintenance; sanding multiple flooring types, Bowling Green, Ky.
Contact: education@nwfa.org; 800.422.4556

June 16-18
The International Surface Event
Annual trade show, Mandalay Bay Convention Center, Las Vegas.
Contact: 866.860.1975; info@TISEwest.com

POINTS OF INTEREST

► **Existing home sales** declined in February following two months of gains, according to the National Association of Realtors (NAR).

Completed transactions of single-family homes, condos and co-ops decreased 6.6% from January to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 6.22 million in



February. On a year-over-year basis, sales climbed 9.1% compared to 5.7 million in February 2020. Single-family home sales decreased to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 5.52 million in February, down 6.6% from 5.91 million in January, but rising 8% from one year ago. “Despite the drop in home sales for February, which I would attribute to historically low inventory, the market is

still outperforming pre-pandemic levels,” said Lawrence Yun, chief economist of the NAR.

► **Economic activity in the U.S.** grew faster than previously estimated in the fourth quarter of 2020, according to revised data released by the Commerce

Department. The report showed real gross domestic product surged by 4.3% in the fourth quarter compared to the previously reported 4.1% jump. Economists had expected the pace of GDP growth to be unrevised. The Commerce Department said the stronger than previously estimated growth primarily reflected an upward revision to private inventory invest-

ment that was partly offset by a downward revision to non-residential fixed investment. Despite the upward revision, the GDP growth in the fourth quarter still reflects a substantial slowdown from the 33.4% spike seen in the third quarter.

► **Sales of newly built homes** fell in February by a higher level than expected as builders faced escalating costs and persistent delays. As a result, this forced builders to raise their prices. Taken together with rising mortgage rates during the month, affordability for buyers took a major hit. Higher interest rates, supply shortages and rising material prices are weakening affordability, pushing the median price of a new home in February up just over 5% annually.



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FLOORVANA.+



Tailwinds will lead to many strong years ahead

Continued from page 1

with a look to the past, present and future, along with the things that make Shaw a valued partner for retailers.

Vance, the first question I have is the timing. Why now?

Bell: Well, there are probably a lot of reasons, but one is if I stay too long in the organization that limits other people's growth and development. I want to see the organization mature and develop many of the people down below me. And Tim is ready. Another reason is the business is in really good shape. And I believe we have several years of strong business ahead of us. So, it helps give some tailwinds to the next generation. Obviously, I'm not going out the door today. I'm going to be around for a year and stay engaged in the company even beyond that as chairman. It's a great industry, and I want to maintain the relationships I have both here at Shaw and in the industry.

How does your role change over the next year?

Bell: Tim becomes CEO April 5. He will have the operating decisions, the daily decisions and responsibility for the results. I will be here to help advise and guide Tim and the team. In some of the larger issues around capital—like if we're in acquisitions or really large capital expenditures—I would have an influence along with Tim. And any big corporate strategy changes I would be involved in. But Tim's got the ball in terms of running the business and being responsible for the results.

A year from now, do you see yourself doing anything else within this industry?

Bell: No. I will stay chairman going forward, so I will still be engaged and attending some board meetings, and maybe in other events or meetings. I may come to a market just to see people and keep those relationships. But outside of that, I won't do anything else in the industry.

With Tim holding the joint titles of president and CEO, this represents a change from what has always been a separation between the two positions. Correct?

Bell: Not necessarily. When

Randy [Merritt] left, I did not replace that position for probably a year and a half. So, I think it really is based on the circumstances, the needs, the requirements of the organization and the business. And Tim will look at that over time and see what the needs are.

Baucum: I'm very honored to step behind Vance and also very fortunate that Vance is going to be here and available in this consulting role. It's very different when you're the last person in the room and you're the decision maker. So, I want to take this time where he's still very close to evaluate things and how we want to go forward in terms of how to pick that next partner in the room.

When you look back at these last 45 years, what are you most proud of?

Bell: I got the opportunity to be at a pretty high level of responsibility at a very young age, and I think I helped build the company through some of the most important growth spurts that we had. I kind of describe the decade of the '80s as probably the most fun because we embarked on a different strategy from the rest of the industry. That's when we started going direct to the retail base, building out distribution centers, expanding our sales force. A lot of young people were involved. It was a very exciting time. We basically took a lot of share in the industry and it culminated in the acquisitions of Cabin Craft and [Evans & Black] and Salem in the late '80s and early '90s. I think over the last 15 years as CEO, I'm proud of being able to really reposition the company from what we were. We're dramatically different today than we were.

How is this company different over the last 15 years?

Bell: I think there are a couple of things. No. 1, we're more diversified. Our product mix is more diversified; the markets we participate in are more diversified. When I took over, we were basically a carpet company—over 90%. Today, we're still the leader in residential carpet, and we are the leader in commercial. In total, whether it's carpet,

resilient, whatever it is, we're the leading entity in commercial here. We're the leader in the LVT category, which was a really big move and transformation for the company. We probably saw that and took advantage of it on a scale that most competitors did not during that period of time. We have a very strong turf business. We're very significant in the wood business. So, it's just a dif-



Shaw is banking on changing consumer and work/home trends to significantly boost residential carpet sales. Shown is Foundations.

ferent profile than what we had.

The other thing is we've taken a good organization and made it a great organization. We have improved our talent, the quality of our people, our culture, the way we relate to people and the way people engage with the company. And our performance as an organization is really just on a different level from where it was.

How has the culture changed under your leadership over the last 15 years?

Bell: One of the strongest things about Shaw through downturns, upturns and the last 15 years—and the most important thing—is associate engagement. If you have high associate engagement, then you're going to have a high-performance organization. And we've built a lot of passion in the business for our people to be engaged.

I think we're more inclusive. I think we have a more diverse organization. We have a lot of things that we've built into what we call "The Shaw Way." We put together our culture, our business strategies, our leadership behaviors so everybody in the

company and any new person can understand what to expect. This is how you treat people. This is how I need to behave and how I need to lead.

Would you say associates have more input into decision-making today?

Bell: For sure. That's [what I mean when] I say more inclusive. [We've allowed for] the empowerment of people.

Baucum: Vance has done a marvelous job in creating that empowerment and accountability so we're making decisions faster and closer to the customer and then evaluating it on the backside. It's that spirit of candor, 'Hey, what did we learn? Why did we do that differently? What are we doing well? Where do we need to go?'

Is there one CEO from outside the flooring industry that you admire or maybe you try to emulate or find you respect?

Bell: I was really interested in the book that Robert Iger wrote, "The Ride of a Lifetime." He was the CEO of Disney Corp. And he seemed to be a really inclusive, people-oriented CEO who transformed that company.

Over the 45 years, who's the toughest customer you've ever had to deal with?

Bell: I think the quintessential toughest customer was Marv Berlin in New York Carpet World. It was a very well-run outfit. Marv was a master of detail. He knew everything and every product, every price. Very tough negotiator. So, I'd say that's probably the toughest I've ever seen.

What are you going to miss most once you're gone?

Bell: Relationships. People. That's why I say I hope to keep involved and be at events and be at markets every now and then because it's a very unique industry. It's a very close industry. The thing that has always charged us up is the relationships that we've built with customers. We have lifelong friendships and relationships, and we want to see their

businesses succeed. We see new generations, from parents to kids. So, the thing you miss is just the relationship and the contact with the people you meet.

Baucum: One of the many things I admire about Vance is he has always set the example of enterprise above self. He cares so deeply. It starts with the customer because he knows the enterprise can't be healthy if our customers aren't healthy and it's about them, not him. I think that having his 45 years of experience and wisdom and counsel is a real privilege for me and for our customers to engage that for as long as he's willing to share it.

Bell: Our foundational values and our culture are not going to change. Tim has been part of building that culture. So, for a long, long time in the future, the values and the culture that we have brought to this industry are not going to change. Obviously, sometimes your business strategy or the markets you're in or the products you're in—that changes. But the culture and the values of this company are not going to change, even well beyond me.

Last year posed challenges for everybody, particularly with service. Have those issues been alleviated?

Bell: Yes. If you look at our carpet service and our service metrics today, they're probably as good as they've ever been. So that's a very strong positive. And I think they should get even better. A lot of that is because we ran our facilities very hard through November and December, and we were able to build inventory. I think we're back to where we have always been, and I don't think anything's going to change that. I think we're through the worst of the pandemic.

Was the biggest issue COVID-19 in facilities?

Bell: Sure. When you have high absenteeism, you just can't get the output that you would like within the facilities. But that all changed later in the year. We've caught up, and I don't see that issue on the carpet side.

Baucum: Some of the things that happened during that time, too, was shifting in channels. So that inventory you may have built for this channel that doesn't go to that channel, now that channel's surging. Residential and commercial is the most obvious example. You can be long on one,

short on the other. So, you're having to scramble to get that aligned. At the same time, you're battling absenteeism. One of the things that, again, Vance says all the time, "don't waste a crisis." We are more robust and hardened because of what we learned from the experience.

Let's talk about business in this first quarter of 2021.

Bell: The revenue has been good. Growth has been strong. Costs have been up. So, from a cost standpoint and a margin standpoint, I don't see it as normal. But we're very optimistic. If you look at the residential side, the fundamentals and the demographics in place for residential are probably the best I've seen in 30 years. Just the demand that's going to be for housing, for renovation, for everything in the home—I don't think it's going away even as the pandemic ends because you've got this huge wave of millennials that are going to drive the business for the next five or 10 years. And that's very positive. I think we'll see that this year on top of some of the continued pandemic-related 'get into a home,' 'move out to the suburbs,' all those things that

have created housing demand, both new and existing. It's as strong as anybody has ever seen. It's just crazy how strong housing is in some of the rural markets across the country.

Biggest challenge right now is with importing, containers at the ports? Have you been impacted by that? How do you solve that issue, if at all?

Bell: Every consumer and industrial product chain everywhere has been impacted by that. And prices have spiked. Containers off contract are costing three and four times [the usual amount]. Our demand has been good, so we've needed more quantity coming over. And the way that we try to approach it is we have a very sophisticated global logistics operation. And we have direct negotiations with the largest ocean shippers. We don't use intermediaries. So, we try to use some of that leverage, and the scale that we have to maybe get more capacity that others might not. And we're virtually paying whatever it takes to bring material over so that we



The red-hot LVT/SPC sector has encouraged Shaw to invest heavily in its resilient flooring portfolio. Pictured is the Floorté Elite Series.

this huge surge of demand. When demand was so good in the third and fourth quarters last year, most retailers—big boxes, too—depleted their inventories. They're trying to build that back on top of a surge. The only thing that's going to solve it is for that to normalize as we go through the year.

Do you have any kind of projection as to when this normalization occurs?

Bell: We think it will be improving by the end of the second quarter, maybe into the third quarter. But obviously, it's a 15- or 16-week supply chain. So, we may feel it a little bit longer than that, but we think it's going to get a little more normalized toward the end of the second quarter.

Tell me about the laminate strategy.

Bell: We source laminate. And we sell strategically, primarily in the builder market. We've

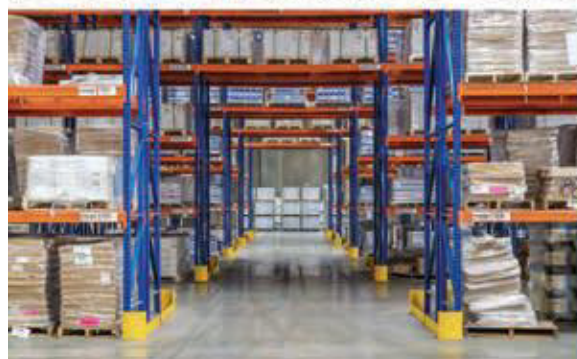
gotten more heavily invested in LVT. We think for the long term, LVT provides better options than laminate. And there's even more innovation coming in LVT, which is going to keep raising the bar on the category.

What about the wood strategy/outlook?

Bell: We're one of the largest engineered wood manufacturers in the country. We have probably one of the largest facilities in South Pittsburg, Tenn., making wood. And we have other facilities in Tennessee and South Carolina. We got out of solid wood because we saw that category declining, and it was converting to engineered. But the highest percentage for us is domestic manufacturing.

Baucom: And even within solid, we have a strategic relationship with that supplier. They're in the broad categories of solid wood, not just flooring. We just felt like it was a win-win. But, arguably, we have the highest market share in wood in the industry. It's a much more fragmented business, but we are really bullish on our wood business.

(Part II of this story will run in the April 12/19 edition of FCNews.)



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Jay Kopelson: EVERYONE'S BEST FRIEND

BY BETSY AMOROSO

To know him is to love him—and vice-versa. More than a salesman as his title implies, Jay Kopelson is a true friend to everyone he meets. He personifies the phrase “never met a stranger” and connects with people instantly in a way that mystifies even the most seasoned executives.

“Jay’s love of people is the key to his success,” said Zack Zehner, president of Mannington Residential. “He really and truly loves engaging with people. His relationships with our customers keep him energized. And he remembers everything—their birthdays, anniversaries, kids’ names—you can’t learn those things in training classes. Jay was born with it.”

Jay has been with Mannington for 29 years, all of them in sales. For

the past 20-plus years, his signature Jay’s Basement event at Surfaces has drawn accolades for its huge success as well as huge crowds rushing to the Mannington booth at the opening bell on the first day of the show. An extrovert’s extrovert, Jay has appeared on stage in front of thousands of customers dressed as a Vegas-style Elvis or a straitjacket-wearing Hannibal Lecter.

Keith Campbell, chairman of the board, has seen Jay in action. “His dedication to customers is something very special. He puts everything he has into those relationships and it’s 100% genuine. Jay is what Mannington’s values are all about.”

Betsy Amoroso is senior director of corporate communications for Mannington Mills



Barbara Stroup and Lori Kisner: NAVIGATING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY

BY SAMANTHA BAKER

Two individuals who have played a key role in the flooring industry are Barbara Stroup and Lori Kisner, managing partners of Market Maker Events (MME). Barbara and Lori are behind the engine that makes this all-female company move forward. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the future of trade shows was suddenly uncertain. With over 70 years of event and crisis management experience between the two of them, Barbara and Lori were prepared to use their expertise to overcome this hurdle.

When producing tradeshow during a pandemic, timing, flexibility and collaboration are everything. Barbara and Lori dedicated their time and energy to discussing safety protocols and researching best practices before deciding to move ahead. As seasoned professionals, they were able to strategically plan the production of the 2021 Flooring Markets with safety top of mind after watching similar-sized and larger events

convene safely with no outbreaks reported.

At the end of the day, flooring is a tactile experience. Products need to be touched and seen in person. As industry forerunners, Barbara and Lori knew the success of flooring retailers and vendors depended on having the opportunity to conduct business safely face-to-face. Barbara and Lori continue to monitor the current situation of the pandemic with diligence and professionalism.

The Flooring Markets in Atlanta, Dallas and Biloxi are currently happening as live events with strict safety measures in place. Buyers and vendors thank Barbara and Lori, and the [MME team], for their leadership and dedication in the return of in-person regional markets. The industry is in good hands with Barbara and Lori behind the wheel.

Samantha Baker is marketing manager, Market Maker Events Partners



Barbara Stroup



Lori Kisner

Factory workers: UNSUNG HEROES

Factory workers in the flooring industry are accustomed to working under tough conditions—from the heat and humidity of a Georgia summer to the tedious work required during an eight-hour shift.

At the height of the pandemic, scores of factory workers became flooring’s version of front-line workers. Rather than shirk from their duties, these essential workers became the unsung heroes of the flooring industry, showing up to work and ensuring that products left the warehouse in good condition.

Over the course of 2020 and into 2021, many flooring companies recognized the personal sacrifice of its facto-

ry workers. One of those companies was Foss Floors. “What is the lifeblood of the company?” Kevin Nassar, executive VP, asked. “It is our workforce. We are a manufacturing company, a boots-on-the-ground kind of company, and we need them. My dad (A.J.) has run a lot of companies over his career and would often tell me, ‘You can’t do anything without your people.’”

Sometimes leaders are not CEOs or presidents of companies; sometimes they are factory workers, ordinary people who come to work every day and make a difference in the success of their company.



Foss workers, from left: Josh Agan, Jerome Tucker and Michael Long

Raj Shah: CREATIVE BUSINESS ACUMEN

BY AL PACHECO

After a successful career in investment banking, Raj Shah, alongside his brother, Rup, joined the family business in 2003. It was important for his parents, Manu and Rika, that Raj understand an employee’s perspective before leading MSI. They believed a good leader must experience the manager/employee relationship.

It is an experience Raj has taken to heart as he leads our great company to over \$2 billion in annual revenue and more than 2,000 employees. I have known Raj for more than 15 years. At the core, Raj is a very humble leader. His inclusive nature makes every employee feel they play an integral role in shaping MSI. Despite his impressive background and wealth of knowledge, he is the most approachable and accessible president that I have had the pleasure to work with. Before settling into his office every morning, Raj interacts with warehouse and office staff to understand challenges and opportunities. He rou-



tinely mentions “our employees always have the answers to complex issues, just ask them for the solutions.”

Many leaders have solid business acumen. Raj has what I refer to as “creative business acumen.” He has the uncanny ability to offer a creative perspective regardless of the challenge and then collaboratively finds a simple solution. His vision is grounded on staying true to MSI’s core purpose of making dreams attainable and fostering a culture of respect and teamwork. This has never been more evident than during the pandemic. MSI handled this difficult situation with grace and never wavered from protecting its employees. Raj continues to make a profound impact on MSI, our associates and customers. It is a pleasure to work alongside such a passionate leader that allows all our voices to be heard.

Al Pacheco is senior vice president at MSI

Michel Vermette: BUILDER OF TEAMS

BY DAVE THORESEN

Someone once asked me to describe what kind of leader Michel Vermette is, and without even thinking I said, “He’s the toughest boss I’ve ever worked for, but I wouldn’t want to work for anyone else.” I think if you could go back to ask Michel’s direct reports, you would find most agree. That’s because when you work for Michel, you learn



something every single day and you know you are doing your best work.

He is a talented business leader who builds exceptional teams. His ability to spot and develop talent has led to the achievement of “inexplicable success” (one of his favorite sayings), beyond what many thought possible in themselves.

Michel started his career in finance and accounting, and he has since proven to be a successful leader of sales, product, operations and marketing. Nicknamed “Captain Chaos,” he is never afraid to wade into complicated waters and change things up if necessary. His fearless approach to getting things done can be met with initial resistance but after assuring his team that “sometimes the tortured path is the correct one,” he’s in the trenches with you, and success typically follows.

Michel brings passion and energy to work every day, and while he demands excellence, he leads by example in everything he does. He is closely aligned with every functional area in the company. He knows the people, the process and the products. Not only does he listen, but he also remembers—often catching people off guard with his uncanny recall for past conversations.

So, why does such a challenging manager command such unmatched loyalty? No matter where you line up with Michel, you always know where you stand. He speaks honestly and shows genuine concern when he needs more from his people. I spoke to several past Armstrong Flooring colleagues after he joined as the CEO and told them they had just won the lottery. With Michel at the helm, there are some very good days ahead for Armstrong Flooring.

Dave Thoresen is senior vice president, product and innovation officer for Armstrong Flooring

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Look for the article in
this issue about Jay's
Jaystock adventure!



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Jason Goldberg: THE VISIONARY

BY BRAD DRESBACH

To tell Jason's story, I sat down with two long-time America's Floor Source employees—Tim Henson, divisional president; and Chris Howell, CFO.

Here are their thoughts.

What makes Jason uniquely Jason?

Howell: His passion and drive are obvious. But his loyalty, compassion and probably his creativity are what make him—and America's Floor Source—special.

Henson: I came here 17 years ago because I believed in Jason's vision of what a flooring company could be. Early on, I'd sometimes question my decision. We were in this warehouse behind a church and the ceiling leaked onto the folding table that was my desk. But every day, I'd see more evidence that his vision was becoming a reality.



How has Jason's leadership brought this vision to life?

Howell: Jason sets the direction and then allows his people to do their job, learn and grow. But he's not above stepping in to help. I've seen him work full days in the warehouse or meet with the smallest clients or prospects to help resolve issues. He'll do anything to help the company, our customers and his people.

Henson: He is 100% committed to his people. He reads every employee's monthly report on goals and successes, and he responds to their suggestions, confirming their value and contributions to the company.

What else should people know about Jason?

Henson: He's a good person who lives by his core values and strives to always do the right thing. He gives people second chances—and often third and fourth chances. He wants them to succeed in whatever way they measure success.

Howell: He shares the rewards of our company's success with the entire team, and he helps his people in whatever way he can—much of which happens behind the scenes with no fanfare. He also supports a number of charities, specifically In Christy's Shoes, an organization that helps women experiencing homelessness, unemployment, domestic abuse, substance issues and human trafficking.

Brad Dresbach is chief branding officer for America's Floor Source

Rotem Eylor: DESTINED FOR GREATNESS

BY EFI EYLOR

When people first meet Rotem Eylor, they can tell early on that he was destined for greatness. From his humble beginnings in a small desert city in Israel, through many years of service in a special tactical unit of the Israeli military, then a top executive in the international diamonds business to CEO/owner of a rapidly growing flooring company in the U.S.—Rotem has achieved success in so many diverse areas. The common denominator, however, is his approach to business and his willingness to go against the grain and be different.

Rotem calls his approach "guerrilla operations." One of his key management skills is being able to turn the ship quick-

ly—no matter the size of the ship. His take-charge attitude and passion for creating beautiful flooring products has propelled Republic Floor to the top of the industry.



Never losing sight that it takes a team to nurture, build and grow the business, Rotem is readily available to all employees—not just the management team—and constantly encourages everyone to be the best version of themselves.

An entrepreneur, forward thinker and hands-on owner. That's Rotem Eylor.

Efi Eylor is director of business development for Republic Floor

Ralph Boe: THE CREATIVE CHEMIST

BY PAUL FRIEDRICHSEN

Great leader. Sheer genius. Rarely do you encounter both qualities in the same person. I first met Ralph at Beaulieu America, shortly after the Bliss carpet brand had been launched. He was already a legend in the flooring industry and proceeded to lead the company through the dark days of the Great Recession. While others were shuttering plants, Ralph was "rolling right-sizing" to keep folks employed. While others were struggling with rising health care costs, Ralph instituted a "million-mile challenge" to keep everyone physically fit by walking every day.

But the best was yet to come.

With a PhD in chemistry, Ralph spent a career creating synthetic fibers and turning them into the plush, beautiful carpets we take for granted. Now, this same genius that perfected polyester carpet fiber set about to deconstruct it. With Ralph's leadership and ingenuity, his new company,

Arropol Chemicals, has developed a practical use for reclaimed polyester fiber by recycling it into polyol—an essential ingredient used to make urethane. Now, post-consumer or post-industrial polyester carpets and fibers need not go into landfills. Instead, they can find new life as the ingredient to make the urethane foam that cushions furniture, underlays flooring or insulates homes. His polyols can even create rigid, lightweight urethane paneling for cargo truck linings or decking for roof construction.

Every industry needs great leadership that cares about and inspires people. Every industry also needs a creative genius that is never satisfied with the status quo. In the floor covering business, we are very fortunate—we have Ralph Boe.

Paul Friedrichsen is marketing consultant for BrandBiz



Andrea Blackburn: A BEACON OF HOPE IN TOUGH TIMES

BY CHARLIE DILKS

Andrea singlehandedly tends to the day-to-day business of the Floor Covering Industry Foundation (FCIF). From promoting the benefits that the foundation can provide to families with life-altering medical crisis, to receiving and processing grant applications and ultimately the distribution of financial help, Andrea does it all.

It's obvious to people who meet Andrea that she is passionate about the mission of the foundation and the resulting work that she performs. She guides prospective applicants through the grant application process, collects the background information required to process the application and prepares the information for committee approval. No stone goes unturned.

Andrea has increased the grant activity that the foundation processes from approximately 50 applications to 138 during 2020—all with a smile. It is safe to say that since Andrea

took the reins at FCIF, we are a far better organization.

Andrea's work ethic is second to none. During COVID-19, when many worked from home, it was not uncommon to see Andrea and her team coming in to process grants, as she knew the need was likely to be great and those needing help would be negatively impacted by delays, even if they were justified by a pandemic.

Not only does she care about those she is helping, but she is also mindful of the importance of wisely accounting for every dollar granted. With this in mind, she has utilized internships with local college students to further stretch the donations to FCIF. With Andrea's help and persistence, the FCIF is well positioned for the future.

Charlie Dilks is chief product officer for CCA Global and chair of the Floor Covering Industry Foundation (FCIF)



John Rietveldt: UNDETERRED PERSEVERANCE

BY STÉPHANIE COUTURE

I have known John for over a decade and one thing is for sure—he is without doubt one of the most loyal and determined people I have ever met. Even the pandemic has not deterred him from delivering on his promises to customers, partners and colleagues, as well as family and friends.

For many, global lockdowns have made contact with others more challenging, but John has dared to defy all obstacles by turning the situation into something positive. He has adapted i4F's modus operandi in record time and committed extra time for employees to safeguard our feelings of inclusion, safety and happiness—so very important during this long period of physical separation.

Instead of expected freezes in investments, he is investing more toward safety, R&D, marketing and people. He is growing our teams in Europe and Asia by hiring new people via online interviews to ensure the best possible support is provided to the industry.

John's ability to truly connect with people has further encouraged the flooring market during this

period. For example, he has pledged to continue participating in all major exhibitions both digitally—via i4F's elaborate virtual showcase—and, when possible and safely, in person. As well, he has initiated and hosted intimate sessions with flooring's most prominent leaders to examine how to make best use of the moment to drive forward innovation and deliver on business plans.

Undeterred, John continues to drive business forward. Several meaningful new innovations have been developed, patent applications continue to be filed around the world and numerous new patent partnerships

have been established. Demand creation is being boosted through a significant retailer campaign, now rolling out across North America and Europe.

i4F delivered record results in 2020, and our team has never been more motivated. As a loyal and "undeterred perseverer," John continues to earn the trust and respect of his team as well as the entire global flooring industry.

Stéphanie Couture is general counsel for i4F



Allen and George Chen: AN AMERICAN SUCCESS STORY

BY STEVE WAGNER

As Wellmade's director of marketing for the past 10 years, I'm proud to have worked side-by-side with brothers Allen and George Chen in their quest to design, manufacture and market top-line hard surface flooring products for distribution throughout North America.

The story begins in Nanjing, China, where Allen and George opened a small plant to manufacture bamboo flooring. George remained in China to oversee the plant, while Allen established a U.S. sales office in Portland, Ore. As fate would have it, Allen quickly landed a very high-profile, large channel retail account. George worked tirelessly producing basically one product (carbonized bamboo flooring) with one production line, and the customer purchased copious amounts of it.

Step-by-step, Wellmade expanded the operation and established the company as a major player in the solid and engineered bamboo category, supplying significant national OEM accounts, large channel retailers and flooring distributors. Yet, even with the success of bamboo flooring, the brothers realized that diversifying into higher-volume products would be key to reaching long-term success and stability for the company.

With the emergence of a WPC core structure,

George and Allen realized the category would continue to evolve. With that, George spearheaded the development of Wellmade's patented HDPC rigid core family of products. As they say, "The rest is history."

Today, Wellmade's HDPC rigid core is available with vinyl wood or vinyl tile looks. And the company's first-to-market HDPC waterproof hardwood and bamboo is forging a new trend in the industry.

The story does not end there. Allen and George have continued to invest heavily back into the business. As part of Wellmade's "Made in the USA" initiative, the company is expanding its manufacturing to Cartersville, Ga., with construction of a state-of-the-art, 328,000-square-foot stateside facility. Scheduled to open this summer, the new plant will eventually employ up to 200 individuals from the surrounding Bartow County area.

Growing pains are a natural part of building any business. Allen and George continue to rise to the challenge, exemplifying the American entrepreneurial spirit while promoting the virtues of family, friends and loyalty to customers and employees.

Steve Wagner is director of marketing for Wellmade



Allen Chen



George Chen

Mike Fromm: SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN TRANSFORMATIVE TIMES

BY TIM BAUCOM

What does it take for a company to stay aligned through a sudden shift in operations? Especially one with more than 20,000 unique individuals with diverse perspectives, backgrounds and responsibilities that service an even broader customer base across the globe?

The answer is simple: culture. In times of crisis, the integrity of individuals—and organizations—shines through. Leadership is revealed. And a company's belief in one another and commitment to the work becomes more important than ever. In the context of COVID-19, it required someone to step forward and provide answers. Or, perhaps more importantly, admit when they didn't have them.

Mike Fromm, chief human resources officer, was that leader for Shaw—embodying our culture of respect and perseverance. Fromm championed the needs of associates, leaning on the resources of various departments, innovating our platforms of communication, embracing vulnerability and inspiring bold action in the

face of uncertainty. We didn't have all the answers. But what Shaw did have was our core values of honesty, integrity and passion that served as our moral compass through it all.

We put people first—and that carried through to our customers. Through his example, Fromm empowered other leaders to act with honesty, fostering open conversations with customers. His transparency solidified our integrity, enabling us to confidently open our virtual doors to customers, vendor partners and media to ensure all felt informed, respected and engaged. Through it all, Shaw's passion for our customers—and each other—has echoed through Zoom calls and acts of service across the country.

Mike Fromm showed us what it means to "make a difference." It means giving your whole self in the service of others. No matter what or where, Shaw is here in service of you.

Tim Baucom is president and CEO of Shaw Industries



Derek Welbourn: A TRUE PARTNER

BY FRED FEUERMANN

Derek Welbourn has a unique vision to create a different type of company. His guiding principle continues to be one based on partnership. From day one, Derek saw Inhaus' distributors and dealers as an extension of Inhaus and, because of this, has built some extremely strong and long-standing relationships that he often refers to as the "Inhaus Family."

A belief that partnerships would result in a truly unique company was not a business plan or strategy; it was simply derived from Derek's collaborative approach to business—believing strongly that a company will achieve greater success if it creates a strong network of expert customers that have similar principles.

Inhaus has a "customer-first" culture that stems from Derek's relentless effort to make sure all customers are looked after and treated equally regardless of size or stature.

After 20 years, Derek continues to have boundless energy to create efficient processes, invent unique and innovative products while leading by example through a set culture of professionalism and hard work while never forgetting to add fun to the mix. Having successfully achieved what he set out to do, he's far from resting on his laurels. He created a very flat organization by trusting and empowering a team of faithful employees to make decisions, learn from their mistakes and grow with the company. Derek is excited about the future of Inhaus and sharing in its continued success with its strong network of devoted customers. His lab background and strong personal interest in innovation continue to drive Inhaus' efforts to create new products.

Fred Feuermann is chief operating officer for Inhaus



Vaccine creators: GIVING US ALL A FIGHTING CHANCE

When scientists began seeking a vaccine for the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus in early 2020, they were careful not to promise quick success. The fastest any vaccine had previously been developed—from viral sampling to approval—was four years, for mumps in the 1960s. To hope for one even by the summer of 2021 seemed highly optimistic.

But by the start of December, the developers of several vaccines had announced excellent results in large trials, with more showing promise. On Dec. 2, a vaccine made by drug giant Pfizer with German biotech firm BioNTech was announced. A week later, the Moderna unveiled its COVID-19 vaccine, and on Feb. 27, the FDA authorized Johnson & Johnson's one-shot vaccine for emergency use. A fourth vaccine, developed by Oxford-AstraZeneca, is being manufactured in 15 countries and is currently under review for emergency use in the U.S.

Here's a brief description of the scientists behind the vaccines.

Pfizer: Ozlem Tureci, who founded the German company BioNTech with her husband, Ugur Sahin, was working on a way to harness the body's immune system to tackle tumors when they learned of an unknown virus infecting people in China. Over breakfast, the couple decided to apply the technology they'd been researching for two decades to the new threat. The vaccine uses messenger RNA, or mRNA, to carry instructions into the

human body for making proteins that prime it to attack a specific virus. The same principle can be applied to get the immune system to take on tumors.

Moderna: It is the work by Hamilton Bennett's team at Moderna that enabled the biotech company's coronavirus vaccine to gain emergency use approval by the FDA in record time. While Pfizer's was the first, Moderna's is the second mRNA-based vaccine to have ever received the U.S. FDA's approval for emergency use.

Johnson & Johnson: The Johnson & Johnson vaccine relies on a design Dr. Dan Barouch pioneered nearly 20 years ago for two experimental vaccines that have shown promise against HIV and Zika, and a third that won approval from the European Union in July to prevent Ebola. It uses a harmless and relatively rare cold virus, adenovirus serotype 26 or Ad26, as a Trojan horse to deliver part of the distinctive spike protein on the coronavirus surface into cells to trigger an immune response without making people sick.

AstraZeneca: At the heart of Oxford's effort to produce a COVID-19 vaccine are half a dozen scientists—led by Sarah Gilbert and Adrian Hill—who between them brought decades of experience to the challenge of designing, developing, manufacturing and trialing a safe vaccine at breakneck speed. Instead of mRNA, AstraZeneca uses a viral vector (or carrier) to hold extra genetic material that codes for the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein.



Crystal Moore: UNSTOPPABLE FORCE

BY LAURA BARTLEY

When Mohawk first began talks of safely hosting the Mohawk Momentum Roadshow during a global pandemic, Crystal Moore was the first on the case. From scouting hotels that were willing to bring back furloughed employees, to negotiating contracts in uncertain times, Crystal worked tirelessly to make the Roadshow the success that it has been for more than 2,000 attendees across four cities.

But that's all in a normal day's work for Crystal. Following in the footsteps of her parents, Crystal has dedicated her career to Mohawk Industries. Her parents both retired from the company after 77 years of service, collectively. Her eyes light up when tenured employees connect her family dots. Since 2003, Crystal has spent her time at Mohawk in shipping, safety, customer service and hospitality. She is now a member of the marketing team, working exclusively on residential events such as Edge Council, roadshows, Surfaces and Edge.



It's not just her unique ability to multitask, execute and manage million-dollar budgets across the business that sets her apart. Crystal is an unstoppable force with a smile always on her face. She is genuinely honest and wonderfully opinionated. She has friends in every corner of Calhoun-based Mohawk Flooring Center, with many of those relationships dating back to her first day. She is a trusted, hardworking Mohawk employee and a loyal friend.

While Crystal is currently planning and preparing every aspect of Mohawk's Roadshow presence at Surfaces in June, her stress level is not as high as it may have been in other years. After all, she was a pioneer in hosting successful in-person events in a COVID-19 world—she's just getting started.

Laura Bartley is senior director, marketing communications and events for Mohawk Flooring N.A.

Jeff King: SOUND LEGAL ADVISOR

BY SCOTT HUMPHREY

One of the first people I met when I became CEO of the World Floor Covering Association (WFCA) was Jeff King. When I met him, he said, "Hi, I am Jeff King, your legal counsel—if you will have me."

I have made many important personnel appointments since taking this position, but none have proven more critical than the decision to retain Jeff as the legal counsel of the WFCA. I am honored to recognize his contributions to our industry.

His life experiences are vast, his passion is unequalled and his heart for this industry is second to none. By far one of the most intelligent people I have had the privilege to know and learn from, Jeff has the amazing ability to take complex concepts and make them understandable. Having practiced law in Washington, D.C., for many years, his knowledge of the inner workings of our government along with our valued partnership with

our lobbying firm—Lobbyit—make meetings in our nation's capital amazingly productive. The trifold partnership of WFCA, Lobbyit and Jeff became significantly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, with daily changes being considered in legislation that would impact our 10,000-plus members and the industry as a whole. His daily emails and weekly Zoom updates brought comfort to the industry during a time of great uncertainty.

Making himself readily available to individual members, groups and entities throughout the industry, Jeff is often a featured speaker at industry meetings and shows. I often say Jeff is WFCA's legal counsel but, in reality, he is legal counsel to the entire industry, and we are blessed to have him.

Scott Humphrey is CEO of the World Floor Covering Association



T.M. Nuckols: INNOVATIVE COMMUNICATOR

BY DAN PHELAN

The Dixie Group believes our greatest advantage has been our people. As we step into our next 100 years, we are committed to investing in talent that strengthens our organization. Additionally, we are "obsessed with making our customers more successful." At the helm of these beliefs is T.M. Nuckols.

When we were looking for someone to lead our residential business, T.M. was a uniquely qualified candidate who mirrored our values, understood our business and had industry relation-



ships to deliver our promise.

T.M. leads TDG's residential business by being an exceptional communicator, having a strong emphasis on product innovation, empowering others to do the right things and giving our consumers and customers a world-class product offering.

T.M. has been an industry leader for nearly three decades. His leadership spans his 28 years with DuPont, Invista/Stainmaster and the last four with The Dixie Group. As president of our residential business, T.M. is laser focused on our customers' success by advocating meaningful improvements

throughout our organization. T.M. has transitioned The Dixie Group into new segments, brought in the industry's best talent for future growth and enhanced operational excellence across our residential business.

Congratulations, T.M., on this well-deserved recognition by the industry and your peers. We are honored to work alongside you as we continue to challenge the process and make our customers more successful.

Dan Phelan is vice president of marketing and hard surface, TDG residential

Biden visits Smith Flooring on first leg of 'Help is Here' tour

By Ken Ryan

President Joe Biden chose a flooring store in suburban Philadelphia for his first stop in a cross-country canvas to tout the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package. It's what the White House is calling the "Help is Here" tour (*FCNews*, March 15/22). The president visited Chester, Pa.-based Smith Flooring, a woman/minority-owned business, where he spoke with Kristin Smith, president, and James Smith, vice president.

President Biden met with the Smiths to discuss how the relief package—including the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)—helps millions of Americans and family-owned commercial flooring contractors maintain operations. Like many other flooring contractor businesses, Smith Flooring saw revenue decrease by 20% at the height of the pandemic. Once the store applied for the PPP loan, it was able to retain its journeymen and upgrade tech-

nology to increase business and operational efficiency.

"The PPP loan allowed us to not only sustain our operations, but it will also enable us to continue to grow our business," James Smith said. "Being selected as the first stop is a testament to our craftsmanship, the quality of service we provide and demonstrates the strength the union provides to family-owned shops."

Kristin Smith said they were honored to be chosen for the visit, calling it "a memorable" day for sure. "We don't feel like celebrities," she told *FCNews*. "We are a small business, a small, minority-owned business and what we do every day are the things that have to get done to run a business."

James Smith agreed, adding, "We were honored to host this special event with President Biden. It signifies the promise the new administration made to small and family-owned businesses, like ours, guaranteeing that help is on the way."

As a member of the United



President Joe Biden visited Smith Flooring, a woman/minority-owned business in Chester, Pa., to promote his American Rescue Plan. With Biden are company president Kristin Smith (center), and James Smith, vice president.

Brotherhood of Carpenters and an INSTALL contractor, Smith Flooring launched its business in 2006. Serving the greater Philadelphia area, a historically underserved population, the company installs flooring in commercial environments such as health care, education, retail and government facilities.

"INSTALL provides value to union contractors big and small, providing an invaluable resource to help them win business and deliver reliable and

professional flooring installations," said John T. McGrath Jr., INSTALL executive director. "On behalf of INSTALL and the union, we congratulate Smith Flooring on receiving the high honor of hosting the President."

Spreading the word

The White House has said the purpose of the tour is to educate Americans about what benefits the package provides and how they can access the relief. The Biden administration estimated

that 400,000 small businesses have closed because of the pandemic, with millions more barely surviving. His aid package includes a \$28 billion grant program to support restaurants and drinking establishments. It also includes \$15 billion in flexible grants.

"Not many people come out and stop here in Chester and so we're just grateful," Kristin Smith said, telling Biden, "We're grateful for the things that you're doing."

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marketing mastery

Make your marketing much more effective

Marketing can be divided into two broad categories: direct response and branding. Direct response is designed to get an immediate response from prospects by giving them a strong call to action. Branding, also known as “delayed response,” is where you put your business name out there repeatedly in order to build up name recognition over time.

The challenge with branding is it’s very expensive and takes a long time to generate results. That’s why I teach dealers the science behind direct response. Done correctly, it’s possible to put a promotion out online—say, via email—and start getting responses within minutes. A happy side benefit is over time you will build name recognition.

Let’s break down the different elements of a strong direct response message:

Headline. Any ad, website or landing page should have an attention-grabbing, benefit-laden headline. The headline is the “ad for the ad.” It gets prospects to stop and read more of your message. A big mistake I see dealers make is using their business

name as the headline. If someone is searching online for a flooring store, they most likely don’t know or care about your business name. They are looking for an answer to their unspoken question: “Why should I do business with you instead of your competitor?” Make sure your headline provides an answer to that question.

DONE CORRECTLY, IT’S POSSIBLE TO PUT A PROMOTION OUT ONLINE AND START GETTING RESPONSES WITHIN MINUTES.

Subheads. These create a double-readership path. Some people are readers; some are skimmers. Subheads give skimmers all the key benefits of your business or your offer.

Social proof. Include anything to build credibility, such as awards, experience, certifications, etc. Explain why having these things will benefit the prospect. Show “before” and

“after” photos of your work. Use photos of happy customers. Testimonials are the most powerful form of social proof. What others say about you is 100 times more powerful than what you say about yourself—even if you’re 100 times more eloquent.

Be personal. You should write like you talk. Prospects should see that you are a real person. Don’t use “advertise-ese.” Example: We at Boring Flooring strive to be No. 1 in customer satisfaction, provide superior service, etc. That’s advertise-ese. No one talks that way in real life, so don’t do it in your marketing.

Guarantees. Plunking down \$3,000-\$10,000 or more for flooring is a major purchase. Prospects are worried they’ll pick the wrong floor, get ripped off, wind up with shoddy workmanship or the floor will fall apart in two years. Strong guarantees that these things won’t happen act as risk reversal for your prospects and gives them confidence to buy from you.

Offer. I generally steer dealers away from straight price discounts. Other options can include a “freemium” if they purchase a minimum amount (area rug, vacuum, dinner for two, movie tickets, etc.) or “limited availability” on a specific product.

Deadline/call to action. Be specific. “Call or visit by July 20 to get the special.” Usually, if there is no deadline, your offer is not complete. This is for people who skip to the end of the message.

Note: Not every web page or ad will require or have room for every element. I consider the most important elements to be: 1) headline; 2) testimonials; and 3) offer with deadline.



JIM AUGUSTUS ARMSTRONG

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Retail outlook

Continued from page 1

Northwest to the Southeast. “Our first quarter was one of our best ever, and I expect the second quarter to be better yet based on the orders and jobs we have scheduled for the next three months,” said Don Cantor, owner of Chelan, Wash.-based Lake Interiors Chelan. “Every segment of our business is clicking. We are busy with lots of new construction, remodels and water restoration build backs. We also have several condominiums and vacation rentals that we work on. We are also selling a lot of kitchen and bathroom cabinets and countertops as well as Hunter Douglas window coverings.”

In Knoxville, Tenn., Kevin Frazier, owner of Frazier’s Carpet One Floor & Home, said he has “explosive expectations” for Q2. “Q1 is already up 22% for us over last year, and our Q1 last year was a record setter,” he said. “It’s like that old Buck Owen’s song, ‘I’ve Got a Tiger by the Tail.’”

Frazier said carpet and luxury vinyl plank are both on a tear and have been for about 20 months. “Additionally, I have been pleasantly surprised that hardwood is holding as steady as it is—around 18% of total sales for us,” he noted. “Even with all of our forecasting and planning and staging, too much business is going to be our biggest challenge in both Q2 and Q3.”

Keeping pace with frenzied activity has been a challenge even for legacy retailers like O’Krent’s Abbey Flooring in San

Antonio, which has more than 100 years of retail experience. “It’s not slowing down, I can tell you that,” Sam O’Krent, owner, told FCNews.

Business at O’Krent’s was already busy even before the historic Texas freeze in February that led to a bevy of broken pipes that will require flooring to be replaced. “Now, it’s crazy busy,” O’Krent said. “It’s challenging just to keep up. Our RSAs are



Some dealers say they have seen a major uptick in kitchen and bath makeovers.

exhausted; our installers, which we didn’t have enough of to begin with, are maxed out. Everyone should be busy.”

Busy would be an apt description for fellow Abbey dealer Ted Gregerson, owner of Ted’s Abbey Carpet & Floor in Anniston, Ala. His business was up 10% in the first quarter from last year, and more of the same is expected in the second quarter. “Customers just keep coming through the doors and buying,” he said. In particular, his business has benefited by a huge uptick in the tile and stone business, which has been fueled by the popularity of kitchen and bath makeovers.

For Marshall Carpet One & Rug Gallery, Q1 2021 was the best quarter in its 55-year history, and there are no signs of a

slowdown, according to Matt Wien, director of sales for the Mayfield Heights, Ohio, store. “Our expectations for Q2 are to keep this train rolling full steam ahead,” he explained. Wien said commercial, which had been the lagging segment, is on the rise as well.

The normally harsh winter in North Dakota didn’t keep customers away from Carpet World of Bismarck. “We expect Q2 to be much like Q1—busy, busy, busy,” said Jon Dauenhauer, co-owner, noting that the hard surface flooring segments rigid vinyl plank and waterproof laminate have continued to dominate the market.

Flooring retailers say they aren’t sure if this pace of business can continue long term. But, for now, they are enjoying it. “As we say around here, ‘Fish while the fish are biting,’” O’Krent said.

Freight’s impact

The potential fly in the ointment for retailers has been—and will continue to be—the global slowdown of freight, which has led to shipping delays and shortages in some instances. However, flooring retailers have, for the most part, mitigated the damage with long-term planning.

“We’re booking six to eight weeks out for installation, so that gives us time to deal with backorders,” Marshall Carpet One’s Wien said. “We are concerned about what the next three to six months holds with the shortage of raw materials due to the Texas snowstorms. We are currently trying to plan for that.”

As supply chain challenges increase, some retailers say they have taken a hit on margins by offering customers an upgrade for no additional cost in order to save the sale. “We have definitely increased our inventory levels from where they normally would be, and reorder much sooner than we would like,” Ted’s Abbey Carpet & Floor’s Gregerson said. “We have instructed salespeople not to promise anything until they check if the material is available.”

Pierce Flooring took an aggressive approach to its stocking inventory levels over the past several months and increased inventory wherever possible. “Our direction to our sales team is ‘sell what we own,’” Loeffler said.

(For the full story, visit FCNews.net)

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Jim is the founder and president of Flooring Success Systems, a company that provides floor dealers with marketing services and coaching to help them attract quality customers, close more sales, get higher margins and work the hours they choose. For information visit FlooringSuccessSystems.com.

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women of the flooring business



Mentorship, friendship all rolled into one group

BY RACHEL BERLIN

(Editor's note: Following is the second installment in a new series promoting Women of the Flooring Business, a social media group that provides members with a platform to share their experiences, observations and best practices.)

When I was first approached by Lisbeth Calandrino and Michelle Winters to be an “admin” for the “Women of the Flooring Business” Facebook group, I said, “Why me? What do I have that makes me special?” But then I got to thinking, and I realized there is one thing that helps me stand out: I ask a lot of questions.

Now, I’m sure as a child that was probably an annoying trait to my parents, my coaches, my teachers and maybe even friends. But, as I’ve gotten older, I’ve realized that everything lies in the questions you

tions and, ultimately, improve our knowledge. This is an amazing thing—to be surrounded (virtually and, hopefully soon, in person) by the best of the best. How cool is that?

Many of the things that I’ve learned from this group have been applied to my daily interactions with my team. Generally speaking, my sales team is all women, most of my clients are women and my best friends are women. So, how do we use our experiences to become the best version of ourselves? We challenge each other, we mentor and we grow. It’s amazing to watch my sales

associates grow into one confident and capable sales machine. It’s not just about the sale, though. It’s really about the relationship she has with the client. She just glows when she is “in the zone.” I know I had a little to do with that, but she is striving to get better and grow. And knowing you have a team behind you is a huge part of that growth. Every day might not be a great day, but there is something great in every day.

I encourage you all to invite other women to this group so we can continue to lift each other up—as well as create a safe space for all of us to ask those little questions that might be weighing heavy on our minds. I urge you to never be afraid to ask questions. You never know—you’re probably one question away from a breakthrough.

I URGE YOU TO NEVER BE AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS. YOU NEVER KNOW—YOU’RE PROBABLY ONE QUESTION AWAY FROM A BREAKTHROUGH.

ask. I am no better or smarter than anyone else in the group—and certainly not this industry—but I can tell you that I’m not afraid to ask questions. And you shouldn’t be, either. We all started somewhere.

My role at Precision Floors & Decor in Plymouth is sales manager, or as I like to say, sales coach. I have no formal training, and I have no prior experience in this role. So, that’s where the Women of the Flooring Business comes in. They are all my coaches and mentors.

The group is full of amazing women who are much smarter than I am—or may ever be. But that’s the greatest part; we can lean on one another to improve ourselves, improve our ques-

tions and, ultimately, improve our knowledge. This is an amazing thing—to be surrounded (virtually and, hopefully soon, in person) by the best of the best. How cool is that?

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Rachel Berlin is an interior designer who has been in the flooring industry for 15 years. She is currently the sales manager at Precision Floors & Décor in Plymouth, Wis. Her passion in life is watching those around her grow.



From left: Bret Perkins, Richard Abramowicz and Richard Hatch gathered at the Southwind booth during the last Surfaces.

Southwind

Continued from page 1

vice president of sales for Southwind, have a 15-year history of working together in various roles in flooring.

Perkins cited synergies between Southwind and BAMR, namely freight—specifically on the import side—by combining volumes of both

companies to achieve better service and rates and domestically in delivering product to Southwind’s existing dealers. “There will be increased inventories of current products as well as additional products to better serve existing customers and target remodeling projects, builder and multi-family,” he explained.

BAMR Holdings includes

Cabinets To Go, a specialty retailer of cabinets, closets and floor coverings; Gracious Home, a luxury home goods retailer; and Thos Baker, a provider of fine outdoor furniture. Perkins told FCNews that Cabinets To Go has been a customer of Southwind’s hard surface products and are sold under the retailer’s XRP Flooring brand.

Remote House Call

Continued from page 3

going to pay my rates for their install right over the phone/email/text,” he explained. “With this technology, I could do full estimates remotely and not waste any time at all.”

From a dealer’s perspective, Rachel Berlin, sales and design, Precision Floors & Décor, Plymouth, Wis., told FCNews she believes RHC is a unique tool that will differentiate the store from its competitors. “This would be a great pre-qualifying tool,” she said. “For a simpler estimate, it would be great to have the client do a quick drawing and/or share dimensions and show us the space. We could then give her a price range to see if this project is within her budget or not. I also think this would be great for warranty claims or small issues that arise on a jobsite so our project managers can see what our installers are seeing. This would speed up the process of coming to a solution to a challenge without needing to be on site.”

Karyn Mitchell, owner and CFO, Simply Floors, West Chester Township, Ohio, agreed on the

tool’s relevance in today’s retail environment, noting the new software’s potential impact on her shop-at-home business. “We are primarily shop-at-home, so this will give us one more tool in our toolbox to improve virtual shopping and customer service,” she explained. “We have always done shop-at-home, and Jason [Goldberg] is one of the few people developing software and tools that ‘get it.’ If other developers want to move forward, they need to listen to the shop-at-home companies and what they need. One hundred percent—we will be using it.”

Goldberg noted that any advancement in his technology services—such as TraLaMa or Retail Lead Management—are meant to help push the industry forward, and RHC is no different. “We work in an industry that doesn’t embrace technology as well as some other industries,” he explained. “We’re always behind. We’re always chasing other industries. In this case, this could be one of the first times the flooring industry gets out ahead and becomes a leader.”

When it comes to the issue of adoption in an industry noto-

rious for overlooking technology, Skyro Floors’ Ballin said COVID-19 has moved advances like RHC to the forefront. “After the year we just had, being able to interact with our customers remotely is becoming much more common than it used to be,” he explained. “Having this sort of access to our customers while they’re in their homes is kind of a game changer. Being able to take pictures, make notes and save everything in one spot for each job takes organization to the next level. I was impressed with TraLaMa when [Jason] released that platform, and I think this is just as impressive. I can’t wait to see how it’s adapted into different aspects of the industry.”

Overall, dealers and installers alike agree, they are more than ready to implement RHC into their business models. “We have always been a company that thrives on and embraces technology,” Precision’s Berlin said. “We want to implement things that work and will make our lives easier and make things more streamlined. If it saves time and makes our customer’s lives easier, it sounds like a no-brainer.”

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Global influences impact tile/stone design trends

By Megan Salzano

Cozy Essentials

“A design movement that I personally like to call ‘Cozy Essentials,’ which can be considered an evolution of minimalistic design, is a trend that combines the color white and the clean lines typical of Scandinavian design with the warmth of modern Mediterranean rustic style and the perfect imperfection of Japanese Wabi Sabi,” said Laura Grill, lead product designer, Daltile. “It is part of the larger global trend/influence of well-being.”

Cozy Essentials embodies the idea of mixing different cultures and design trends, so they influence each other. The typical Scandinavian colors like white, concrete gray and black are accompanied by warmer hues like browns and tobaccos as well as natural materials such as leather and golden-brown woods. Combined with this color evolution is a more tactile experience. This trend speaks to the movement toward holistic design involving all senses.

“It continues to evolve as it is influenced by other cultures,” Grill said. “Japanese culture from one side and modern Mediterranean influence from the other side. Mediterranean influence is coming from the modern reinterpretation of the rustic design typical of the South of Italy, Spain, Greece and Morocco.”



Daltile's Enlite

From Scandinavian minimalist design to biophilia and even the pandemic, global influences are shaping U.S. ceramic design. Whether it's through calming colors or nature-inspired textures, ceramic and stone styles are tapping the needs of today's consumer to feel connected to nature, comforted and safe while at home.

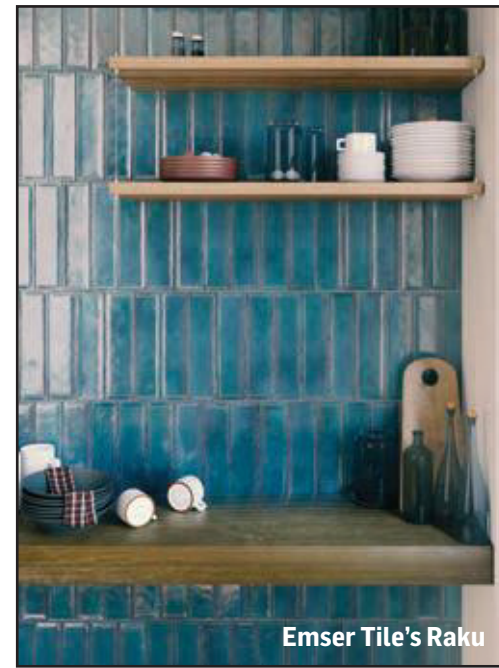
Following are several design trends on deck for 2021.

Biophilic revitalization

“Ceramics with natural, hand-made and authentic textures that add warmth and comfort to a space while helping to blur the line between interior and exterior environments are a top trend directly related to the global pandemic,” said Suzanne Zurfluh, director of design and trend, Emser Tile. “People are seeking a connectedness to nature, the outdoors and even wildlife to create a serene atmosphere and to support their overall well-being during these uncertain times.”

Warm, earthy neutrals, aquatic blues and botanical greens that evoke a rich design aesthetic that is both soothing and revitalizing are trending. Non-uniformed textures and finishes that emulate organic materials with natural imperfections aim to add dimension and appeal to floor and wall surfaces in this category.

After a year of shelter-in-place orders, it's no wonder Americans have a newfound relationship with their homes, thus creating a desire to invest in those homes more than ever before. The global pandemic not only significantly increased the amount of time people spend at home but also the way they function in their environment. Therefore, reflecting the need to make home improvements based on versatility, comfort and wellness.



Emser Tile's Raku

Clean and comforting

The global pandemic has helped shape design trends in ceramic for the foreseeable future, and easy-to-clean tile in comforting shades is in high demand. “With the importance of health, ceramic tiles have been very much in demand, especially in warm, calm and neutral tones and various shapes and sizes,” said Paulo Pereira, senior merchant, MSI. “We see a switch in demand from the ever-popular whites and grays to bright colors and warm tones—such as greens and blues—across wall and floor products. Homeowners across the U.S. have never been more vigilant about having durable tiles that are very easy to clean.”

In an attempt to expand their at-home living space, consumers are also looking for coordinating indoor and outdoor tiles that unite the two spaces seamlessly, more so than ever before.



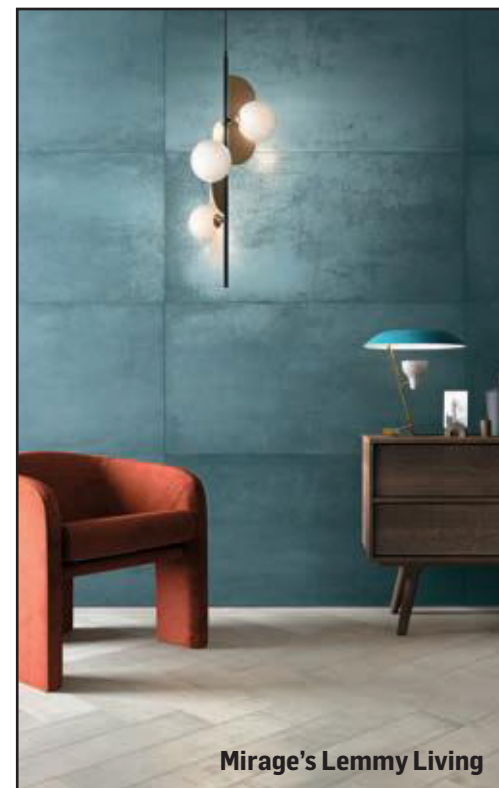
MSI's Renzo

Calm and collected

“After this very stressful and hectic year, Italian manufacturers are introducing product lines with more relaxing, spa-like tones and textures, which help instill a sense of calm in interior spaces,” said Brittney Harmond of Ceramics of Italy.

The continuing travel restrictions, which have forced consumers to spend much more time at home, have inspired people to embrace warm, earthy tones that bring nature indoors. It has also moved some consumers to style their homes in such a way that evokes feelings of travel and brings global cultures—so far out of reach of late—home.

Gianni Ruberti, sales, Mirage USA, added that classic whites and warm colors combined with fun items have been arranged with one common purpose: making the home a cozy and relaxing place. “A safe retreat with all the accessories,” he said. “Bright, serene, classic themes put together in timeless arrangements. It's out with the colors and styles that remind you of the city, office or industry, and in with soft tones, warm hues and even fun, playful colors.”



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Stainmaster set to sponsor American Kennel Club TV spots

NEW YORK—The Stainmaster brand has come onboard as an official flooring TV sponsor of the American Kennel Club (AKC)—the world's largest purebred dog registry and leading advocate for canines. As a sponsor, Stainmaster will be featured in the AKC National Championship Presented by Royal Canin Broadcast. The brand will also be featured in AKC's televised shows for the ESPN networks, including AKC Fastest Dogs USA, AKC Agility Premier Cup, AKC National Agility Championship, NADD Premier Cup and AKC Flyball National Championship. Stainmaster will also be a sponsor of five AKC Meet The Breeds Events in 2021.

"We are thrilled to have this new relationship with Stainmaster," said Dennis Sprung, president and CEO, AKC. "At our shows, we have large quantities of dogs and having a flooring that is not only safe for dogs but also has dog-friendly benefits, makes for a better experience for our dogs and our exhibitors. We also look forward to sharing the Stainmaster brand with our constituency and dog owners everywhere."

For the Stainmaster brand and its relevant campaign themes, the partnership is perfect match. "We are excited to be the official flooring sponsor of the American Kennel Club," said Maggie Bidlingmaier, president of Invista Performance Solutions. "The AKC's ability to connect with and educate millions of dog owners nationwide gives us an unparalleled opportunity to share the Stainmaster PetProtect carpet promise that it is the ideal foundation for pet-friendly adventures. We all believe our dogs are our family and belong right by our sides."

Jenny Wilburn, director of marketing, Invista, told *FCNews* that the new Stainmaster initiative gives the specialty flooring retail a number of advantages in the market. "Right out of the gate it puts us back on TV, and that's something our retailers have been requesting for a long

time," she said. "It boosts awareness and recognition, so when customers come into their store they know what to ask for."

She added that there will be more than 30 hours of programming across the ESPN and ABC networks over the next year. Throughout, Stainmaster PetProtect will be featured on traditional signage throughout



Stainmaster's new partnership with the American Kennel Club gives retailers more ammunition to promote PetProtect in their stores.

the courses, billboards and announcements.

"There are two additional things that I'm pumped about," Wilburn added. "First, there is a waiting area for each dog and owner when they get finished with the course. I compare it to the Olympics when each figure skater gets done with their event and they wait for their scores in their own area. The same thing happens here. And we are going to be tufting a special 10-foot section for that area that will feature just the Stainmaster PetProtect logo every time this happens."

On top of that, there will

also be commercials within the broadcasts. "The first will be the Agility Championships where something always goes viral," Wilburn added. "That will be airing at 8 p.m. on a Thursday night, so it's prime time. The show is also going to re-air several times and we look forward to seeing Stainmaster PetProtect commercials."

While boosting brand awareness is a boon for specialty retailers, there's more. Flooring retailers will also have the rights to the AKC branding in-store. "This builds up a lot of credibility with dog owners because the AKC is saying, 'This is the flooring we recommend for all dog owners,'" Wilburn noted. "They will have the right to use those marks on signage and displays anywhere in their stores."

The sponsorship benefits don't end there. Moving forward, anytime someone registers a puppy with the AKC they are sent a registration package that will include a Stainmaster PetProtect insert with a QR code. Pet owners will be directed to a Stainmaster page with a list of the Stainmaster Flooring Centers and a lead point. This directly connects the people registering their puppies with their new flooring and where to get it. "Carpet is up and we are really trying to capitalize on that," Wilburn explained.

lisbiz strategies

Adapting to emerging consumer trends

As we continue into what we think is our "post-pandemic" period, there are still many people who remain reluctant about going shopping, dining out indoors at restaurants or having installers in their houses. I say "post" because there are several signs that still indicate that we're very much in the throes of a pandemic.

My next-door neighbor was telling me how bad her carpet looked the other day, but she's still unwilling to hire a carpet cleaner. (She doesn't want any workmen in her home.) She decided she's going to clean it the best she can all by herself.

Despite the fact my friend has had her COVID-19 immunizations, she doesn't go to many places. This is a trend I think will continue for quite a while as people reacclimate to going out in public and among groups. As retailers, you need to be ready and respond accordingly.

WITH ALL THE CHANGES HAPPENING IN RETAIL TODAY, IT'S IMPORTANT TO LOOK FOR EXCITING NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE WITH CUSTOMERS.

This leads us into my first trend; it's called the Do-It-Yourself continues.

When I say DIY, I don't only mean flooring—although having classes on this inside the store has always been a good draw. Maybe it's the DIY backsplash, or "let's paint a wall," or some other home decorating project. You can partner with other trades and have that weekly Zoom interaction. It could be cooking, flower arranging, starting a small business or gardening.

The do-it-yourself trend isn't new. However, the pandemic has forced many people to do more for ourselves. We're maybe still not doing the "heavy lifting" such as putting on a new roof, but we're learning how to do repair projects around the house.

Another trend I see is unconventional partnerships—such as home centers and specialty retailers. It may sound crazy, but I am aware of retailers that provide installation or even products for the box stores. If I were a store



LISBETH CALANDRINO

owner, I would call the manager at one of the box stores with a proposition to supply labor or to do an installation workshop for them. (I know what you're thinking—"she's crazy!") But if I were a customer and saw on social media that you were doing a workshop for a box store, I know where I would shop.

The growth of concierge services is another trend that's also gaining steam. Usually relegated to high-end hotels or upscale retail establishments, concierge services are becoming more popular in the age of social distancing. For flooring and home furnishings dealers,

having a concierge service might entail offering curbside pickup. Or how about bringing samples to the

customer's home and offering to go out and measure for a job or talk about your concierge installation. These specialized services go along with your craftspeople and your knack for custom installation.

I'm also seeing more creative use of outdoor space these days. (Look no further than the restaurant industry for examples.) How about getting creative with your parking lot? I hate when I go by a flooring store during the summer and there's nothing going on in a huge, empty parking lot. If it were mine, I would regularly schedule a farmer's market in my parking lot. You could host all kinds of different events—raffles, arcade games, fun things for sale.

Bottom line: With all the changes happening in retail today—combined with evolving consumer shopping habits—it's important to look for exciting new opportunities to engage with customers. What's the worst that could happen? And you might have some fun in the process.

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

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How to use Instagram to build business

By Megan Salzano

As the most visual—and arguably most beautiful—social media platform, Instagram (IG) can play a major role in successfully selling flooring. Not only that, but IG’s user base has grown exponentially over the past few years. As a result, more than half of all businesses (60%) say they are planning to increase their IG budgets in 2021, according to Hootsuite’s annual social media report. Like all good marketers should, they’re following the user growth. IG’s advertising reach grew by 7.1% in the most recent quarter—more than three times Facebook at 2.2%, the report found.

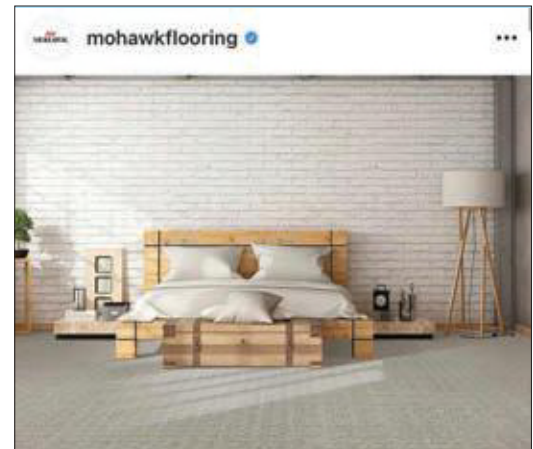
IG is a powerhouse selling tool and can be used in myriad ways to help grow brand awareness, interact with your customer base and even make sales—if used correctly. Following are a few new features to drive sales—beware: they’re not all for the faint of heart.



LO-FI VIDEO

Lo-fi style video—video with a DIY look and feel—is trending among businesses looking to engage customers on an authentic level. Whether it’s Reels, Stories or IGTV videos, the style used by most Instagrammers is popping up in everything from organic DIY videos to Super Bowl ads. The takeaway? Customers enjoy content that feels approachable and unpolished.

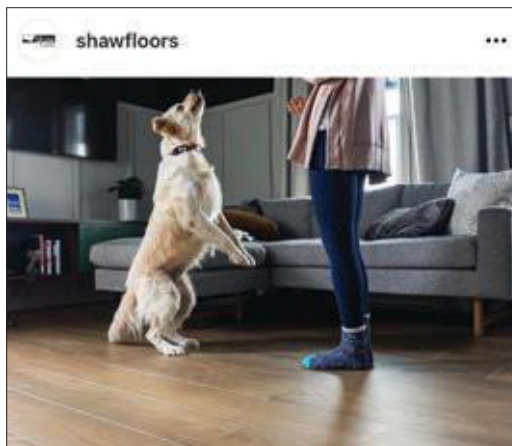
—Instagram



REELS

Instagram Reels is a relatively recent type of content that the platform introduced to compete with TikTok. It’s advisable to incorporate Reels into a posting strategy, not only because the algorithm favors the use of new content types but because people really enjoy and have fun with them. Use targeted hashtags that your actual customers care about and follow.

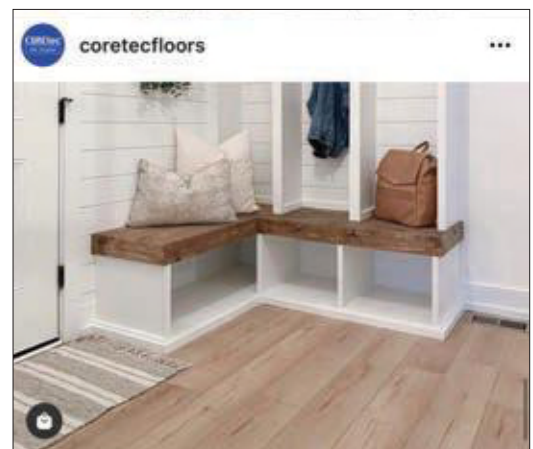
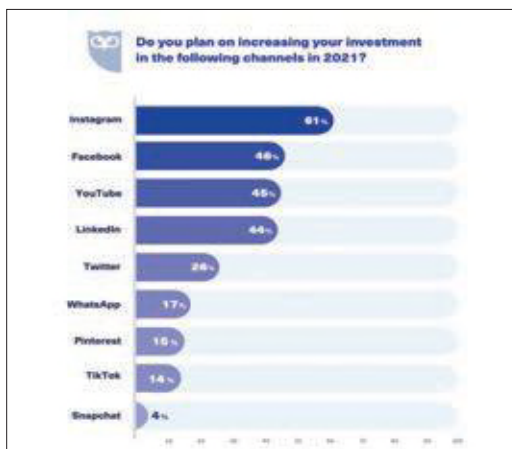
—Irene Williams, Msg2Mkt



INSTAGRAM SHOPPING

Instagram Shopping allows brands to create a digital, shareable catalog of their products right on Instagram—it’s a brand’s customizable, digital storefront. Users can learn more about products right in the app, and either purchase directly on Instagram or click through to the brand’s ecommerce site. You can also use a Shopping Tag to tag products in your Stories or Posts.

—Stacey McLachlan, Hootsuite

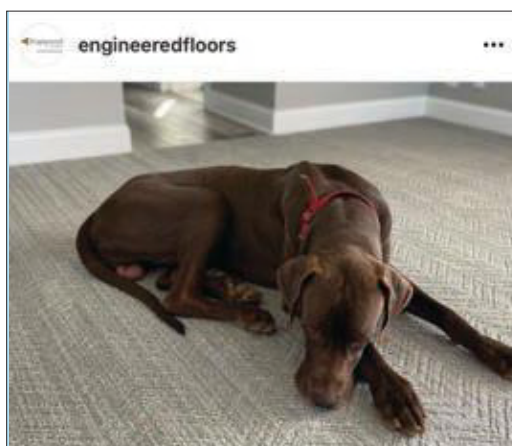


INSTAGRAM LIVE ROOMS

With Live Rooms, brands can reach new audiences, drive sales and engage in real time.

- #1: Product demos.** Video content is key to promoting and selling products.
- #2: Chats and Q&As.** Host panels, Q&As, webinars or even an FAQ series.
- #3: Interactive classes.** Live Rooms provides a way to meet with a small group—whether it be RSAs or product reps—to share insights or education.

—Monique Thomas, Later



PROFESSIONAL DASHBOARD

Professional Dashboard takes some existing business tools and consolidates them into one easy-to-use dashboard to help users streamline tasks. The “Grow Your Business” section brings together the tools needed to focus on revenue-generating tactics. The “Stay Informed” section provides helpful articles and carousels to help you start using other features, as well as best practices for each of them.

—Naomi Nakashima, Social Media Examiner

DID YOU KNOW



Mercier Walnut series

When educating consumers on wood flooring, it's best to keep things simple

The best approach to guiding consumers through the product selection process, experts say, is to avoid overwhelming them with technical terms. While a basic explanation of the various formats, constructions and styles will be required to determine which product best suits the customer's needs, the key to success lies in speaking with her in terms she can relate to and understand.

For instance, one of the most frequently asked questions is, "What's best—a prefinished floor or unfinished?" While a hardwood floor can be purchased unfinished and finished on site, many consumers prefer the convenience of getting a prefinished hardwood floor that's ready to install right out of the box. But even among prefinished floors there are other factors to consider, namely the number of coats applied to the surface of the product as well as the properties and advantages that each coat brings to the final product.

"The application of successive and distinct coats makes it possible to combine flexibility, durability, resistance to friction, adhesion to the wood, gloss and,

of course, the final visual aspect of the floor," Wade Bondrowski, director of sales, U.S., Mercier Wood Flooring, explained.

There are other benefits to prefinished floors. Factory finished floors are often recommended for people with allergy issues. Since these finishes are solvent-free, the floors have very few emissions, which makes them hypoallergenic and, therefore, more desirable.

Other questions consumers might have may pertain to the difference between wood look-alike products vs. the real thing. This can be especially tricky, proponents say, when comparing

genuine wood floors to products that mimic real wood but tout enhanced performance attributes. In these situations, experts say the most effective approach is to accentuate wood's natural attributes.

"Today's wood floors provide real solutions to everyday situations," said Paul Stringer, vice president of sales and marketing, Somerset. "With real wood, customers get the beauty, texture, prestige and the strength of a natural product vs. a plastic floor. Today's hardwood flooring products offer more features and benefits consumers desire, including waterproof attributes."



TRIED AND TRUE

Brazilian chestnut from Indusparquet

Sucupira (Brazilian Chestnut) is one of the world's most durable hardwood species, boasting a Janka rating of 3500. That makes it twice as strong as American red oak, which translates into a long-lasting product for the consumer. The popular species also features natural color variations and grain patterns that are eye catching but not overwhelming to the overall design of the room. What's more, Brazilian Chestnut maintains its natural beauty through years of wear and tear.

Mullican: Hardwood flooring stewards

Mullican Hardwood Flooring is a leading American manufacturer of premium hardwood flooring. The company is committed to providing the best quality hardwood flooring to its partners and customers, creating a product that provides a safe, beautiful and original living space for families and their loved ones for generations while adding value to the home. The Mullican team is consistently developing new products and styles to match the demands and expectations of their partners and customers.

Mullican sources hardwoods exclusively from the Appalachian Mountains. This helps the company craft beautiful flooring products with consistent grain symmetry and sought-after patterns that customers desire. Real hardwood flooring, both solid and engineered, remains in high demand among homeowners, architects and interior designers alike. To that end, Mullican offers end users a wide variety of options to match virtually any décor. Furthermore, customers desire flooring products that are not only responsibly sourced but also safe for their families, employees and guests. Mullican is Responsible Forestry Certified and verified by the U.S. Renewing forest label. What's more, all Mullican prefinished flooring is FloorScore certified, the leading certification standard for air quality.



Hartco HydroBlok

AHF Products unveiled Hartco HydroBlok, a 100% waterproof genuine hardwood flooring. Made for everyday life, HydroBlok is a waterproof white oak and hickory engineered hardwood collection infused with proprietary technology that provides top-down moisture protection for up to 36 hours.

SELLING TIPS

Five tips on trading up to real wood

With the slew of wood look-alikes and other alternatives available on the market today, helping the consumer narrow down her selection is no easy task. Following are some tips RSAs can employ to help trade consumers back up to real wood flooring.

Tip #1: Emphasize the difference between flooring types. The flood of wood look-alike products—led by LVT, WPC, SPC and other rigid core options—has created a lot of confusion about what is and what is not a real wood floor. Hence the importance of educating not only the consumer but also retail salespeople about the benefits real wood offers over competing categories.

"We encourage the entire wood flooring industry to utilize the preference they have with homeowners and to work together so when consumers ask for wood floors, the supply chain is selling real wood instead of a substitute product," said Michael Martin, president and CEO of the National



Wood Flooring Association.

Tip #2: Promote hardwood's attributes. Research shows 52% of homes in the U.S. have wood floors somewhere in the house, and nearly two-thirds of consumers agree wood adds the most value to a home compared to other options.

Tip #3: Wood flooring is sustainable. Many non-wood alternatives tout enhanced resistance to moisture and water damage due to the waterproof construction of the core material. On the flip side, many of these products contain plastic or materials derived from petroleum—none of which are naturally biodegradable.

Tip #4: Selling wood provides greater profit margins. While hardwood flooring has lost market share to other hard surface categories, there is still money to be made selling real hardwood. "Wood offers better margins for retailers, bigger paychecks for RSAs and greater satisfaction for consumers," said Chris King, vice president, sales, AHF Products.

Tip #5: Wood provides greater value over the long haul. The No. 1 selling point for the consumer who is interested in purchasing a real wood floor for her home is return on investment. "For consumers who want to add value to their home, hardwood floor remains their preferred choice," said Pierre Thabet, president and CEO of Boa-Franc, maker of the Mirage brand.

NEW AND NOTABLE



REAL WOOD COALITION

Often imitated,
NEVER DUPLICATED

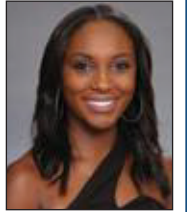


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