

Teamwork and Savvy Judgement Fuel Growth at Premier Surface Design

“Build a company on a good foundation. Take care of your people and they will take care of your customers.” Entrepreneurs who follow those two simple adages will almost certainly find success, and Premier Surface Design founder Chrys Bishop took this to heart when he opened the doors of his company in 2014.

Strategically located between St. Augustine, Gainesville and Jacksonville, Florida, Premier Surface Design is located in Green Cove Springs, Florida. Nearing its 10th anniversary, the company also has customers in to Daytona Beach, Ocala, Lake City and as far as southern Georgia.

by Peter J. Marcucci

Photos Courtesy Premier Surface Design

From luxury high-end homes to the smaller, simpler jobs, the company’s current mixed bag includes walk-in residential, big box stores and lots of builders. While developing these markets, Chrys Bishop was able to put his many years of sales experience to good use by growing territory and volume. During this time, however, his three original team members, using only a semi-manual Coch bridge saw and finishing fabricated parts by hand, struggled to keep up with the demand.

It was stressful, to say the least, recalled Chrys.

“In the beginning, I was very reliant on every person. If one guy called in sick, I was in trouble, because there were a lot of moving parts to our basic fabrication process! I was ordering material, doing the accounting, checking the templates coming in and checking the jobs going out. Now things are a little bit different. We now have an automated machine-based operation and a team that operates and maintains them.”

Chrys shares the helm of Premier Surface Design with partners and family – brother Brandon and father Rocky. Along with PSD, they operate sister companies

providing cabinetry and windows. This relationship works well, said Chrys.

“If a customer comes in for countertops and needs one of our other services, we have them covered.” It is notable that Brandon came onboard Premier Surface Design a few years ago, and fine-tuned their day-to-day operations, such as data flow through the shop, scheduling and accounting. Additionally and notable, according to Chrys, is that the company is now fully paperless. Basically, if you don’t have a computer where you work, you will have a tablet. This includes all shop personnel. “It’s amazing how this has reduced clutter, increased productivity and modernized our operations,” said Chrys.

Now approaching their 10th anniversary, the Premier Surface Design shop is located in a high-growth area in Florida.



Team Safety is Priority

In the beginning, like most small shops, Premier Surface Design was shaping fabricated components using dry cutting and grinding methods. Chrys soon realized this could not continue for long.

“We made a commitment to going fully wet, solely for creating a healthy work environment for our employees. That said, silicosis prevention is a really big thing these days, especially in California, and it’s just a matter of time until there are some requirements and our industry is regulated. How will this be instituted in Florida? I’m not sure, but better safeguards are needed.

“We just picked up a partnership with IKEA and their onboarding process was extensive. We just did a dust test through the University of South Florida. Their people came in and we passed with flying colors. They said that the new laws regarding silicosis and safe fabrication are coming, need to happen, and will happen. So, we know things will change. However, the shops out there that need to change with it, don’t need to go automated. There are a ton of other options.”

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Premier Surface

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Current shop equipment consists of a Northwood dual-table Raptor Sawjet and a Northwood 138 CNC Router, a Park Industries Saber CNC, a Marmo Meccanica LCR edger, as well as their original Coch semi-manual bridge saw. Air filtration and particle monitors are strategically placed, while one 3-axis overhead crane and one jib crane help to keep daily operations safely moving along. The company currently employs 35 direct team members, while nine subcontracted installation crews handle an average of 2,000 square feet of fabrication per day.

The company's current markets have a strong appetite for quartz, to the tune of 70% of the company's volume, with Dekton and natural stone rounding out the final 30% of customer-preferred surfacing.

As for turnaround times, jobs less than 100 square feet (custom residential kitchens) are usually installed in 6 working days, while un-mitered jobs over 100 square feet are usually installed in 9 days. Cabinets from sister company Premier Cabinetry, be it custom or pre-made, can also be mixed into a fairly short turn-around time due to the efficiency of both companies and their



Full-size island and glass-fronted display cabinets for a custom builder client. Right: A partnership with sister company Premier Cabinets provides additional high-end services to offer their customers.

well-organized team members, said Chrys.

"We wouldn't be where we are today without them. We have a few guys who have been here for eight years, and I have always tried to promote from within. My CAD programmer used to be a cutter, and my big box account manager was a fabricator when he started here. We've always done our due diligence when hiring, and we are more like a family than a company. From front office to fabricator, we try our best to take care of each other. Brandon and

I could leave for a month, and this company would still run very well with the team and processes we have in place. I can't emphasize enough the quality of our staff and their commitment to our customers."

According to Chrys, the company does not advertise, because the majority of their customers are builders.

"When we started, we were strictly residential, but I wanted to diversify between big box, commercial, and low- and high-end new construction. Having a diverse client base is important, because you never know what direction the economy is going to go, and what you are going to gain or lose.

"Big box work is very supplier-driven, and manufacturers like Caesarstone or Cosentino can come in and say, 'This isn't



working.' So, you can easily lose this type of work to another fabricator.

"That said, working with residential builders allows for a more direct relationship to be developed. Combining that with pricing and great service makes performing that area of our work very manageable. So diversification is important."

A Big Difference Where it Matters

"Our company is unlike many others because of our people and the way they handle our customers.

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The Premier Surface Design fabrication crew run a fully-automated wet shop. The shop equipment includes a Northwood dual-table Raptor Sawjet, Northwood 138 CNC Router, Park Industries Saber CNC, Marmo Meccanica LCR edger, as well as their original Coch semi-manual bridge saw. Right: This spacious main bath features double vanities and custom walk-in / roll-in shower.



Premier Surface

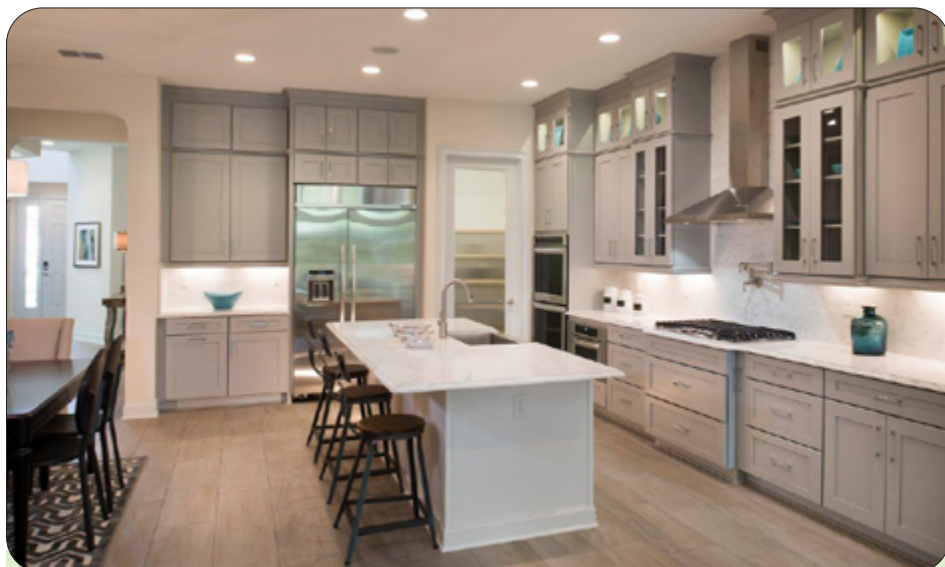
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It hurts sometimes when we make mistakes. We are not perfect. Someone is always going to trip-up, but we *always* do the right thing to satisfy the customer. Without satisfied customers, you cannot flourish.

“Over the next five years, we want to hire more sales people, be more aggressive, and stay focused on being more efficient and doing better in all ways. We want to build new customers, while still taking great care of the ones who have gotten us

to where we are today. We have very personal relationships with these folks, and spend as much time with them as we can. Right now, my dad is on a fishing boat charter with one of them. Sometimes people lose that ability to stay close, because they are so focused on growth and more volume, and they forget about the customers who got them there. It’s simple and basic and a big thing for us, and we work very hard at doing it right.”

For more information visit www.premiersurfacedesign.com and www.facebook.com/premiersurfacedesign.



Above: This spacious kitchen features a counter-to-ceiling splash behind the range hood, and custom glass-fronted cabinets.

Below: This high-end kitchen installation for a builder partner features a full-slab island.



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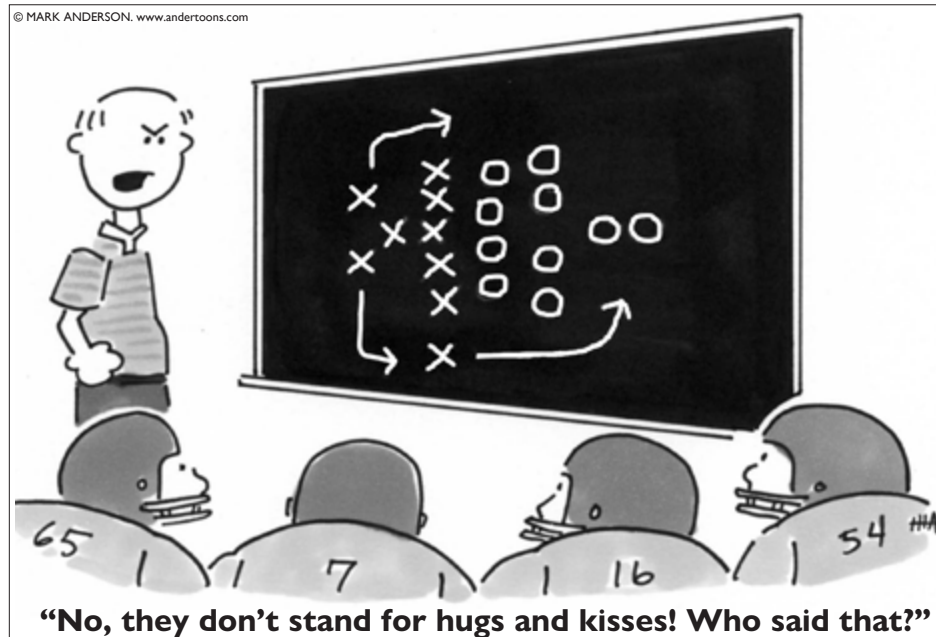
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ISFA Announces Upcoming Fabricator Forum

Previously known as Industry Roundtables, Fabricator Forums are regional events aimed at providing educational and networking opportunities. These events help members access the information and resources they need to tackle business challenges and establish valuable relationships.

After a successful spring Fabricator Forum in Charlotte, North Carolina, and one in Houston in August, The International Surface Fabricators Association (ISFA) looks forward to hosting the next event on September 11-12, in St. Louis, Missouri.

The September Fabricator Forum in St. Louis, sponsored by BB Industries and Vicostone, is a two-day event that includes presentations and discussions about:

- Silica safety.
- Staffing and employee management strategies.
- Fleet management.
- Marketing strategies.
- Quartz cleaning and care techniques.

On the second day in St. Louis, ISFA will take the show on the road for a fabricator shop tour of Custom Marble in nearby Millstadt, Illinois. Since 1978, Custom Marble has been working with the most trusted kitchen and bath dealers throughout the St. Louis metropolitan area, offering a wide range of services and materials to meet the growing needs of their customers. Attendees will tour the shop to see what makes Custom Marble so successful. The

tour will also include an OSHA presentation, “Know Your OSHA Rights,” designed to inform fabricators about common compliance issues and understand how they can mitigate risk in their shops.

“ISFA is looking forward to bringing these popular events to fabricators in the Houston and St. Louis areas,” said Marissa Bankert, executive director of ISFA. “Fabricator Forums are designed to be well-rounded opportunities that provide attendees with the resources they need to overcome challenges and grow their businesses, and the programming reflects the needs of today’s fabricators.”

ISFA Fabricator Forums are open to all fabricators, including nonmembers. Visit www.ISFAnow.org/fabricator-forums for more details and to register. Space is limited, so those interested in attending are encouraged to reserve their spot as soon as possible.

For more information about the International Surface Fabricators Association, membership and events, including the ISFA Annual Conference, which will be held November 6-8, 2024, in Miami, visit www.ISFAnow.org.

“Diplomacy is the art of saying ‘nice doggie’ until you can find a rock.”
 – Will Rogers

Industry Calendar of Events

September 2024

ISFA: 2-Day Fabricator Forum

When: Wednesday September 11. 8:00 A.M. to Thursday, Sept 12, 5:00 P.M. (CDT)

Where: St. Louis, Missouri

Visit isfanow.org/calendar for more information.

Actionflow in Action Seminar

When: Wednesday September 11-September 12,, 2024

Where: Florida Custom Marble, Jacksonville, FL

Visit <https://info.actionflow.net/upcoming-events> for schedule and registration.

NSI: Ohio Stone Summit

When: Thursday September 19, 9a.m. –3p.m. ET

Where: MSI, 6399 Broughton Ave, Columbus, Ohio 43213

Visit naturalstoneinstitute.org/calendar for more information.

Marmomac 2024

When: Tuesday September 24 to Friday Sept. 27, 2024

Where: Verona, Italy; See www.marmomac.com for more information.

October 2024

Park Industries: Digital Stoneworking Expo

When: October 3-4, 2024

Where: Honolulu, Hawaii; Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort

Visit [Parkindustries.com/event](https://parkindustries.com/event) to register and for more information.

ISFA: Solid Surface Fabrication Training

When: October 22-23

Where: Woburn, MA (Host TBA)

Visit isfanow.org/calendar for more information.

Kitchen + Bath Canada and Stonetech Canada

When: Tuesday, October 22, 2024 to Thursday, October 24, 2024

Where: International Centre, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

Visit <https://KBCexpo.com> for more information.

BB Industries Announces Distribution Partnership with No-Lift Install System

AS BB Industries LLC celebrates its 30-year anniversary, we are proud and excited to announce a new vendor-partner: No-Lift Install System.

Originally designed by No-Lift co-founder Aaron Crowley to solve issues that all installers face, the patented No-Lift Install System reduces the risk of injury while transporting heavy slabs off the truck and onto the jobsite, and onto counters and islands. The ease of installation with a No-Lift cart increases productivity and the time, effort and number of workers



it takes to install countertops. One of the greatest benefits, insists Crowley, is that the 3 No-Lift models now in production can simply give installers a longer, more productive work life without back injury.

Built to safely handle 2cm to 6cm countertops, including those full slab center islands with a sink cutout, a No-Lift



How Do You Compare?

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Project completed by Carnevale & Lohr, Natural Stone Institute Accredited since 2014.

Install System cart will take its 600-pound capacity payload through the toughest terrain, upstairs and around and through the tightest corners. Built to the highest standards for countless years of service, it is by all accounts the Bentley of slab transport systems, explained BBI Product Manager Matt Maples.

“BB Industries is happy to announce we’re partnering with No-Lift Install System to offer their quality and game-changing products to our customers. As we celebrate our 30th Anniversary this year, it’s important to mention that we have had a working relationship with Aaron Crowley going back about two decades. We helped to first market and promote many of his stone industry inventions, and they have all been game-changers for stone industry fabricators. The No-Lift Cart is one of the best safety products shop owners can provide to their employees.

“We are pleased to offer their full line of products. There’s a new model — the

Econo Tilt — which can be an entry level cart for smaller shops or shops on a budget. It’s very affordable, and made with the same precision and attention to detail as the Power Tilt and Manual Tilt carts.”

For more about these exceptional products and accessories, and BBI’s line of material handling, safety and installation products, visit www.bbindustriesllc.com.

Since its beginning in 1994, BBI’s philosophy has been to offer the best customer service in the industry and the best value stone fabrication products. We are right there for our customers through all phases of business with education, training, and support from CNCs to blades. Our vendors and customers are valued partners. For more info, visit BBIndustriesLLC.com, and [BBIndustriesLLC](#) on social media channels [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook.com/BBIndustriesLLC.USA](#).

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Digital Marketing Mastery for Countertop Fabricators: Key Strategies & Insights

According to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), 92% of homeowners use online resources to research home improvement projects, including finding and evaluating contractors (NAHB, 2021).

Another survey by the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA) found that 54% of homeowners use social media platforms like Pinterest and Instagram for design inspiration and to find service providers (NKBA, 2022).

Now, if homeowners and contractors, who make up your customer base, are searching for your services through digital means, imagine having a digital marketing strategy that ensures they can always find you. That's what a robust strategy will get you.

Understanding Digital Marketing for Countertop Fabricators

Digital marketing involves using online tools and strategies to promote your products and services, attract potential customers, and build a recognizable brand. It covers a range of activities designed to increase visibility, engage with your target audiences, and drive business growth.

For countertop fabricators, digital marketing means harnessing the power of the internet to reach homeowners and contractors who are actively searching for countertop solutions. This involves creating a strong online presence through various channels such as websites, social media, and online advertising.

Key Digital Marketing Essentials for Countertop Fabricators

Key digital marketing essentials for countertop fabricators include a well-designed website, engaging social media presence, local SEO optimization, compelling content, effective email marketing, and strategic competitor analysis.

Anthony Milia
Milia Marketing

1. Professional Website

For countertop fabricators, a website isn't just a digital presence—it's a showcase of their craftsmanship. High-quality images of completed projects, detailed service descriptions, and samples of past work help potential clients picture their own projects and assess your quality and style.

A well-designed website with features like a contact form, quote request option, and scheduling tool helps convert site visitors into leads. You could integrate a virtual consultation booking system to streamline client interactions.

2. Social Media Presence

Countertop fabrication is a visually driven industry. Platforms like Instagram and Pinterest are ideal for sharing photos and videos of intricate designs, different materials, and installation processes.

Social media also allows you to engage with followers by answering questions about materials, installation processes, or design trends that help you build a community around your brand. It gets you closer to the customer.

3. Local SEO

Local SEO helps your business appear in search results when people look for services in your area. According to Google, 46% of all Google searches have local intent, meaning nearly half of all searches are looking for local information or services.

Optimizing for local SEO ensures that when potential customers search for "granite countertops near me" or "kitchen remodels in [City]," your business appears prominently in the search results.

4. Content Marketing

Content marketing involves creating and sharing useful and engaging content—like blog posts, videos, and infographics—about your countertop materials, design trends, and maintenance tips to attract and

Effective digital marketing includes a well-designed website, social media presence, local SEO optimization, compelling content, email marketing, and paid search ads.

inform potential customers, build trust, and showcase expertise in the industry.

5. Email Marketing

Email marketing for countertop fabricators involves sending targeted emails with updates, promotions, and useful information about countertops to nurture leads, keep current customers engaged, and encourage repeat business. A simple monthly newsletter featuring a "Project of the Month" and exclusive discounts can help maintain engagement and encourage repeat business.

Email marketing also allows you to send personalized messages to warm leads, offering tailored information and exclusive offers that address their specific interests and needs, which helps in converting them into customers.

6. Paid Advertising

Paid search ads and social media ads can drive targeted traffic to the website. Google Ads targeting keywords like "luxury marble countertops" or Facebook ads showcasing recent installations can attract high-intent customers looking for premium products.

You can also use retargeting ads, which can be effective to reach visitors who have previously visited the website, but didn't convert. If a user browses different countertop styles but leaves without inquiring, retargeting ads can remind them of your offerings and encourage them to return.

7. Analytics and Data Tracking

Tracking website performance, user behavior, and marketing campaign results helps fabricators understand what's working and what needs improvement. You cannot keep spending your marketing dollars

without a complete understanding of the results they produce. Analytics and data tracking show you where you need to pull the plug or keep funding.

8. Competitor Analysis

Competitor analysis involves researching and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of your competitors' digital marketing efforts, like their website performance, content strategies, and advertising tactics.

This process includes benchmarking, where you compare your marketing efforts to those of leading brands and competitors in your industry and area. You can compare data like conversions, website form submissions, the amount spent on marketing campaigns, and many more metrics.

Effective Digital Marketing Strategies for Countertop Fabricators

Effective digital marketing strategies for countertop fabricators involve showcasing high-quality visuals, leveraging local SEO, creating engaging content, utilizing targeted advertising, maintaining an active social media presence, managing online reviews, and analyzing performance data.

1. Showcase High-Quality Visual Content

Strategy: Use high-resolution images and videos to highlight your work. Create before-and-after galleries, project walk-throughs, and detailed close-ups of materials.

Why: Countertop fabrication is a visual industry where the quality of the product is paramount. Stunning visuals help potential customers appreciate the craftsmanship and materials used.

How:

• **Portfolio Page:** Develop a comprehensive gallery on your website showcasing different types of countertops and completed projects.

• **Social Media:** Regularly post images and videos of your latest work on Instagram, Pinterest, and Facebook.

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Digital Marketing Mastery

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- **Virtual Tours:** Offer virtual tours of your showroom or completed projects to provide an immersive experience.

2. Leverage Local SEO for Increased Visibility

Strategy: Optimize your website and online profiles for local search terms to attract customers in your geographic area.

Why: According to Google, 76% of people who search for something nearby visit a business within one day, and 28% of those searches result in a purchase.

Most customers searching for countertop services are looking for local providers for quick and easy service. Being visible in local search results increases the chances of attracting nearby clients.

How:

- **Google Business Profile:** Claim and optimize your listing with accurate business information, photos, and customer reviews.

- **Local Keywords:** Incorporate local keywords (e.g., “Granite countertops in [City]”) into your website content and blog posts.

- **Local Listings:** Ensure your business is listed in local directories and industry-specific platforms.

3. Create Educational and Engaging Content

Strategy: Develop content that educates your audience about countertops, including materials, installation processes, and maintenance tips.

Why: Educational content builds trust and positions your business as an authority in the industry. It also helps attract potential customers who are researching their options.

How:

- **Blog Posts:** Write articles on topics like “Choosing the Right Countertop Material” or “Maintaining Your Granite Countertops.”

- **How-To Guides:** Create guides or videos on topics such as installation tips or care instructions.

- **Infographics:** Design infographics that visually explain countertop options, benefits, or trends.

4. Use Targeted Online Advertising

Strategy: Implement pay-per-click (PPC) and social media advertising to target specific demographics and geographic areas.

Why: Targeted advertising helps you reach potential customers who are actively searching for or interested in countertop solutions.

How:

- **Google Ads:** Create campaigns targeting keywords relevant to countertop fabrication, such as “custom quartz countertops” or “marble kitchen countertops.”

- **Social Media Ads:** Use platforms like Facebook and Instagram to run ads targeting homeowners or interior designers in your service area.

- **Retargeting:** Set up retargeting ads to re-engage visitors who have previously interacted with your website but did not convert.

5. Engage with Customers on Social Media

Strategy: Build a strong presence on social media by regularly posting updates, engaging with followers, and running promotions.

Why: Social media platforms provide an opportunity to connect directly with potential customers, showcase your work, and build a community around your brand.

How:

- **Content Calendar:** Develop a content calendar to plan and schedule regular posts, including project showcases, industry news, and customer testimonials.

- **Interactive Posts:** Run polls, Q&A sessions, or contests to engage your audience and encourage interaction.



- **Customer Engagement:** Respond promptly to comments and messages, and encourage satisfied clients to share their experiences.

6. Focus on Customer Reviews and Testimonials

Strategy: Collect and showcase positive reviews and testimonials from satisfied clients to build credibility and trust.

Why: Reviews and testimonials are critical for establishing trust with potential customers and influencing their decision-making process.

How:

- **Review Platforms:** Encourage clients to leave reviews on Google, Yelp, and industry-specific sites.

- **Testimonial Page:** Create a dedicated testimonials page on your website featuring quotes and feedback from happy customers.

- **Social Proof:** Share positive reviews and testimonials on social media and in your marketing materials.

7. Implement Data-Driven Decision Making

Strategy: Use analytics tools to monitor and analyze your digital marketing performance, and adjust your strategies based on data insights.

Why: Data-driven decisions allow you to optimize your marketing efforts, understand customer behavior, and improve overall effectiveness.

How:

- **Google Analytics:** Track website traffic, user behavior, and conversion rates to understand what’s working and where improvements are needed.

- **A/B Testing:** Conduct A/B tests on different elements of your campaigns, such as ad creatives or landing pages, to determine the most effective approaches.

- **Performance Reports:** Regularly review performance reports to identify trends and make informed decisions about your marketing strategy.

- **Benchmarking:** Compare your marketing efforts with those of leading brands and competitors using benchmarking tools to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.

At Milia Marketing, we offer a benchmarking group that allows countertop fabricators to seamlessly compare their marketing strategies with top performers, helping them identify areas for improvement and stay competitive.

Take Actionable Steps to Refine Your marketing Strategy Today

As a countertop fabricator, embracing digital marketing can significantly enhance your online presence and drive business growth. Start by optimizing your website with compelling visuals and user-friendly features, and ensure your local SEO is on point to attract nearby customers.

Engage with your audience through regular, high-quality content and maintain an active social media presence to build relationships and showcase your expertise. Take advantage of targeted advertising and personalize your email marketing to nurture leads and encourage repeat business.

If you need help refining your digital marketing strategy to boost sales, our team at Milia Marketing is here to help. Reach out to us today via <https://milia-marketing.com/discovery/> to get started.

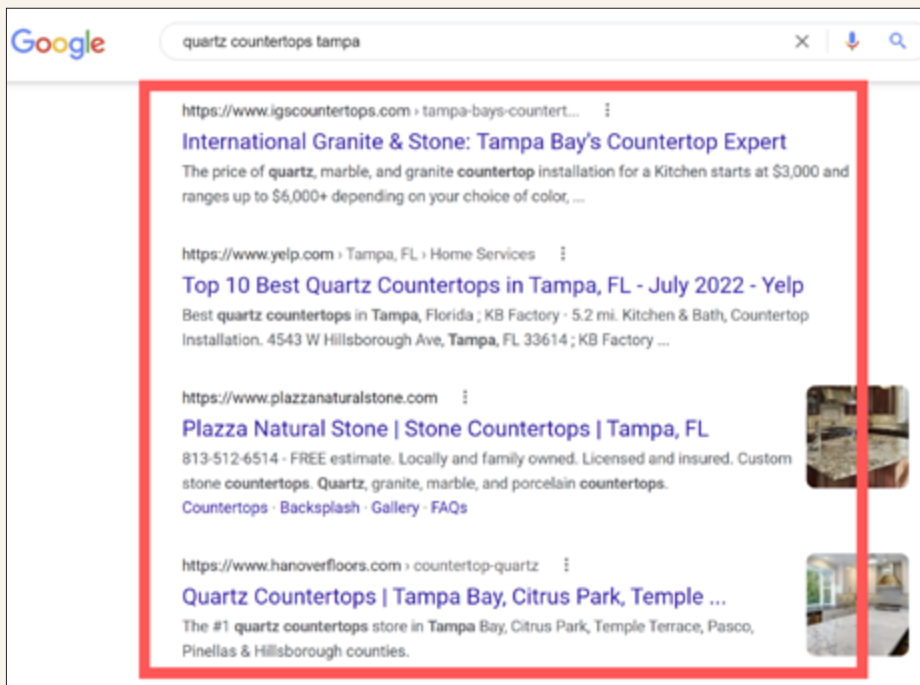
TRAINING & EDUCATION

How Does SEO Work for a Countertop Shop?

SEO—I know what you're thinking. You've been pitched a million times either from cold callers or people emailing you about SEO for your countertop shop website. Or maybe you had a horrible experience with a marketing company helping you with SEO.

Stephen Alberts
Countertop Marketing

website. And the more traffic you get to your website, the more leads, and projects you will get.



Typical search results when someone types in “quartz countertops Tampa” in Google search. The listings here are the organic search results, and SEO helps a website get top-listed.

In this article, I'm hopefully going to turn that around for you and give you the truth about SEO and how it can help your business. And then next time someone calls you pitching SEO services, you can maybe teach them something!

What is SEO?

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization. It's the things you do to your online presence for your website to show higher (aka rank higher) in a search engine like Google. The best way to think about SEO is to imagine a big puzzle. There are a ton of pieces to that puzzle and like for SEO, there are a ton of tasks and things you can do to help your search engine rankings.

And what's the overall finished puzzle? It's that top few spots in Google that will bring you traffic to your countertop shops

How Long Does it Take?

This is probably the number one question I get. When will my fabrication shop be on page one in Google? And I say the same thing every time: I have no idea.

And that's the truth. No one knows this. But I'll give you a breakdown of what you can expect if you start an SEO campaign.

Brand New Website: If you never had a website it will take you a LONG time to rank on Google. By long it could take 12 to 24 months.

If your website is on page 3,4, or 5+: This might take place a little quicker, but still could take a good 6 to 12 months.

If your website is on page 2: OK! Now we're talking! If you are on page 2 this is a good sign. You can expect it to take 3-6 months. Nothing in Google happens overnight.

If anyone tells you that your shop's site

will be on page 1 in Google in 30 days, run and run fast in the other direction!

How Much Does it Cost, and Why is it Expensive?

Remember when I said that there were a lot of puzzle pieces to SEO, this is the reason for the high cost. It's very labor intensive for a company or for yourself to do SEO on your website. Most solid companies will charge around \$2,000-5,000/month to work on your business's SEO campaign. An in-house SEO employee at a marketing firm makes around \$50-85K/year.

What Tasks are Involved in SEO?

There are dozens of tasks that go into SEO. I'll list some important tasks and briefly describe them below:

- **Website speed and user experience:** Your site needs to be fast and user-friendly. This is a big ranking factor.
- **Content:** You need unique and quality content on your website. Each page should have around 500 words on it.
- **Meta Titles and Descriptions:** This is what shows on a Google search page. You want to include important keywords in these. (See diagram 2)
- **NAP:** Your name, address, and phone number should be consistent on your website and online profiles like Google maps and Yelp. Google looks at this as a ranking factor as well.

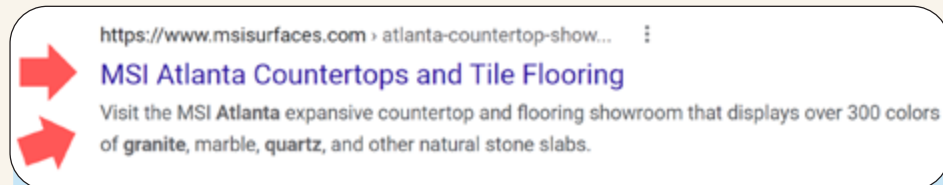
what your customers ask you:

- *What should I expect on the day of my countertop installation?*
- *What's the difference between granite and quartz?*
- *What kitchen countertop materials are best if I have children in the house?*

You can talk about the different types of edges, backsplashes, material... the list is endless, and there are tons of topics to write about. I'd start by going through your current pages and increasing the word count on those. Add a few paragraphs to each one. Then you can start a blog on your site and post articles. **Remember to make sure each one is around 500 words long.**

Is it Worth it for My Countertop Company to Do SEO?

YES, 1,000% yes! Think about how people look for local businesses. They do ask friends and family for recommendations, but if they don't do that, they pull out their phones and search for what they need. Google is never going away; the way we search might change, but people will always “Google” things they want, whether it's a new pair of shoes or some Alpine White granite for their kitchen. Either invest the time and learn SEO or invest the money, and start now. Because like I said above, it takes time. But if done correctly, it can completely transform your business and bring you in a ton of new revenue.



Meta titles and descriptions (shown in bold) are the specific key words you need to use in your business description. This will help rank your website higher in search results.

Can I Do it Myself?

You could learn SEO and tackle this yourself. There is a lot to learn, so for some of the tasks you might have to hire outside help. Unless you are skilled in web design, you will need to have some of those skills.

But what you *can* do is write content! This is probably the easiest thing you can do to help your countertop shop's SEO, and all it takes is time. There are hundreds of topics that you can write about. Start with

Stephen Alberts is the owner of the Countertop Marketing Co and STONE ENGAGE. They specialize in helping countertop companies grow the retail side of their business outside of word-of-mouth and referrals. They also offer software to help you engage more with customers and close more countertop projects.

Visit countertopmarketingco.com or stonengage.com. You can also email Stephen at steve@countertopmarketingco.com.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Fixing the Leak

Times are tight right now in the countertop industry, and it's a good time to look for leaks in the plumbing of your business. There are four main flows of money that need to be monitored and managed:

1. The Revenue stream (R) coming into the production system.
2. The Truly Variable Expenses stream (T.V.E.) exiting the system to buy materials.
3. The Throughput Dollars stream (\$T) staying in the system to pay bills and contribute to profits.
4. The Operating Expenses stream (OE) exiting the system to pay bills.

I use this simple diagram to teach how a business makes money with the four streams: It's the fifth stream of money, that which overflows the bucket and

Pete DuBrule

Synchronous Solutions

Use these simple metrics to make money today, and more money in the future.

generation of more profit requires more \$T and or less OE.

Of the two opportunities, the potential to reduce OE is very limited. What is the potential to increase \$T?

\$T is simply the R (revenue) stream minus the T.V.E. stream. To increase the \$T stream, it is necessary to either increase the Revenue stream or decrease the TVE stream. The opportunities presented by these two streams couldn't be



becomes profit, that is most compelling. It is the result of how well the other four streams are managed. Manage the other four streams correctly and the profits simply take care of themselves.

The most important flow of money in the business is the stream labeled \$T: the money that stays in the business to pay expenses (everything except material cost). When this stream exceeds the out flow of money represented by the bucket labeled OE (Operating Expense), the result is Net Profit. This means that

more different. The upside to increasing Revenue is almost unlimited. The potential losses in the TVE pipe are very finite.

If the upside of the Revenue stream is almost unlimited, then so too is the \$T stream. What limits the ability to capture \$T is the capacity of the production system.

In relative terms, the potential to increase Revenue and \$T are huge, the potential to decrease TVE is small, while the potential to reduce OE is extremely small.

If profits are not where you want them, where should you focus?

There is a reason the best countertop software products like ActionFlow and Stone App integrate \$Ts into their software. There is no number in a fabrication business that is more important to manage.

The four most critical Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of a business are derived from \$T, and help answer four key questions:

1. **\$T per day** – Is there enough \$T flowing to fill the OE bucket and meet NP goals?
2. **\$T per Constraint minute** – Is it flowing at a fast enough rate through the Constraint to meet \$T per day goals given the available Constraint minutes?
3. **\$T Ratio (\$T/R)** – Is Revenue being converted into \$T efficiently by making good use of material?
4. **Productivity Score (\$T/OE)** – Is the business using OE (people and equipment) efficiently?

These four points are listed in their order of importance. Apply the company's scarce resources accordingly.

- **Marketing and Sales must focus on bringing in the Revenue that most efficiently converts to more \$T.**
- **Production must be focused on increasing Constraint capacity while ensuring all non-constraint processes have sufficient extra capacity to never hold up or limit the Constraint.**
- **Production must be maximizing material usage.**

Determined focus on, and improvement of these simple metrics will ensure your business will “make money today, and more money in the future”.

Peter DuBrule
– **Synchronous Solutions**

We help clients control the flow of information and materials through their system to increase profitability, decrease process times, and reduce chaos.” Contact us at www.synchronousolutions.com.

Registration Now Open for ISFA's 2024 Annual Conference



Fabricators and other professionals within the surfacing industry are invited to explore growth opportunities at the International Surface Fabricators Association's (ISFA) 2024 Annual Conference November 6-8 in Miami. Attendees will enjoy three days of educational sessions, business development workshops, networking opportunities and more at The Palms Hotel & Spa. A tropical escape in the heart of Miami Beach, The Palms Hotel & Spa is an oceanfront resort with a unique emphasis on wellness, nature's beauty and luxury.

At the 2024 Annual Conference, attendees can unlock a world of possibilities, where innovation meets creation. This event is an excellent chance for fabricators and other professionals to elevate their businesses, enhance their skills and make meaningful connections.

This year's theme is **Crafting Success: Innovate, Fabricate, Dominate.**

“The ISFA Annual Conference is the premier event for our members, and this year's event promises to be outstanding,” said Marissa Bankert, chief executive officer of ISFA. “We have thoughtfully planned programming and resources to create opportunities to learn, connect and elevate successes. It's a must-attend event designed to empower attendees with the knowledge and the relationships they need to drive their businesses forward.”

Registration is open to members and non-members, and anyone interested in attending can find more details at www.ISFAnow.org/annual-conference. Those who register before September 20 can take advantage of early bird pricing. Registration fees include programming and activities listed on the agenda.

Learn more at www.isfanow.org.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Eight Mistakes Keeping Your Shop From Growing

DO you wonder how other stone shops and countertop companies grow easily while you're stuck? This article is for you. We've worked with shops nationwide, from sub-\$1MM to above \$25MM, and learned what sets successful companies apart. Here, we'll outline the eight common mistakes that successful companies avoid to grow more effectively.

Mistake 1: Lacking a Clear Vision

A common mistake is lacking a clear vision for your stone shop or countertop company. Ask yourself, "What does my ideal business look like in three years?" Consider financials, company culture, team dynamics, and your lifestyle. Your business should fit your life, not the other way around. A clear vision ensures you're on the right path and helps your team understand their roles and goals.

Mistake 2: Not Prioritizing Sales

How much time did your company spend on prospecting, nurturing deals, and following up with customers this week? Often, businesses prioritize service over sales. While quality work is vital, neglecting sales can cause stagnation. To grow your stone shop or countertop business, actively generate new business by reaching out to past clients, seeking new opportunities, and maintaining a steady sales pipeline.

Mistake 3: Hiring for Capacity Instead of Growth

Many businesses hire to meet current demand instead of strategic growth. While having enough staff is important, investing in roles that drive growth is crucial. For example, hiring for administrative tasks frees up time for sales and marketing. Dan Martell's book, *Buyback Your Time*, emphasizes delegating lower-value tasks to focus on impactful activities.

Mistake 4: Not Controlling Your Time or Focus

Time management is a significant constraint for many business owners. Without proper time management systems, you can easily find yourself reacting to daily fires rather than proactively working on growth

Justin Shaw

Stone Fabricator Elite

Aim to build a business that supports the lifestyle you want...Your business should be a means to an end, not the end in itself.

strategies. Implement a structured schedule that prioritizes high-impact activities like sales and business development. My former colleague Craig Ballentine wrote a book on the concept of the "Perfect Week." It can be a useful tool for helping you allocate time effectively and focus on achieving specific outcomes.

Mistake 5: Neglecting Marketing

Relying solely on referrals and word of mouth can limit your growth potential. While these methods are valuable, they are often unpredictable and insufficient for scaling your business. To achieve consistent growth, you need a robust marketing strategy. This includes digital marketing, social media campaigns, and business development initiatives. Understanding your target market and consistently reaching out to them will help you maintain a steady flow of new clients.

Mistake 6: Lacking a Competitive Advantage

Many stone shops and countertop companies fall into the trap of being indistinguishable from their competitors. To stand out, you need a unique selling proposition (USP) that sets you apart. Identify the specific problems your market faces and position your company as the best solution. This clear differentiation will make your marketing efforts more effective and help you avoid competing solely on price.

AVOID THESE 8 GROWTH KILLERS

Common Mistakes That Prevent Growth

Mistake 7: Not Acquiring the Skills to Advance

To lead your company to the next level, you need to continuously acquire new skills and expertise. Whether it's learning about the latest industry trends, improving your sales techniques, or understanding new marketing strategies, investing in your personal and professional development is crucial. This also extends to your team; ensuring they have the skills and training they need will make your business more resilient and adaptable.

Mistake 8: Building Your Life Around the Business

Many business owners make the mistake of letting their business consume their lives. Instead, aim to build a business that supports the lifestyle you want. Consider what quality of life you desire, how many hours you want to work, and what you need to earn to support your family. Your business should be a means to an end, not an end in itself. By focusing on creating a balanced lifestyle, you'll be more satisfied and motivated to grow your business sustainably.

To Wrap it Up

By avoiding these eight common mistakes, you can set your stone shop or countertop company on a path to sustainable growth. Having a clear vision, prioritizing

sales, hiring strategically, managing your time effectively, investing in marketing, establishing a competitive advantage, acquiring new skills, and building a business that supports your desired lifestyle are all critical components of success. Implementing these strategies will help you build a business by design rather than by default, allowing you to achieve consistent revenue growth and enjoy the work you do.

If you find yourself struggling with any of these areas, take a step back and evaluate where you can make changes. Small adjustments can lead to significant improvements, helping you to build the successful business you envision.

If you enjoyed this article you can watch the full YouTube video Justin published on this topic! Point your browser to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=630S0plmzoE>.

Justin Shaw has been helping stone fabricators and countertop companies since 2017 to implement the systems, strategies, and playbooks to grow their businesses more easily. He is the Founder of the 90-Day Growth Engine Program and CEO of Stone Fabricator Elite. Email Justin at justin@stonefabricator-elite.com or to learn more visit: justinshaw.com and stonefabricatorelite.com.

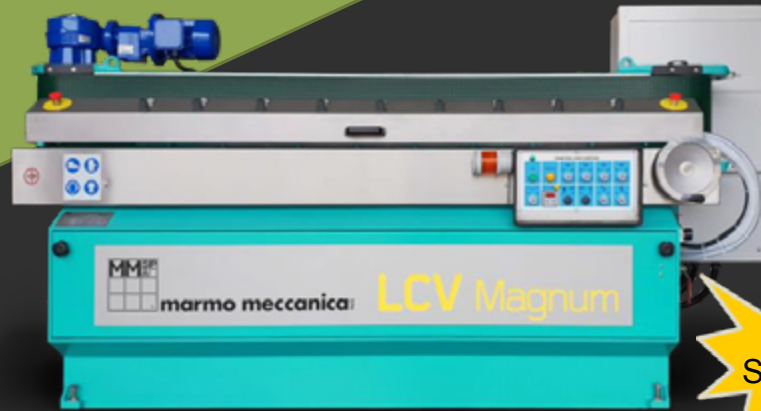
"In a very general way, our society has fallen out of love with the skilled trades. Part of the problem is a myriad of myths and misperceptions that surround the jobs themselves, but the biggest cause is our stubborn belief that a four-year degree is the best path for the most people."

—Mike Rowe



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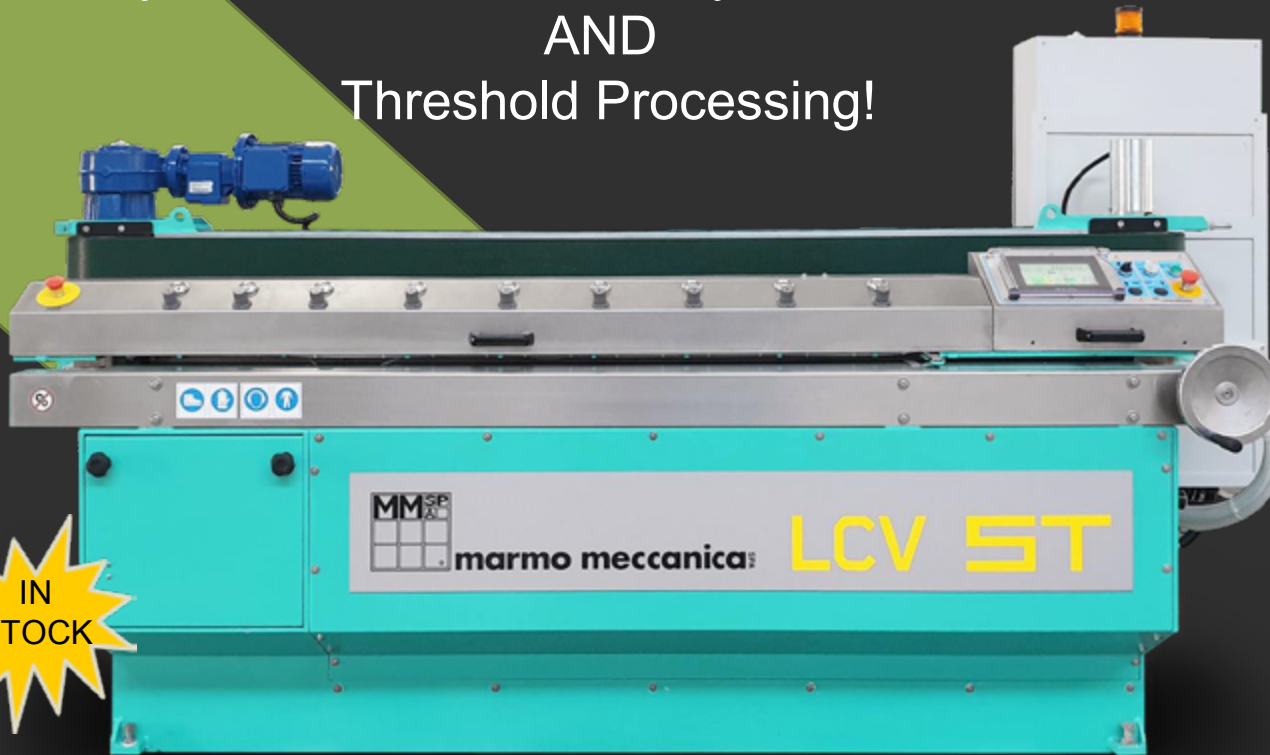
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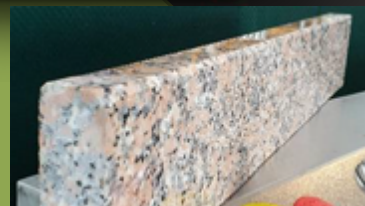
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TRAINING & EDUCATION

Why Do I Need a Business Coach?

You've spent the last 10 or 20 years building your business, so you know it inside and out, right? How can someone who has never been in your shop come in and tell you something about your business that you don't already know? Why would you even consider spending money on that?

Owning and running a business can be a lonely endeavor. It often feels like you're alone on an island, wrapped up in your own thoughts, making it tough to think clearly. Running a business requires a wide range of skills: vision, leadership, people management, organizational management, money management, sales, marketing, project management, technology, and strategic planning, to name just a few. Excelling in all of these areas is challenging, and a few missteps can negatively impact your business and your quality of life.

A good coach can help you navigate the chaos and identify what to focus on first. They can serve as a sounding board for difficult decisions. Should you let your most experienced operator go because he resists automation, or is there another option? Can you afford to hire another salesperson? A good coach can help you work through these dilemmas, assess the financial impact, and make sound decisions. Here are some other ways a coach can help your business.

The Ways a Business Coach Can Help

1. Strategic Planning and Goal Setting:

A business coach can help you set clear goals and develop plans to achieve them, breaking down long-term visions into manageable steps to keep you on track.

2. Accountability:

A key benefit of a business coach is accountability. They ensure you follow through with your plans and commitments, driving performance and preventing procrastination.

3. Expert Insight and Perspective:

Business coaches offer experience and an outsider's perspective, identifying blind spots, providing fresh ideas, and giving feedback to help you make better decisions.

Ed Young
Fabricator's Coach

Justin Shaw
Stone Fabricator Elite

4. Skill Development: Coaches enhance your leadership and management skills, offering training in communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, and team building.

5. Problem Solving and Decision Making: Coaches use their experience to guide you through challenges and develop solutions. They assist in critical business decisions with a structured approach to evaluating options and outcomes.

6. Networking and Resources: A well-connected coach can introduce you to valuable contacts, resources, and opportunities, opening doors to partnerships, funding, and growth.

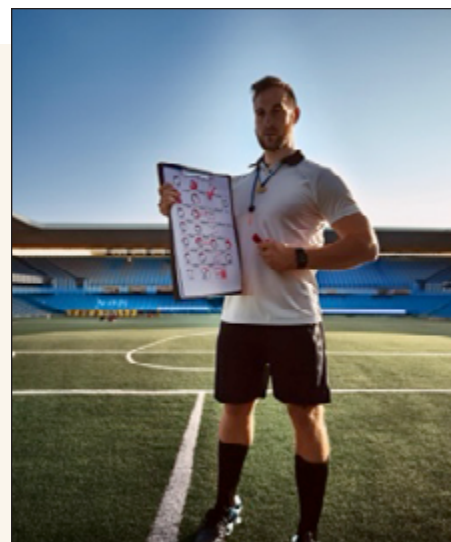
7. Proven Playbooks: Some coaches have proven playbooks for marketing, business development, and hiring. These playbooks provide shortcuts and help implement successful stress management, and energy optimization, often overlooked in business growth.

8. Mindset & High Performance: Some coaches can help to improve your "inner game," focusing on mindset and performance. They enhance habits, time management, and energy optimization, often overlooked in business growth.

What a Coach Can Do and What They Cannot Do

What a Coach Can Do:

- **Provide Guidance:** Offer advice based on their experience and knowledge.
- **Offer Support:** Act as a sounding board for ideas and concerns.
- **Challenge Assumptions:** Encourage you to think critically and consider different perspectives.



• **Facilitate Growth:** Help you develop plans and strategies for business growth.

• **Enhance Skills:** Provide training and resources to develop key business skills.

• **Clarity and Confidence:** Cut through the noise and avoid getting in your own way.

What a Coach Cannot Do:

• **Run Your Business:** They can provide guidance, but the execution of strategies and day-to-day operations is up to you.

• **Make Decisions for You:** A coach can offer advice and perspectives, but the final decisions must be yours.

• **Guarantee Success:** While a coach can significantly improve your chances of success, they cannot guarantee specific outcomes.

• **Solve All Problems:** They can guide you through problem-solving, but they can't fix every issue single-handedly.

• **Do the work for you:** You have to do your own push-ups.

Advice on How to Select the Right Coach

1. Identify Your Needs: Identify the areas of your business needing the most support, such as strategic planning, marketing, leadership development, or financial management, so you can find a coach with the right expertise.

2. Check Credentials and Experience: Look for coaches with relevant qualifications, a strong track record, and

experience in your industry. Check their references and client testimonials to gauge their effectiveness.

3. Assess Compatibility: Your coach should be trustworthy and a good fit for your learning style. Arrange a preliminary meeting to ensure compatibility.

4. Evaluate Their Approach: Ensure their coaching methods match your business philosophy. Inquire about their problem-solving, goal setting, and accountability approaches.

5. Consider Their Network: A well-connected coach can offer additional value through their network of contacts and resources. Inquire about the potential networking opportunities they can provide.

6. Discuss Availability and Commitment: Ensure the coach's availability matches your needs. Clarify how often you will meet, their availability for ad-hoc support, and their commitment to your business's success.

Conclusion

A business coach can elevate your business by providing guidance, accountability, and fresh perspectives. Choosing the right coach, who understands your needs and aligns with your values, is crucial. With the right coach, you can unlock your business's full potential and achieve success faster.

Justin Shaw has been helping stone fabricators and countertop companies since 2017 to implement systems, strategies, and playbooks to grow their businesses more easily. He also has a coaching program the "90-Day Growth Engine", within this flagship program, Justin covers everything from strategy and new business development to marketing and the "inner game" with mindset and high-performance coaching. To learn more, visit: <https://justinshaw.com/> and stonefabricatorelite.com/.

This changing economy will generate significant headwinds for many fabricators. If you need assistance planning for these challenges, reach out to a seasoned business owner and coach at Ed@FabricatorsCoach.com. You deserve to have a business that not only makes you money but also allows you time to enjoy it.

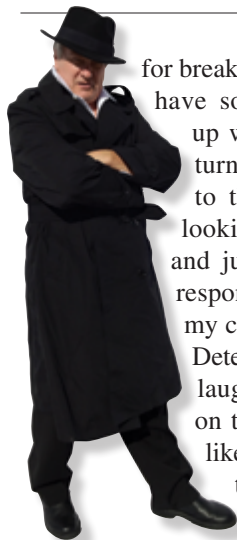
The Stone Detective

The Case of the Shiny Grout

IT was a brisk Florida morning. I woke up, and to check the weather yelled, “Alexa, what’s the weather today?” She responded with, “The humidity is higher than a kite right now. It’s a bad hair day in the making, so plan accordingly.” Alexa has been a little funny lately, but I like it. I laughed, got up, showered, grabbed my fedora, and headed out the door to—you know where. That’s right, to visit my favorite greasy spoon for a cup of joe and some flirting with Flo. Now, for those of you who read my stories, do you remember the story where I name the restaurant I most frequent? If so, drop me a line and the first person to respond will win an autographed copy of my signature on a post-it note (LOL).

I arrived at the restaurant and took my regular stool next to the old Admiral. Flo already had my cup of joe poured, gave me a wink, and asked me what I wanted

Dr. Frederick M. Hueston, PhD



for breakfast. I told her I would have some eggs sunny side up with some bacon. She turned around and yelled to the cook, “Porky Pig looking at me.” I laughed and just as I was about to respond with my own pun, my cell phone rang. “Stone Detective here,” I said in a laughing tone. The voice on the other end sounded like they were talking in a tunnel. All I could hear was a tinny-sounding male voice on the other end saying something about their grout being too shiny. I asked them to call me back, and he did, which corrected the tunnel-like sound effect.

He began to explain to me that he had a new tile kitchen floor installed, and some of the grout was really shiny while other areas appeared normal. He told me the installer had no idea why this was happening, and he needed an independent opinion, and found me on the internet. He asked if I could jaunt out there today and take a look. It was one of my rare slow days, and I had planned on washing and waxing the old Woody, but work is work, so I told him I would be out there within the next hour. I hung up the phone just as Flo was bringing my breakfast. I couldn’t help but laugh again when I thought about her calling my bacon “Porky Pig.” When I looked down at my eggs, they did look like a pair of eyes staring back at me.

I arrived at the gentleman’s home and was greeted at the door before I could even knock. I’m sure he was waiting for my arrival and saw me and my dirty, unwaxed Woody pull up the drive. He led me into the kitchen and, to my surprise, there were several people there. They all introduced themselves. There were the installer and his help, two different attorneys, one representing

the installer and the other the homeowner. This surprised me since I didn’t know this was going to be a lawsuit. So, I put on my expert witness personality, which is basically, do the inspection and don’t say a word. I looked at the tile installation and it all seemed normal except there were several areas where the grout was extremely smooth and shiny and other areas that were very sandy-looking. I turned and asked the installer what type of grout he used, and he told me it was an epoxy grout. I knew right away what the problem was as soon as he said epoxy. I then asked him to explain to me in detail how he applied the grout. He proceeded to tell me that they mixed the three-part epoxy and started installing it on the tile. I then asked him how long it took him to install it, and he looked a little puzzled. So, I asked him if he took a break when applying it, and he said yes, several. *Bingo*, I thought to myself. I took the homeowner and his attorney aside and explained that this is common with epoxy grout. Epoxy is a resin that is mixed with a sanded grout.

[Please turn to page 15](#)

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ISFA Announces Porcelain Fabrication Training Event in Texas



Porcelain countertops are rapidly gaining popularity in both residential and commercial settings due to their durability, versatility and aesthetic appeal. This training session will equip participants with the knowledge and practical skills necessary to excel in this expanding market.

The International Surface Fabricators Association (ISFA) is excited to announce an upcoming training session focused on the fabrication of porcelain for countertops and other applications, including vertical cladding and more. This hands-on session will be held September 26-27, 2024, at Alpha Granite & Tile's state-of-the-art facility in Austin, Texas.

Porcelain countertops are rapidly gaining popularity in both residential and commercial settings due to their durability, versatility and aesthetic appeal. As demand for these surfaces grows, the need for skilled fabricators who can expertly handle porcelain has never been greater. This training session will equip participants with the knowledge and practical skills necessary to excel in this expanding market.

Extensive Training Program

• Comprehensive Curriculum:

Participants will learn about the properties and benefits of porcelain slabs, including a lesson on material handling and slab inspection.

• Hands-On Fabrication Techniques:

Under the guidance of expert trainers, attendees will engage in practical exercises that cover all facets of the porcelain fabrication process, including cutting techniques (feed rate, blade recommendations, tension release cuts), sink cutouts, miters, overhangs, seaming, polishing and finishing, installation, and chip and

scratch repair techniques.

• Advanced Tools and Equipment:

The session will provide training on the latest tools and technologies used in slab fabrication, ensuring that participants are up to date with industry standards.

• Safety and Best Practices:

Emphasis will be placed on safety protocols and best practices to ensure a secure and efficient fabrication process.

• Certification:

Upon completing the training, participants will receive a certificate of completion from ISFA, which is recognized throughout the industry.

"Fabricators founded ISFA to provide educational and growth opportunities for professionals within the surface industry," said Marissa Bankert, executive director of ISFA. "More than 25 years later, ISFA remains dedicated to delivering the tools and resources fabricators need to keep up with current trends and material innovations across the industry. In this challenging labor market, our training programs are a great way to train new hires, get familiarized with new materials, and gain valuable insights that lead to safe and successful operations."

Sponsored by BB Industries, Daltile and Integra Adhesives, this training session is ideal for both novice and experienced fabricators looking to enhance their skills and



Drilling sink holes in porcelain material. Photos courtesy The International Surface Fabricators Association and Daltile.

stay competitive in the market. Early registration is recommended as space is limited. Registration fees cover coursework and all meals listed on the agenda. To register or for more information, visit www.ISFAnow.org/porcelain-fabrication-training.

Aside from Porcelain Fabrication Training, ISFA offers Solid Surface Fabrication Training throughout the year. The next Solid Surface Training will be held October 22-23 in Boston, Massachusetts. In addition, ISFA offers a Solid Surface Training option conducted onsite at the registrant's shop. This is ideal for fabrication shops, facility management and maintenance companies, and other technical trade businesses with several staff members who need training and would benefit from having it in their own space. Onsite training includes the same fabrication coursework as the regularly scheduled events. For more information about onsite training, contact

Trainer@ISFAnow.org. For more information about the International Surface Fabricators Association and all its training programs, visit www.ISFAnow.org.

The International Surface Fabricators Association (ISFA) is globally recognized as a premier trade organization serving the manufactured surface industry. ISFA exists to help fabricators and other industry professionals increase product quality, improve safety measures, encourage professionalism and elevate profitability by facilitating education, standards and camaraderie. ISFA values innovation, dependability, trust, honesty, ethics and serving others above all else. Learn more at www.ISFAnow.org.

"When I was very young, most of my childhood heroes wore capes, flew through the air, or picked up buildings with one arm. They were spectacular and got a lot of attention. But as I grew, my heroes changed, so that now I can honestly say that anyone who does anything to help a child is a hero to me."

— Fred Rogers

Digital Business Cards



Digital business cards, aka e-business cards or virtual business cards, have gained popularity in recent years as technology has advanced and more people have become environmentally conscious. These digital alternatives to traditional card stock (paper) business cards offer a range of advantages and disadvantages. Let's take a look at the pros and cons of digital business cards.

Pros of Digital Business Cards

1. Eco-Friendly

One of the most significant benefits of digital business cards is their environmental impact. Traditional paper business cards contribute to deforestation and waste. According to some estimates, over 7 million trees are cut down each year to produce business cards. Digital business cards do not need paper, ink, and other resources, thus reducing your carbon footprint and helping promote sustainability.

Printing paper business cards can be expensive, especially if you update your contact information or branding often. Digital business cards, on the other hand, can be created and shared with usually a much lower cost. There are various free and low-cost apps and websites available for designing and distributing digital business cards, making them an economical choice for individuals and businesses alike.

3. Convenient

Digital business cards can be easily shared and stored. They can be sent via email, text message, or through social

Sharon Koehler

Stone Industry Consultant

media platforms. Recipients can save the card directly to their smartphones. This means that your contact information is always readily available. This convenience also ends the risk of losing a paper card and ensures that your information is available when needed.

4. Easy to Update

With traditional business cards, any change in contact details or job titles requires printing new cards. However, digital business cards can be updated instantly. This one advantage means that your contacts always have your most current information, which is particularly useful for people who often change their jobs or contact details.

5. Interactive Features

Digital business cards can incorporate interactive elements such as links to websites, social media profiles, videos, and maps. This interactivity can provide recipients with a more engaging experience and more information about your business. For example, a link to a LinkedIn profile can allow recipients to learn more about your professional background instantly.

6. Enhanced Networking Opportunities

Digital business cards can be shared at any time, even if you don't have a physical card on hand. They are especially useful

in virtual networking scenarios, such as online conferences and meetings, where physical cards can't be used. Additionally, digital cards can be integrated with customer relationship management (CRM) systems, making for much better follow-up and networking management.

Cons of Digital Business Cards

1. Technological Barriers

While digital business cards offer many advantages, they also rely on technology. Not everyone is comfortable using digital tools, and some recipients may prefer a traditional paper card. Additionally, digital business cards require a device and an internet connection to be shared and accessed, which might not always be available.

2. Compatibility Issues

There are various formats and platforms for digital business cards, and not all are compatible with every device or operating system. Some recipients might experience problems opening or saving the card, especially if they are using older devices or software. This issue can sometimes be a snag in the seamless exchange of contact information.

3. Perceived Lack of Professionalism

In certain industries, traditional paper business cards are seen as more professional and formal. The actual experience of handing over a physical card can create a stronger personal connection. Some people may perceive digital business cards as impersonal or informal, which could affect people's feelings about your business in certain professional settings.

4. Security Concerns

Sharing digital business cards involves the transfer of personal information over the internet, which can raise security and privacy concerns. There is a risk of data breaches or unauthorized access to your information. Users must ensure that they use secure platforms and follow best practices for protecting their data.

5. Dependence on Battery and Power

Digital business cards rely on electronic devices, which in turn rely on battery power. If your smartphone or tablet runs out of battery, you may be unable to access or share your digital business card. This dependence on technology can be a drawback, especially in situations where charging options are limited.

The Stone Detective

Continued from page 13

The sand has a tendency to settle in the bucket if not mixed periodically, so when it is applied, some areas will be almost pure resin with no sand and other areas very sandy in appearance. This is why you can have shiny areas and others that are not. The attorney asked me if I could write a report, and I agreed. Now, where can I find a car wash?"

The Stone Detective is a fictional character created by Dr. Frederick M. Hueston, PhD, written to entertain and educate. Dr. Fred has written over 33 books on stone and tile installations, fabrication and restoration and also serves as an expert for many legal cases across the world. Send your comments to fhueston@stoneforensics.com.

6. Learning Curve

For those not technologically savvy, there can be a learning curve associated with creating and sharing digital business cards. This can be a potential roadblock for those who are not comfortable with digital tools. Time and effort are both needed to learn how to use the various platforms and ensure that the card is designed and shared effectively.

All that being said, digital business cards offer a modern, eco-friendly, and cost-effective alternative to traditional paper business cards. They provide convenience, easy updates, and interactive features that enhance networking opportunities. However, they also come with technological barriers, compatibility issues, and potential security concerns. The choice between digital and traditional business cards ultimately depends on personal preference, industry standards, and the specific needs of the user. As technology continues to evolve, it is likely that digital business cards will become more prevalent and user-friendly, making them an increasingly popular choice for professionals.

Please send your thoughts and comments on this article to Sharon Koehler at Sharonk.SRG@gmail.com.

Stone Restoration and Maintenance Corner

M3 Technologies and Majestic Stone Care

M3 Technologies, Inc. is coming up on 30 years of providing quality products and technical assistance to hard surface restoration professionals across the country and around the world. Gad Schmidt started the company in 1995. Based out of beautiful Cohasset, Massachusetts, the company is a highly-focused supplier of abrasives, chemicals, and specialty equipment, all geared towards the restoration and maintenance of marble, terrazzo, granite and all natural stone, concrete, and ceramic tile surfaces.

The M3 Majestic line of quality stone care products is, without a doubt, one of the leading brands of chemical products for the hard surface restoration and maintenance professional in the industry. The Majestic No-Rinse pH Neutral Cleaner is our number two selling product for a good reason: it is the best maintenance cleaner for natural stone available anywhere, period. It is used in hospitals, airports, casinos, commercial properties and even by homeowners around the world. It contains “optical brighteners” so that it requires no rinsing and leaves the surface sharper and crisper than competitive products. Every completed project should be left with instructions on how to use Majestic No-Rinse pH Neutral Cleaner. Remember that when clients use their own maintenance product, your work cannot be guaranteed.

M3 offers high quality epoxy resin diamond discs, like our TX Triple Thick series. These semi-flexible diamond discs are a staple for every marble, terrazzo, and limestone flooring restoration contractor for grinding, honing, and/or polishing. I dare say these are some of the most popular diamond discs on the market, and very cost effective, too. As an example, many marble (or similar) floors typically require the honing of traffic wear patterns using a 220 grit, 400 grit, and on some floors as high as an 800 grit, before beginning the polishing process. Of course there are some floors, like serpentine (green marble) that may require going higher in grit before polishing. FYI, epoxy resin diamonds are typically more colorful than other resin matrix diamonds.

We have other similar epoxy resin diamonds too, like our TYP Typhoon series,

Bob Murrell
M3 Technologies
Photos by Bob Murrell



which is even thicker than the TX discs. Also, the Rosette series are epoxy discs with a different water channel configuration. It depends on the project as to which of these epoxy resin diamonds are the best fit. Another series of epoxy resin discs are the AA Turbo series, available in 3, 4, 5, and 7-inch sizes. The 5-inch size is mainly used for hand tool work. They are thinner and more flexible for doing edge (border) work, vertical surfaces, and countertops.

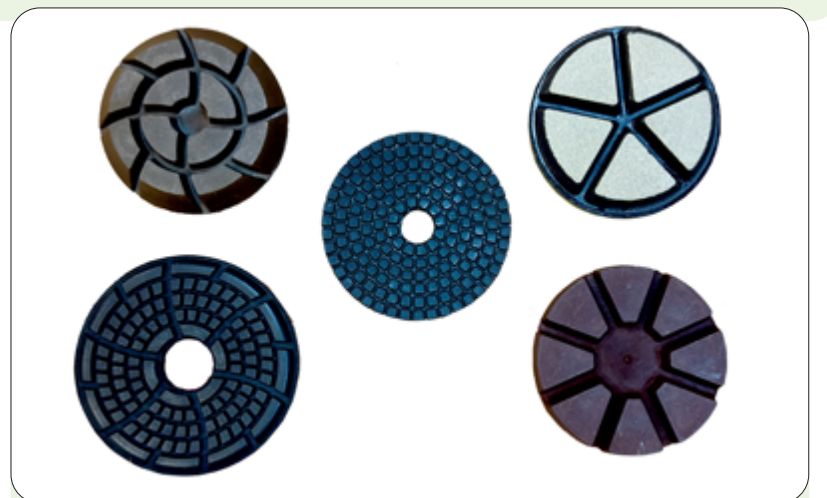
There are other diamonds available like our DICP Premium Flexible discs, which are a more aggressive phenolic resin. They are typically used on harder surfaces like granite but will cut marble, too. The phenolic resins typically do not provide as high of a shine at the same grit level as an epoxy resin disc. The DIFL Granite Diamonds and the HC Superior Hard Concrete Diamonds are also phenolic resins.

Then there are the metal-bond series diamonds that M3 offers. The Magnum series segmented diamonds discs are very popular for concrete work. They are available in very aggressive 6 grit to 220



Neutral Cleaner – Majestic No-Rinse pH Neutral Cleaner is the best maintenance product for all natural stone, terrazzo, concrete, and ceramic tile installations.

Left: The M3 Technologies epoxy resin lineup starts with the industry standard Triple Thick (TX) and includes the Rosettes (ROS3 & ROS4), Typhoons (TYP3 & TYP4), and AA Turbos (AA3, AA4, AA5, & AA7). Epoxy resins are easily identifiable because of their bright colors.



Phenolic Resin Lineup – M3 Technologies' Premium Flexible (DICP3, DICP4, DICP5, & DICP7) are a great general purpose resin diamond for all natural stone, terrazzo and concrete. The Granite Diamonds (DIFL3.5) are excellent diamonds for honing and polishing granite. The Superior Hard Concrete resins (HC) are specifically made for use on concrete for honing and polishing.

grit for heavy stock removal. We stock both electroplated (LT series for marble and similar stone) and segmented metal-bond diamonds (Daisy/Toolip series for all natural stone and concrete) for lippage removal. The very popular ELF Flexible Metal-Bond series are great for general

grinding and honing operations. These Flexible metal bonds are very useful in many situations. I've personally used them for mild lippage removal, some coatings removal, and general light to medium stock removal situations.

[Please turn to page 18](#)

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Beachcombers Beware

When you think of Florida, some of the first things to come to mind are its great weather, strong economy, and masses of retirees.

But what might not be your first thought is the copious amounts of drugs washing up on the state's beaches.

One Monday in August, around \$1 million worth of cocaine — 25 packages at roughly 70 pounds each — was discovered at a beach in the Florida Keys after Hurricane Debby swept through the region.

Earlier this summer, boaters found another 65 pounds of cocaine floating in the ocean near the Florida Keys, and divers came across 25 kilograms of cocaine roughly 100 feet underwater off Key West.

And that's far from the end of it. Around 67 pounds of cocaine was seized after washing up on a beach in Volusia County in October 2023.

Even drugs like marijuana have washed ashore in vast volumes at places like Neptune Beach and Palm Beach. (All you NY tourists note: recreational use in Florida is still illegal.)

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Silica Legislation Update

California Fabricator Licensure of Silicosis Legislation Withdrawn

IN early July, the proposed legislation introduced by Assemblywoman Luz Rivas (D-San Fernando Valley) to the California state legislature was withdrawn. This legislation would have required all stone fabricators to obtain a license, while also placing restrictions on the sale of slab material only to licensed fabricators and/or to customers with a verified licensed fabricator involved in the project. Components of the legislation would have also outlawed the use of dry cutting methods. In short, the legislation aimed to control the supply chain to the point that only fabrication shops that demonstrated employee training and compliance with Cal/OSHA regulations could obtain slab material.

While the bill had passed the California lower house, it faced opposition in the state senate because it lacked a clear plan for which state agency would administer and enforce the licensure. The bill also did not fully account for implementation/enforcement costs, which became problematic given California's significant budget deficit.

Multiple industry leaders, including the Natural Stone Institute, participated in discussions with the bill's author. It was hoped that NSI's Silica & Slab Safety Certificate would be utilized as the framework for the training element of the licensure program.

Jim Hieb of NSI shared: "Given the complexity of the California supply chain, with slab sales being made to a variety of outlets (including homeowners, designers, general contractors, and stone companies), many stakeholders believed the introduction of a licensure program would curb the level of silicosis cases in the state. As it is unclear if similar legislation will be introduced in the future, the industry will continue its work with Cal/OSHA on desired amendments to provide some regulatory relief to fabricators impacted by the emergency temporary standard (ETS). While the ETS is set to expire in December 2024, Cal/OSHA has proposed permanent silica standards with similar requirements as the ETS."

To stay current on silica related topics, visit www.naturalstoneinstitute.org/silica.

Stone Restoration Corner

Continued from page 16

M3's number one selling product is the Majestic 5X Gold marble polishing powder, considered by many pros to be the highest quality 5X powder in the world. It is manufactured to our specifications using the highest quality abrasives and materials and then ball-milled to be extra fine with no rocks or large crystals of potassium oxalate. Majestic 5X Gold is used worldwide and used exclusively by performance-demanding professional contractors around the globe. If you want to polish marble or other similar stones, 5X Gold is a must-have.

Of course, we also offer Majestic XXX Marble Polishing Powder, DiaBrite 10X marble polishing powder, Granite Polishing Powder in both light and dark colors, Granite's Gloss, pure Tin Oxide, Granite Polishing Compound, and honing powders available in 150 grit to 1800 grit. The DiaBrite 10X is very popular in the west, especially in the casino towns. It is a "hotter" mix than 5X or XXX and some professionals prefer it, but it is a higher-priced marble polishing powder. I recommend that restoration contractors have some of the DiaBrite 10X, along with their 5X Gold. The 5X Gold is the standard go-to marble polishing product, but having the DiaBrite 10X on the truck is a good second choice, for sure. Restoration professionals have to think on their feet and be able to adjust when standard practices are not yielding the expected results. You need adequate options so that you don't get stuck without the resources you need, while out on a job. This is especially true if it is a lengthy drive to the jobsite.

M3 Technologies stocks most all of the restoration products professionals need to



Majestic 5X Gold is the world's #1 marble polishing powder because it is super-high quality and ball-milled to be extra fine. This improves performance and coverage.

get their jobs done right. We offer everything from chemicals, abrasives, masking products, floor machines, accessories for hand tools and floor machines, gloss meters, slip resistance enhancing products, diamond impregnated pads, natural (Combo) and white pads, steel wool pads, and most things that you need on-site.

I always recommend doing a test area on any project to confirm both the results and procedure. Also, the best way to help ensure success is by partnering with a good distributor, like BB Industries, that knows the business. They can help with technical support, product purchase decisions, logistics, and other pertinent project information.

Bob Murrell has worked in the natural stone industry for over 40 years and is well known for his expertise in natural stone, tile, and decorative concrete restoration and maintenance. He helped develop some of the main products and processes which revolutionized the industry, and is currently the Director of Operations for M3 Technologies. Send your comments and questions to Bob at [attn: publisher@slipperyrockgazette.net](mailto:attn:publisher@slipperyrockgazette.net).

M3 Technologies offers a variety of essential masking products you might need to complete your restoration or maintenance projects.



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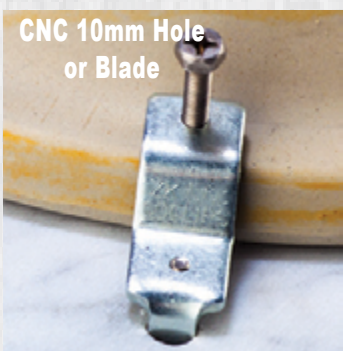
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Beachcombers Beware

Continued from page 17

Where is it all coming from?

According to researchers with the United Nations, approximately 90% of cocaine consumed in North America was produced in — drumroll, please — South America.

Drug traffickers then try to smuggle the illicit substances over the water via boats or small aircraft, often over the Caribbean Sea or Atlantic Ocean.

However, traffickers will dump their hauls into the water below for fellow smugglers to pick up or to evade detection by law enforcement.

How does it get to Florida?

According to *Scientific American*, loose packages of cocaine dropped in the water may be carried by ocean currents or strong storms, which causes them to wash up on the shore.

And with Debby having just passed through, it's no surprise that so much was discovered lately in the Florida Keys.

"You always hear about tropical systems unearthing shipwrecks and things like that, so if there's something in the water — the storm can transport that, too!" News 6 Meteorologist Jonathan Kegges said.

What should I do if I find suspicious packages on the beach?

"Finders keepers" doesn't apply here. First of all, many packages are marked with certain symbols or insignias to denote what group they came from, which can help indicate whether what you're looking at is actually an illicit substance.

But holding onto it is a bad idea, according to Florida law firm Perlet & Shiner.

"It should go without saying that retaining possession of (a washed-up block of drugs) is an incredibly bad idea..." the law firm states. "If, for example, you intentionally retain possession of a block of drugs later valued at \$100,000, you have committed grand theft in the first degree, which can carry up to 30 years in prison, plus significant fines." So, if you stumble across bricks of cocaine on the beach, you should instead immediately alert your local law enforcement agency and keep an eye on the packages.

My New “Cup” Came Close to Running Over

Sam Venable

Department of Irony

Technology is not my strong suit. Never has been. Never will be.

I have little use for any gadget, contrivance, device or invention more complicated to operate than a hammer. Indeed, I’m often tempted to take a hammer to the aforementioned contraptions when they refuse to behave.

Part of the problem is my mental wiring.

Men are supposed to emerge from the womb with instinctive knowledge of how things work and how to fix them when they quit working. Not in my case. That strand of DNA got lost in the shuffle.

It’s just the opposite with my wife.

Mary Ann was born with a computer chip for a brain. If she can’t decipher a technical issue by rote, she resorts to written instructions, how-to diagrams and other voodoo.

We make an ideal pair in this regard. I throw my hands into the air after spending 30 minutes of maddening, cursing attempts. She calmly solves the problem in 30 seconds.

What’s more, I’ve been known to glance at modern thingamajigs and misidentify them. Once, I picked up a TV remote and attempted to make a phone call on it.

No joke. I swear on a stack of semiconductors this is true. It occurred at my daughter’s house in front of a half-dozen nerdy, high-tech witnesses, any of whom can, and will upon request, recount the story in riotous detail.

But that incident pales compared to what happened one day last week. The fact that I cross-my-heart-and-hope-to-die vouch for its truth — much less confess it in public — proves I have neither high-tech intellect nor one shred of shame.

Please turn to page 22

“If all men are created equal, that is **final**.
If they are endowed with inalienable rights, that is **final**. If governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, that is **final**.
No advance, no progress can be made beyond these propositions.”

—President Calvin Coolidge
on the 150th Anniversary of the
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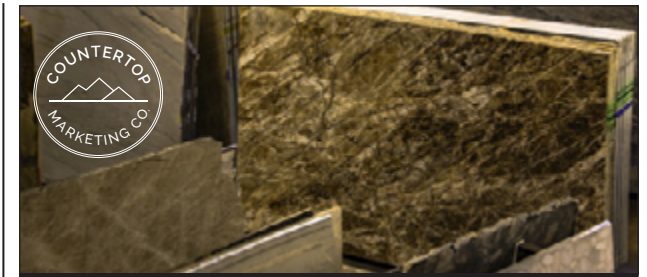


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For Sale

Tree Sculpture for Sale: Limestone tree that Cliff Dieker carved at the Missouri Ledge Stone Co. in Oak Grove Mo. Very detailed with squirrels, raccoon and even acorns in and on a hollowed out tree trunk. It measures 6 ft. 4 in. tall, 32 ins. at widest base and 32 ins., at widest middle area. Original sculpture at price of \$7000.00 email us at dkrede54@gmail.com.

Achilli MBS/CE bridge saw, Edgemate polisher, Trac Saw and Scorpion sink machine: \$6,150 for the Bridge saw (fits in tight quarters) \$2,800 for the Edgemate with rails \$4,250 Trac Saw with rails (used very little) \$4,900 for the Scorpion with extra motor .All are under power and working. Contact: Loren Fisher: (785)925-3400 Email: loren@fisherfixtures.com.

Comandulli Speedy Edge Polishing Machine For Sale – Edge polishing machine for sale \$14K OBO - Must sell! Located in Los Angeles, CA, the machine is in excellent condition, low hours, Model Speedy System, Year 2006, Automatic Tool changer, Pneumatic turntable for piece loading, pre-set programs visualized on “touch-screen” control panel. Contact us at 310-328-8000 or email elizabeth@delorenzomarble.com.

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My New “Cup” Came Close to Running Over

Continued from page 20

It was a couple of hours before dawn. I was about to leave the house to go hunting. I poured hot coffee into my well-worn insulated travel cup and attached the lid. At that precise moment, the aged cup gave up the ghost and began leaking. Wiping the countertop dry, I said shoot-pshaw-ding-dang, or words to that effect, and made a mental note to buy a new one.

The very next afternoon — repeat: very next afternoon — a small box arrived in the mail. I cut it open. Inside was an insulated travel cup, along with a note from our internet service provider, thanking the Venables for being loyal customers.

What timing! It fit my hand perfectly,



although I did notice the top wiggled instead of immediately popping open. No biggie, I shrugged. Just something different to get used to.

I told Mary Ann about it when she got home. She took one look. Then she simultaneously rolled her eyes and burst into laughter.

“This isn’t a cup, Einstein,” she said. “It’s a Bluetooth speaker.”

Well, whadaya know.

Good thing I didn’t try pouring scalding coffee into the crazy thing. Don’t know about teeth, but the air definitely would’ve turned deep, dark blue.

Sam Venable is an author, comedic entertainer, and humor columnist for the Knoxville (TN) News Sentinel. His latest book is “The Joke’s on YOU! (All I Did Was Clean Out My Files).” He may be reached at sam.venable@outlook.com.

Silica Guidance Documents Now Available from Natural Stone Institute

The Natural Stone Institute (NSI) and the International Surface Fabricators Association are proud to introduce two guidance documents for workplace silica exposure assessment assembled by the Yale School of Medicine. These documents are available in both English and Spanish and can be found on the [NSI silica webpage](#).

The Fabricator Guidance Document provides resources for sourcing workplace air monitoring for respirable dust and crystalline silica. It also includes best practices for when sampling should be scheduled, what information should be provided to the consultant, and how long reports should be retained.

The Sampling Firm/Consultant Guidance Document shares general requirements, sample strategies, minimum documentation, and laboratory results. It also details what should be included in a final consultant report,

including both regulatory and best practice-based recommendations for the client.

Where to get silica sampling was a regular question fielded by the NSI technical department. NSI Accreditation & Technical Manager Mark Meriaux shares: “These documents should help our members and the industry at large better understand the process of air monitoring for respirable crystalline silica (RCS). A recent survey and data collection project with Yale researchers revealed that there is little consistency of information gathered in professional sampling reports. These two new documents define best practices in air monitoring for RCS and give a better understanding of expectations to those companies who haven’t started air monitoring.”

All industry members are encouraged to download these documents online at www.naturalstoneinstitute.org/silica.

Immanent Increases in Ocean Freight Predicted

While pandemic-related shipping challenges have tapered, global logistics providers are foreseeing another rise in ocean freight rates due to increased demand, port congestion and capacity issues caused by unprecedented global events including the Red Sea crisis and conflict in the Middle East.

The pandemic caused a sharp over-demand followed subsequently by an over-supply peaked in the third quarter of 2023. Initial predictions of over-supply in 2024 were thwarted by the Red Sea crisis, resulting in two series of increased rates. The first increase occurred after the stoppage of routes across the Red Sea, and the second, more impactful increase, is caused due to both an increased demand year over year and port/container congestion.

Because the past four years have shown extremes in the supply and demand, fueled by unprecedented global events (COVID-19, Russia/Ukraine War, Israel/Palestine conflict and the Baltimore Bridge collapse, to name a few) the supply chain is experiencing instability. From the lasting impact of the COVID outbreak on consumer purchasing behavior to the Suez Canal blockage, the global shipping industry struggles with port congestion, driver shortages, impending strikes, seasonality shifts, etc. Container availability, particularly in Asia, is limited due to longer transit times and less available container space. Export lanes from Asia to Europe and North America are currently challenged.

“Space and equipment remain tight across many markets, especially those outside of China to US West Coast trades,” Mark Gorman President and CEO of Century Supply Chain Solutions writes. “Particular areas of concern are India and South America. The conflict in the Middle East continues to lengthen transits and reduce capacity and that is not likely to change soon. Further, the possibility of labor unrest on the US East Coast this October adds uncertainty.”

Port congestion has emerged as a critical issue. As key hubs in international trade, ports are crucial nodes where goods are transferred between ships, trucks, and rail systems. When these hubs become congested, the effects ripple through the supply chain, impacting businesses and consumers worldwide. In normal cases, transit times



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Global shipping routes indicated by the white lines reveal the intricate network of international trade.

from Dubai to US ports average 40 days. In today's climate, transit times for the same route take as much as 70 days.

In response to this instability, carriers are swiftly reverting to pandemic shipping behavior, focusing on maximizing asset profitability. Rate increases, emergency surcharges and peak season premiums have been and will continue to be implemented. Capacity restrains due to blank sailings, a scheduled sailing of a container vessel that has been canceled by the carrier, and increased demand in Asia have caused an impact in booking availability out of Brazil, India and Italy.

As an example, freight rates from India to the US have increased by 200%, from Thailand to the US by 375% and from Brazil to the US by 260% since January 2024.

Consumers can expect an increase in product prices, supply chain disruptions, strategic shifts in sourcing efforts and impact on exporters. Businesses are often unable to absorb the full financial impact of the increased ocean freight, passing along a percentage of the increase to the consumer. Higher shipping costs also lead to significant supply chain disruption, as small to medium-sized enterprises may struggle to

absorb these costs, leading to delays or canceled shipments. Additionally, the decrease in booking availability results in extended lead times for exporting products.

Supply chain management and logistics teams can look to mitigate risks, provide quick updates to customers and secure the most current port arrival dates possible. Businesses are reevaluating their supply strategy, leveraging the nearshoring or reshoring options in addition to booking multiple sailings and alternative routes. Purchasing and supply teams are reviewing inventory and priorities, focusing on tightening demand volumes to secure space for critical and essential products. Monitoring congestion at ports and drayage availability also increases the efficiency of returning empty containers for export.

“It is more important than ever to diversify carriers and forwarders to provide maximum coverage and to have representation that is origin empowered to make decisions in real time,” Gorman suggests. “These critical steps build the agility to mitigate the impact of the disruptions that are likely to continue and might possibly worsen over the coming months.”

The increases in ocean freight costs are a multifaceted issue with far-reaching implications. From pandemic-induced disruptions and container shortages to rising fuel prices and stricter environmental regulations, various factors have converged to create a challenging environment for global shipping. The impacts are felt across the entire supply chain, affecting product prices, availability, and trade dynamics.

Awareness of the global shipping climate allows business owners to prepare for increased cost of goods and operate through extended shipping lead times. By understanding the intricacies of international shipping, businesses can better anticipate potential disruptions and develop more resilient supply chain strategies.

“There’s a belief... in the country that we can cure unemployment by creating opportunity. The skills gap proves that opportunity alone is not enough to get people employed.”

— Mike Rowe

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