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MightySlab™ is Porcelain's Newest Superhero

Moderno Porcelain Works Creates a Game-Changing Product

When the doors of Moderno Porcelain Works opened in 2019, it was 100% dedicated to bringing porcelain fabrication to the Houston, Texas area. Its CEO, Roberto Contreras was basically old-school, coming from a long lineage in the fabrication industry. To his credit, two notable parts of this lineage was being the founder of Cosentino U.S.A., the folks who gave us Silestone, as well as prior ownership of a fabrication shop in 1988. However, many of the old-school techniques he brought with him

by Peter J. Marcucci

Photos Courtesy Moderno Porcelain Works

from natural stone, did not apply to porcelain, recalled Contreras. "It's been a learning process. In the beginning, we thought that working with porcelain would be much easier, but it wasn't, and that's why we created the MightySlab™, as a solution to make things easier and faster for us." Today, Moderno has 13 locations nationwide, and 4 franchises.

Super Cost Effective and Fabricator Friendly

With so many Ultra Compact and Sintered materials on the market these days, what makes MightySlab™ different? For starters, these large format super-detailed slabs come in an assortment of fashionable colors, capable of pleasing the most discerning clients looking for a durable product to adorn their home or business, inside or out. However, the biggest difference and game-changer of MightySlab™ is not what's on top. It's what's in back, explained Contreras.

Bridlewood residential kitchen features mitered and waterfall countertops and backsplash showcasing large format Arabescato porcelain material. The thinness of the MightySlab™ panels makes the extensive mitering easier to fabricate and install.



MightySlab™ makes any vertical application possible, like this Black Marquina-clad fireplace.

"Ask yourself: why do most stone fabricators either shy away from porcelain or markup the price very high, or prefer to not fabricate it at all? Well, one reason is because when you cut porcelain, your cutting table has to be perfectly flat; otherwise, an uneven surface can break the material. For a company cutting granite or quartz, a table can be uneven, not perfectly flat, and it is not a problem. Conversely, when cutting MightySlab™, a stone fabricator can avoid this drawback, because of the reinforcement on the back side. The vibration of the blade gets absorbed by the MCB board, and therefore won't chip the edge, and a saw table that is not flat will not break the material due to the blade's pressure. Additionally, because you are using our 6mm material, you can cut and miter way faster!"

The Patent Pending MightySlab™ is created by sandwiching porcelain to 3/8-inch thick reinforcement known as MCB (Moderno Core Board), the same material used in the core of wind turbine generator blades. MightySlabs™ are 63 inches by 126 inches and weigh 120 pounds, big enough for any creative designer's imagination to daydream of possibilities, light enough to carry upstairs or hang vertically, and tough enough to sustain whatever you throw at it, including sun, dirt and pollution. Contreras also said that unlike using thin-set for bonding during installation, MightySlab™ only needs construction adhesive. This in itself is a huge savings in both prep time and placement, especially when doing high, vertical installations that aren't plumb.

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Moderno

Continued from page 1 **Training and Learning Curve to the Rescue**

Contreras offers hands-on training at your shop or his. Newbies to porcelain fabrication will appreciate being able to learn the tricks of the trade on Moderno Porcelain Works' home turf, and also learn the machinery and the layout of the machinery that's used in a strictly porcelain shop. "We have two gentlemen who will travel and do training as needed, but we also extend the invitation for fabricators to visit us in Houston, Texas.

"Keep in mind that there is a big difference between us and natural stone and quartz fabricators. We have different equipment and handle it differently. The manufacturing processes are different, too. Unfortunately, sometimes you will not notice this difference until it's too late, and you break a piece. The differences are the speed that you run the product through the oven, the length of that oven, the raw material that you use, and the age of the equipment. Is it old or new technology? These are the things that you don't notice when you look at a slab of porcelain, but sometimes learn the hard way, if it breaks. Like natural stone, every brand, color or type of porcelain reacts differently to cutting, and that's a big reason why fabricators get confused and push back."

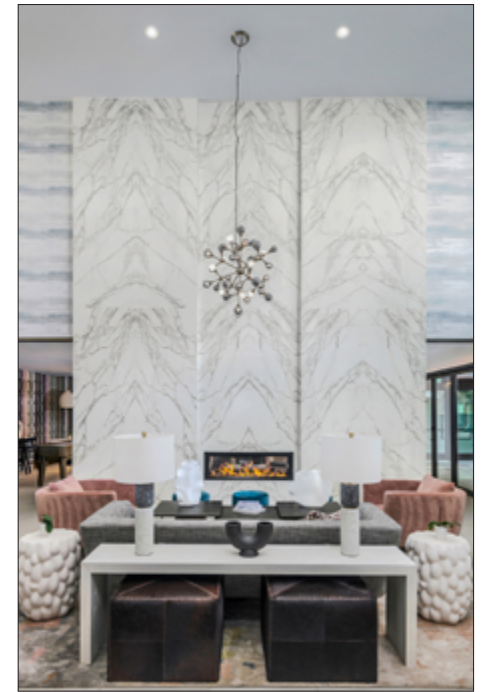


This commercial project in Houston, Texas uses contrasting colors of MightySlab™ on floors and wall cladding. Benefits on large projects include cost savings, easier installation.

MightySlab™ is also available in 12mm thickness, but Contreras suggests their 6mm product, because there is really no advantage to using 12mm – It just makes it heavier and more expensive. As for where to buy MightySlab™, he said there are currently 17 locations throughout the U.S. Thirteen are company owned, some are partnerships, and four are franchises. All of these locations fabricate with porcelain, while a few also work with natural stone. "We have a large inventory in Atlanta, Georgia, and we will ship any

amount by common carrier to anyone needing slabs immediately." He also said they are currently recruiting distributors, and that MightySlab™ will be more available throughout the United States by this coming September. Canada and countries south of the border will also be getting some consideration in the near future.

Contreras went on to say that there is one more big advantage to partnering with Moderno Porcelain Works. "Any color that you may want is very easily replicated for us to produce. This cannot be done with



MightySlab™ offers fabricators and designers unlimited creative possibilities.

quartz products. You can get close, but it will never be the same. Not so with porcelain, because it uses a digital printing process. So whatever color, from any quarry in the world or fabric or metal or wood that you want to copy, if you take a professional, digital picture, you can get it in porcelain. The technology has advanced to such a high level and the printing of the image is so realistic, that it can be copied to a T with all of the details."



This floor-to-ceiling remodel utilizes large format porcelain in ways that marble cannot match.



There are several reasons why porcelain is becoming a popular material choice for outdoor kitchens. Benefits include lower cost, durability, color choice and ease-of-care.

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Moderno

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A Boon for the Renovation Sector?

Question: Is it possible, due to porcelain's extreme reproductive accuracy, that it could be used to replicate certain portions of certain types of renovation work, such as in historic buildings or landmarks, where marble or granite was quarried decades or centuries before? Think about it! Instead of having to dig up documentation (if even available), stating what area of a quarry blocks were quarried, and where it was used on the original structure, a super accurate duplicate of porcelain could be made. Old quarries tend to either be overgrown or submerged at this point, and quarrying blocks is pretty much out of the question, leaving the renovation company no choice but to try and find a look-a-like replacement from a current quarry somewhere else around the globe. Good luck with that!

Unlimited Possibilities

"MightySlab™ is a way for the fabricator to do more work in a house and offer the customer countertops, fireplaces,



Large format sintered stone fireplace clad in Taj Mahal.

outdoor kitchens and furniture that are on parallel with the beauty of natural stone. Additionally, pound for pound, dollar for dollar, porcelain is the best product you could use on a shower wall. There is nothing that compares to large format porcelain in a shower. If you put natural stone or quartz in a shower, it is not going to look the same after a few years, but with porcelain, you not only have the durability and zero maintenance, you have a beautiful shower.



Contreras: "Porcelain is the best product you could use on a shower wall."

"As for countertops, there is nothing wrong with using granite, quartzite or quartz. Nevertheless, we believe that porcelain has a great future— you just have to get the fabricators comfortable with using the product, and MightySlab™ may be the solution. We don't discourage anyone to use a material that they have in mind. We think this is very important, because if a manufacturer is spending money in marketing or specifying a product, we respect that, so we will never try to switch. That being said, if you come to us wanting Dekton, we will fabricate Dekton. (It can be any brand of porcelain; in Moderno we never switch specs.) However, with MightySlab™, we work with it easier and faster, and it has tremendous advantages. The weight, the price and the speed of fabrication make it a no-brainer. We want fabricators to get out of their comfort zone of only doing countertops, and go back to the old days of doing all applications in the same house. With only a little more effort, you're making a lot more money by doing a lot more business. MightySlab™ is lightweight, durable, transportable and a game changer, and this is the message that we want to convey."

Moderno Porcelain Works is a member of the National Kitchen and Bath Association and the American Society of Interior Designers.

For more information on purchasing or distributing MightySlab™, [visit www.moderno.com](http://www.moderno.com) .



Top: Black Maquina outdoor kitchen countertop and cladding is a durable option. Center: MightySlab™ porcelain floor, matching wall cladding and vanity tops. Bottom: Large format porcelain presents an almost seamless floor treatment.



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BB Industries Expands U.S. Local Sales Force

BB Industries, one of the largest U.S. distributors of stone tools, is once again expanding their U.S. local sales presence to better serve the fabrication community.

BBI is looking to add Outside Sales Consultants in the following areas: **Northern Ohio/Michigan; Dallas, Texas; and Denver, Colorado and the surrounding area.** Says BBI CEO Rick Stimac, "We are always open to experienced sales people, anywhere in the US. In fact, we recently added two new Outside Sales Consultants, one for Southern California and one for Northern California, for a total of five Consultants in California, to better cover this large territory and introduce even more countertop shops to our unbeatable customer service."

Individuals interested in joining the BBI team should have previous industry related sales or stone fabrication experience, be a team player, and have excellent customer service skills. **This**

position requires you to drive a company-provided utility van to existing customer sites (if applicable to the territory), as well as source new customers. The position is considered physical and it will require lifting products to and from the van.

BB Industries is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. 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](https://www.linkedin.com/company/bbindustriesllc) on social media channels LinkedIn, Instagram, and [facebook.com/BBIndustriesLLCUSA](https://www.facebook.com/BBIndustriesLLCUSA).

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APPLICATION:

- Building
- Furnishing
- Elevators
- Marine
- Backlight
- Pre-Fab Homes/ RV

Industry Calendar of Events

July 2024

NSI: Wisconsin Stone Summit—Know Your Business

When: Thursday July 11. 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. (ET)

Where: 7739 S. 6th St, Oak Creek, WI 53154

Visit naturalstoneinstitute.org/calendar for more information.

NSI: Flooring Sustainability Summit

When: Wednesday July 17 and Thursday July 18

Where: Washington D.C.

Visit naturalstoneinstitute.org/calendar for more information.

August 2024

BACA Systems: Digital Fabrication Seminar

When: Thursday, August 15 – 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. (ET)

Where: Accent Countertops, Murray, MA; More info TBA

NSI: Reducing Embodied Carbon with Natural Stone

When: Thursday, August 22 – 11:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. (ET)

Where: Online

Visit naturalstoneinstitute.org/calendar for more information.

NSI: Utah Study Tour—Know Your Business

When: Sunday, August 25 through Wed. August 28 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. (ET)

Where: Salt Lake City Area, TBA

Visit naturalstoneinstitute.org/calendar for more information.

NTCA: Tile Design Trends and Installation Regional Seminars

When: August 6, 3:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M.

Where: Louisville Tile, 1650 Howard Street, Elk Grove Village, IL 60007

When: August 8, 3:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M.

Where: Louisville Tile, 13200 10th Avenue N, Suite D, Minneapolis, MN 55441

When: August 15, 3:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M.

Where: Louisville Tile, 650 Melrose Avenue, Nashville, TN 37203

Visit NTCAtraining.com to register and for more information.

Other regional and online event opportunities are available through the industry association websites listed above.

How to Follow-Up Like a Pro

Growing revenue can only be achieved by three different methods:

1. Sell more units
2. Increase prices
3. Add on complementary products or services.

As a fabricator, typically the first place to start is more units. Most shops try to increase their SF output or increase the number of jobs they sell per week to increase ad spend.

In this article, I will focus on how to grow sales without having to generating more leads by simply converting more of

Steve McKenna

North Star Productions

the quotes you're already sending into more sales.

Clate Mask, author of my favorite book of 2024 called *Conquer the Chaos* says: "The fortune is in the follow-up."

I have seen this first hand, with my own eyes, and in my own business. Before having a defined sales process, we assumed our salespeople were following up — *because they said they were.*

When we implemented our CRM software and required our sales team to log activity (even send emails and text messages



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naturalstoneinstitute.org/accreditation

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

directly from the CRM), we suddenly realized how little follow-up was happening!

Never assume follow-up is happening. Define your follow-up process.

Did you know that:

- 80% of sales require an average of 5 follow ups.
- 48% of sales reps NEVER follow up.
- 44% of sales reps only follow up ONCE.
- And after 4 follow-ups, *94% of sales reps have given up.**

That is A LOT of potential sales that are not being closed AND just think of all the potential revenue being left on the table!

When you talk to your salespeople you might hear this:

- *"I don't want to be too pushy."*
- *"They said they would call me when they are ready."*
- *"I think I did a good job in the showroom and that speaks volumes, so I shouldn't have to follow up."*

- *"I can't follow-up with someone more than 6 times! I'll sound like a used car salesman! My customers will never put up with that amount of harassment!"*

If this sounds familiar, try this. In addition to your salesperson following up with the client, automate some touch points. Rather than relying all on human memory or manual tasks for each step, you can expect your close rates to improve and see benefits to your customer experience.

What happens when you automate some or all of the follow-up process:

1. You have the opportunity to provide additional value.
2. You're able to give more information you may have forgotten to discuss in a single face-to-face meeting.
3. It shows you care.
4. It makes you stand out from your competition.

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TRAINING & EDUCATION

Your Playbook for Effective Management

IN many respects, running a business is like playing an intense game of football. You have an ultimate goal – scoring a touchdown, or in business terms, achieving your profit target. But just like in football, you can't focus only on the end score; you need to know the yards to the next first down, the time left on the clock, and how well each play is executed. To truly excel in business, you need to monitor both your sales funnel metrics and operational metrics regularly. Here's a playbook to help you execute effectively with a structured, dynamic approach.

Implementing the Playbook

To make this work, real-time feedback is crucial. Just like a football team gets immediate feedback on the last play, your team needs real-time data to improve performance. Ensure data is updated daily – live data is even better. Multiple visual displays around the workplace can help keep everyone informed. Each display should show performance against the Throughput Dollar goal, but also focus on key metrics relevant to that area. For instance, the sales display might show how many new leads still need to be contacted and quote-to-order conversion rate, while the shop display focuses on template-to-install lead time and quality.

Trend analysis is another game-changer. Knowing your goal for showroom traffic is 20 people per day is useful, but seeing that you've been trending upward from 8 to 12 visits per day is even better. It shows that your new Facebook ad is working! Display how current statistics relate to both recent history and goals to make the data actionable.

Engage the Team

Ask your employees for feedback on how the displays and metrics are helping them. Are they seeing the right metrics? Do they know what to do if the metrics are unsatisfactory? Involving them in the process can do wonders for effectiveness and morale. It also helps to randomly quiz employees on statistics that are relevant to their jobs. If you consistently remember to 'inspect what you expect',

Ed Young

Fabricator's Business Coach

you will show everyone that these metrics are important.

The Daily Huddle

Start each day with a **Morning Stand-Up Meeting**. A quick 15-minute meeting with a set agenda to report status on the daily metrics below ensures everyone knows the day's priorities. Assign tasks to address issues promptly. Remember this is status reporting only. (Problem solving happens in a different venue.)

Sales Funnel Metrics

- **Lead Generation:** Count the number of new leads entering your funnel every day. This gives you a pulse on your marketing efforts.
- **Website and Social Media Stats:** Track daily visits and engagement. Are your online efforts drawing people in?
- **Showroom Traffic:** Keep tabs on the number of visitors to your showroom. It's a direct indicator of customer interest as well as how your ads are working.
- **Quote Volume:** Monitor the number of quotes generated daily. It's a direct measure of potential future sales.
- **Conversion Rate:** Track how many leads turn into customers. A high conversion rate indicates a strong sales process.

Operational Metrics

- **Capacity Booking:** See how many days of your capacity are already booked. When are your next open dates for Template and Install?
- **Buffer Zones:** Visually check buffer status three times a day. Quick checks ensure everything is running smoothly.
- **Daily \$T Score:** Review and post the previous day's Throughput Dollar score. This keeps everyone focused on performance.
- **Remakes and Callbacks:** Track the number of remakes and callbacks. Reducing these improves efficiency and customer satisfaction. Showing the



Involving everyone in the company in the metric monitoring process can do wonders for effectiveness and morale.

It's crucial to take the correct actions early enough to make a difference.

Operational Metrics

Trend all the daily Operational Metrics: Your Template-Fabricate-Install processes are where you create the value your customers pay you for. Poor performance here can negatively impact sales in

the future. Strong performance here helps increase sales.

None of us has unlimited capacity to solve problems. Analyzing the trends for your key operational metrics is the key to knowing which problems need to be addressed now and which can wait a bit. Tracking your Template-to-Install lead time and your quality trends tells you if you truly have control of the primary value-creating processes that make money for the business.

The Monthly Post-Game Review

Gather the management team once a month for a **deep dive into business performance**. This is where management analyzes the metrics and their trends to determine what's working and what isn't. This is the time to craft solutions to the problems documented in the data. Structured game plans for improving critical metrics should be developed. A clear understanding of the business objective along with roles and responsibilities is essential to successfully moving the needle.

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financial impact of mistakes and poor quality makes the metrics even more effective.

- **Safety score:** Tracking safety incidents isn't sufficient. If you truly want to improve safety for your employees, you should also track near misses. Combine this data with regular safety audits to form the basis for a solid safety culture.
- **Quality score:** Focusing on remakes is common. Adding the financial impact of quality issues strongly communicates the importance of eliminating them. When calculating the financial impact, don't forget to include the 'opportunity cost' – the money you could have made on another job if you didn't have to remake this one.

The Weekly Half Time Analysis

Hold **Weekly Review Meetings**. Review daily \$T performance for the month, forecast month-end P&L, and review the key metrics below with your management team. These reviews help you stay on track and make informed decisions. This is also the time to conduct problem solving. As you review trends for your metrics, it will become obvious where you need to focus your process improvement energies.

Sales Funnel Metrics

Trend all the daily Sales Funnel Metrics: Closely tracking your leading sales indicators of new leads, social media engagement, and showroom traffic will give you an early indicator for Quote Volume. Trending Quote Volume along with Conversion Rate will help you understand if sales are going to increase or decrease soon. This is your early warning system.

“The greatest evils in the world will not be carried out by men with guns, but by men in suits sitting behind desks.”

– C.S. Lewis

Playbook

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Finally, have a **Monthly Business Communication Meeting**. Update the entire company on the status of key business metrics. Openly discuss the challenges inherent in improving those metrics and listen to everyone's feedback. Recognizing positive behavior reinforces your cultural values. Celebrate victories to keep the energy flowing. Have some fun with this one, too. Hand out awards for 'best dressed' or 'most awesome hat' or anything else fun you can think of.

The Winning Formula

By following this structured, upbeat approach, you can free up a significant amount of your existing capacity, reduce lead times, and minimize chaos. However, the system alone won't deliver results – it's the people who make it work. Ensure your management team is capable and committed, and don't hesitate to bring in outsiders for fresh perspectives and tools. Remember, a winning team is always looking to improve, adapt, and celebrate its victories. Here's to your business scoring those touchdowns and celebrating many wins!

Your Business is running exactly the way you designed it to run. If you want to improve your business, reach out to a seasoned business owner and coach at Ed@FabricatorsCoach.com.

“They that can give up
essential liberty to
purchase a little
temporary safety,
deserve neither
liberty nor safety.”
– Benjamin Franklin

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Lean Malpractice: Prematurely Applying Single Piece Flow

Rick Phelps
Synchronous Solutions

For decades, Lean Manufacturing has had a huge presence in the manufacturing continuous improvement space, and for decades it has largely failed to deliver results to the bottom line of many businesses.

Lean's roots are largely linked to Toyota and their highly regarded Toyota Production System.

Yet, does Toyota do 'Lean'? No, not really. At least not as American companies try to do.

Toyota has applied the scientific method to their business, from top to bottom, and end to end. Every aspect of the Toyota system is set up as an on-going experiment from which to learn. The system ensures that countermeasures are taken to mitigate issues and problems as they are encountered.

Single Piece Flow is one of the primary targets of Lean.

Single piece flow is an ideal to be strived for – the ultimate end goal of a process that has eliminated variability.

Back in the 80s and 90s, Toyota production lines ran at 80+% capacity. Through relentless experimentation, application of countermeasures, and elimination of variability Toyota now manages even better performance. Awesome work, and a huge competitive advantage. But note: Toyota does not attempt to run their factories at actual capacity... Their system requires a small amount of unused capacity to absorb systemic variation.

Some fabricating shops have been sold a 'Lean' bill of goods and attempted to leap to single piece flow without doing the decades of work required to eliminate variability in their processes (and their businesses).

It is in the very nature of custom countertop manufacturing that one cannot eliminate a huge portion of the product variability faced day-to-day. This variability is accommodated by the deliberate maintenance of unassigned capacity. The CUSTOM nature of the products produced requires flexibility and uncommitted capacity. For this reason, implementing single-piece-flow in a custom

It is the very nature of countertop manufacturing that one cannot eliminate a huge portion of the product variability fabricators face day-to-day.

products environment can never yield the outcomes of the high-capacity utilization realized in repetitive manufacturing.

It is a mistake to think that one can skip the work, yet reap the results.

Synchronous Flow is the process used to manage the flow of manufacturing and steadily improve. It too has been around for decades, first broadly explained in the book *The Goal*, by Eli Goldratt, published in 1984.

Synchronous flow is the application of Goldratt's methods to manufacturing. It recognizes that every set of dependent processes has a weakest link (least capacity resource) – the clear Constraint of the system. Recognizing that weak link, it seeks to maximize the flow through that link (constraint), while taking into consideration the reality of variability.

In the same way that the weakest link in a chain defines the strength of the chain, the least capacity resource (constraint) defines the highest rate of flow through a system.

The process to manage flow is called **Drum-Buffer-Rope**, or DBR for short. DBR regulates the flow through the system at the Drumbeat of the Constraint, moving information or material through that Constraint at its maximum flow rate. BUFFER is the inventory of work positioned before the DRUM (Constraint) to make sure it never starves and can always produce at its optimum rate. The ROPE is the tie back from the DRUM to the release point, making sure flow into the system happens at the same rate it flows through the Constraint. This rope also minimizes inventory in the system driving down confusion and cost.

Let's look at a feature of DBR that should be VERY attractive to countertop fabricators. The LEAN system must run at only a percentage of the system's capacity to keep from entering a chaotic state, a state that naturally occurs due to the balanced nature of Lean system design. DBR is designed to run at the MAXIMUM rate of the Constraint and therefore, as said above, the maximum rate of the system, by design.

Now for the irony. DBR achieves a form of single piece flow. While there are a number of procedural differences, however, **DBR achieves the highest level of productivity without having the need for the insurance of unused capacity.**

If your company has implemented Lean in the fabrication shop and has not seen the benefit in the bottom line, or worse, jumped to single-piece-flow and put the production process into a chaotic state, don't worry; the investment in Lean has not been wasted.

Implementation of DBR will provide the "time and place" information for profitable use of the Lean tools. Synchronous Flow and DBR is a proven and effective way to focus your continuous improvement efforts in the parts of your business that truly matter – the parts that translate into more dollars on your bottom line.

If you want help to accelerate the learning process for your business, give us a call. Our Synchronous Flow Operating System is designed to make everyone in your business a successful business scientist, learning and improving every day. Contact us at www.synchronousolutions.com.

Rick Phelps – Synchronous Solutions

“We fight not to enslave,
but to set a country free,
and to make room
upon the earth for
honest men to live in.”
– Thomas Paine

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Unlocking Success: Customer Experience Strategy Essentials

While most companies are continuing to make investments in attracting and retaining customers, they aren't necessarily building a coherent customer strategy. However, in today's fast-paced and competitive landscape, providing a great customer experience can make all the difference in your business success. Based on a recent study by *Forbes*, 74% of consumers are at least "somewhat likely" to buy based on experiences alone. Because of this, customers won't be choosing a company simply based on product or price. Their choices will be based on their entire customer experience.

But providing a great customer experience doesn't happen by accident. The process takes planning and preparation to deliver a positive, meaningful experience across all touchpoints between your customers and your business. Implementing

Darlene Compagna
Direct Opinions

a customer experience strategy can provide your team with the structure it needs to consistently deliver high-quality experiences that help you stand out in your market and grow your business.

A McKinsey & Company report found businesses that implemented a company-wide customer experience program saw 15 to 20% increases in sales conversion rates, 20 to 50% declines in service costs, and 10 to 20% improvement in customer satisfaction. So, investing in providing a great customer experience is a guaranteed way to improve brand reputation, increase your bottom line and help streamline extra business costs.

Great customer experience is focused on ensuring all interactions and touchpoints with your business are easy, enjoyable, and

NTCA Announces New Course "Tile Design Trends and Installation"

The National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA) is excited to announce a new educational course titled "Tile Design Trends and Installation - What Every Industry Pro Should Know." This course will be hosted by Louisville Tile and will feature insights from Celebrity Designer Jennifer Farrell and NTCA Training Director Mark Heinlein, promises to equip industry professionals with the knowledge they need to meet evolving market demands.

Recognizing the challenges faced by manufacturers and distributors caught in the middle, this program seeks to facilitate early communication and collaboration between all stakeholders involved in the tile industry. "We are excited to partner with NTCA and Louisville Tile to launch this innovative program," said Farrell. "Our goal is to bridge the divide

between designers and installers by providing valuable insights into the latest design trends and essential installation techniques. By fostering communication and collaboration, we aim to enhance the overall quality and efficiency of tile projects."

Dates and Locations:

August 6, 2024

Louisville Tile, 1650 Howard Street, Elk Grove Village, IL 60007

August 8, 2024

Louisville Tile, 13200 10th Avenue N, Suite D, Minneapolis, MN 55441

August 15, 2024

Louisville Tile, 650 Melrose Avenue, Nashville, TN 37203

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How important is customer experience? A recent *Forbes* survey found that 74% of consumers are at least "somewhat likely" to buy based on experiences alone.

seamless. The customer experience strategy defines the actionable plans in place to deliver a positive, meaningful experience across all interactions. The strategy is integrated across the business, coordinating different functions of product delivery and services.

Here's how to create an effective customer experience strategy...

Define Your Customer Experience Vision

Your customer experience strategy flows from your brand strategy and incorporates the company's personality and values. It defines not just what your company will deliver to customers, but also when, where, how, and why. This vision should align with your brand promises used in sales and marketing messaging.

Evaluate Your Current State

Understand how your customers currently interact with your company and identify what's working and what's not. Make sure to include team members from all departments. This will ensure buy-in and alignment around the goal of improving the overall customer experience and strengthening relationships.

Determine Your Customers' Expectations...

Customer expectations are what people assume they will receive from your business. Gathering customer feedback will help you identify what your customers' expectations are, but also how you are performing against those expectations. Identifying, then proactively managing customer expectations helps you stay one step ahead. When customers know exactly what to expect from a company, it becomes easier for the business to deliver on its promises.

Fill in the Gaps to Create a Seamless Experience

Once you understand where the current customer experience falls short, you can start to develop and implement solutions to better meet customer expectations. The right solutions will depend on what is negatively impacting experiences. Once you know where to improve, you can train your staff accordingly.

Create a Customer Journey Map

A customer journey map outlines all the interactions between a customer and your business. Utilize customer feedback and work with your team to create a journey map. Brainstorm ideas to reduce friction and improve business processes to deliver an experience that exceeds customer expectations.

Develop Metrics for Monitoring Progress

Establish clearly defined metrics to measure performance and a framework within the company to manage opportunities for improvement. Such metrics might include timeliness to schedule an appointment, and response time to inquiries or bids. Customer experience metrics can be used to gauge the improvements you make over time.

Everything you do impacts your customers' perception of your business and their decision to buy from you or not. Your goal as a business owner should be to manage your customer experience strategy and work to continually improve it. This experience strategy development will keep the focus on the customer but will ultimately benefit your business. Positive experiences mean less friction with customers, a smoother operation and increased customer loyalty. It also aligns everyone on your team into a collective approach to delivering on your brand promises.

Consider these Customer Acceleration® tips that will help you make more money from your customers and make them happier in the process!

If you'd like some help to get started, please reach out to Darlene Compagna at dcampagna@directopinions.com or call 216-867-1165.

Just a Reminder

Not too long ago, a very old and dear friend of mine had a heart attack, a VERY severe heart attack. When the situation presented itself, he and his roommate did everything wrong. No one called 911. He just got dressed, put himself in the car and his roommate drove him to an urgent care facility.

The urgent care facility stabilized him, called for an ambulance and he was taken to an honest-to-gosh, real, bona fide, hospital where he was admitted and treated. He received an emergency stint in one of his heart blood vessels and later had a quadruple bypass.

Now, on the flip side: My son-in-law also had a heart attack, a VERY severe heart attack not too long ago, and to be honest, my daughter was on it. She loosened his tight clothing and got him into a comfortable position, sitting, leaning against the

Sharon Koehler Stone Industry Consultant

wall and she called 911. The 911 operator gave her instructions on the phone to help the situation until the ambulance arrived and took him straight to the hospital where they placed several stints, and he went home in just a few days.

Granted, every situation is different, but the point here is time. My son-in-law received help almost immediately and he ended up in much better shape than my friend that did everything wrong and ended up in much worse shape.

So, the question is: If you were working in someone's home or business, or even in your own shop, and an injury or medical emergency happened, would you know what to do to help?



Here are some tips from an EMT on how you can help in an emergency.

The most important advice he offered was that if you are unsure if it's an emergency, CALL 911. They are your best resource for help. That being said, not every situation is an emergency, but you can still help. Some situations you might encounter include:

Bleeding

Types: Minor cuts and grazes, to deep lacerations.

Response:

Minor cuts: Clean with water, apply an antiseptic, and cover with a sterile bandage.

Severe bleeding: Apply direct pressure to the wound using a clean cloth. Elevate the

injured part if possible. Seek emergency medical help immediately.

If a foreign object is embedded, *do not attempt to remove it*. Stabilize it and apply pressure around the wound. Seek emergency medical help immediately.

Burns

Types: First-degree (superficial), second-degree (partial thickness), and third-degree (full thickness).

Response:

Cool the burn with running cold water for at least 10 minutes.

Cover with a sterile, non-adhesive bandage or clean cloth.

Do not apply ice, butter, or ointments.

Always seek medical help for burns that are severe, cover large areas, or are on the face, hands, feet, or genitals.

Choking

Signs: Inability to speak, difficulty breathing, coughing, or high-pitched sounds.

Please turn to page 16



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TRAINING & EDUCATION

Your Shop is Slow – What Should You Do?

WE work with over 65 shops and we know the ups and downs of the market. It's slow one week, and busy the next. But a lot of markets across the US are slow right now. The problem we see is that more fabricators are spending money on ads and advertising, so the cost is going up for leads. A slow market plus more advertisers is not the best combination!

The natural reaction is to pull back at times like this. Don't market, cut spending, and just ride it out. If your overhead is high you might have to do that to survive the slow times. But at some point, you need to bring in more jobs. And once you have a flow (even if it's a slow one) with marketing, at least it's another source of jobs rather than builders, contractors, and word-of-mouth work.

I'm going to lay out a plan and the minimum you can spend to see some results. The issue I see often is that shops don't spend enough on marketing to actually make it work. \$300/mo on ads isn't going to get you far. Read on and I'll break it down for you.

Reviews On Google

This one is easy, GET MORE REVIEWS! It's free and will build over time. If you get 50 reviews tomorrow, you aren't going to see a flood of jobs come in but if you get a handful of reviews each month, Google will show your profile more and you will get more traction on Google Maps and in Google search. Don't worry, people still use Google search to find countertop shops! AI is not taking over search just yet, I think we have many years before that happens.

Facebook and Instagram Ads

Run ads for your shop. Promote something to catch people's attention. I usually recommend running social ads before Google ads. You can get more traction with less money. Yes, you will find the price shoppers and people not ready today, but you will also find some gold in there. I recommend spending about \$1000/mo here to start and you can stay at that budget if

Stephen Alberts
Countertop Marketing Co.



that's where you are comfortable. The problem is if it's not set up correctly, you will burn through that money. But \$1000 should yield 1-2 dozen leads, some foot traffic, and even some phone calls.

Google Ads

Google ads can bring you in direct leads plus help with foot traffic. The cost per lead is usually more costly but it's also usually a higher quality lead. A good budget here is \$1000-1500/mo. If the ads are set up properly you will show on Google Maps more which can really help boost foot traffic. **DON'T LET GOOGLE SET THESE UP FOR YOU!** Yes this is odd advice but I do not recommend having a "Google rep" help you set these up. The problem with Google ads are that it's very easy to set them up in a way that will spend your money quickly. Google will reach out to you and give you advice on how to setup the campaign. Facebook will do this as well. Both will give you advice so that the campaign spends more.

A CRM to Manage Your Marketing

Please, I beg you, get a CRM to manage your marketing. Hubspot, Pipedrive, or ours (STONE ENGAGE) will turn your marketing dollars into more revenue. I see this time and time again, we get shops leads and they don't properly follow up with the leads. Our CRM is awesome to manage the leads and very easy to use, but some shops fail with this as well. I say this all the time: if your competitor is literally running the same campaign you are, with the same offer, 9 times out of 10 you can still dominate them by simply following up with leads quickly and being consistent.

Something that goes along with the CRM is your sales staff and training. Make sure you have even a basic process in place for lead management and sales. At least one person should be handling the sales (not you as the owner) and there should be a backup. That person should be checking in on the CRM each day and looking for any new leads, replying to any missed messages, and then following up with potential leads in the pipeline. It's a never-ending process but you need to do this in order to grow your business, especially in the slow times.

If I had to pick an order of when to do this all I would say start with the Google reviews today! It's free. Then get a CRM and use it. And then Facebook ads, followed by Google ads. You need to make a return quickly and Facebook ads will help you get some jobs booked fast. It's important at some point, to have both Facebook and Google ads working for you. Just like the word of mouth and builder jobs, you need multiple sources of leads coming into the shop. Don't just rely on Facebook. Get that working, and then move on to the next. You'll eventually have a few streams of new leads so if one is slow, the other will be working for you.

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 follow up more with customers and close more countertop projects. To learn more visit <https://countertopmarketingco.com/>. You can also email Stephen at steve@countertopmarketingco.com.

TCNA Helps Investigate Ceramic Tile Dumping from India

The Tile Council of North America (TCNA) has announced that the United States International Trade Commission (USITC) unanimously determined a reasonable indication of material injury or threat of material injury to US tile manufacturers by reason of imports of ceramic tile from India.

Eric Astrachan, Executive Director of TCNA, stated, "We thank our members for their input and information conveyed to the Commission, and thank also the importers that provided information for their heartfelt recitation of their views, albeit sometimes at odds with those of the manufacturers. As the investigation moves forward, the Department of Commerce will continue its investigation of imports to better inform all parties of the extent of dumping and government subsidies taking place. As allowed by international law, tariffs level the playing field by offsetting otherwise injurious practices."

The Department of Commerce reports its preliminary countervailing duty determination will be due on or about July 15, 2024, and its preliminary antidumping duty determination due on or about September 26, 2024, unless the dates are extended due to the complexity of the matter. An extension of approximately 60 days to these dates is possible.

A public report, *Ceramic Tile from India*, will be available by June 28, 2024, with the views of the Commission and information developed during their investigations. The report may be accessed on the USITC website: https://www.usitc.gov/commission_publications_library.

"The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for, among old parchments, or musty records. They are written, as with a sun beam, in the whole volume of human nature, by the hand of the divinity itself; and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power." —*Alexander Hamilton*

Yellowstone Rock: Made by Volcanic Hot Springs

The Yellowstone supervolcano hasn't erupted lately, fortunately, but not too far below the ground, its persistent geothermal heat stokes iconic geysers, boiling mudpots, and colorful hot springs.

A body of magma resides about 3 miles below the surface of Yellowstone National Park. The hot rock warms the groundwater, which then travels upward along faults, dissolving minerals from the surrounding rock as it passes by. By the time the hot water emerges at the surface, it's laden with minerals.

Travertine is the most common type of stone made by hot springs. Calcium carbonate is dissolved from layers of limestone rock below, and carried upward. As the water flows out of the earth, it cools down and deposits the minerals. Over time, the flowing hot water leaves behind layer upon layer of newly-formed rock in the artistic pattern that makes travertine so treasured.

Tribal Ownership

Not far from the park's border in Montana, an extinct hot spring formed a

by **Karin Kirk**

*Infographic and Map by Karin Kirk
Photos Courtesy Yellowstone Rock*

substantial travertine deposit. It's been quarried from time to time over the past 100 years, but the quarry took on a renewed life in 2020 when the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians purchased the quarry.

Brian Adkins is a member of the Little Shell Tribe and the tribe's Economic Development Director. The quarry purchase has been an exciting development for the tribe. The 72-acre parcel contains an abundant supply of stone, and "It's ours," says Adkins. "Nobody can ever take it away."

Expanded Production — Growing Markets

Along with the Montana quarry, the Little Shell Tribe purchased a successful multi-generational, family-owned business with a fabrication shop and two travertine quarries. The fabrication shop is located in Idaho Falls, and the quarries are located in the Greater Yellowstone area.

This company, formerly known as Idaho Travertine, was owned by the Orchard

Continental Bluff Travertine
Idaho Falls, Idaho

Quarried by:
Yellowstone Rock

Products:
Slabs, tiles, blocks, custom fabrication, aggregate

Applications:
Building exteriors and interiors, monuments, custom-created art pieces

Colors:

- Continental Buff
- Ivory
- Yellowstone Frost
- Yellowstone Rose

Uniquely Yellowstone:

- Formed by the Yellowstone volcanic system.
- Owned by the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians.
- The largest quarry and fabricator of domestic travertine in the U.S.

American stones series



family for over 40 years. Several members of the family along with many of the employees continue to work at Yellowstone Rock, providing well over 100 years of combined experience working with travertine. Yellowstone Rock is the largest quarry and fabricator of domestic travertine in the United States. "It's a great thing for us," says Adkins.

[Please turn to page 12](#)



Frost travertine blocks ready for transport from the quarry to the fabrication shop in Idaho Falls.

Yellowstone Rock

Continued from page 11

The tribe has made investments in new saws from Italy which allow faster production from the quarries. “We’ve really gone all in,” explains Adkins, noting that new equipment “has definitely improved our quarrying techniques.”

The fabrication has also been transformed. A new 5-axis CNC saw allows for custom cutting, and a new multi-wire saw can cut multiple slabs at once, which has quadrupled the shop’s slab production rate. Once the slabs are cut, a calibrator is used to grind and flatten slabs so they can be finished to a consistent thickness, ranging from thin tiles to thick slabs. Polishing equipment from Italy completes the job. “The modern machines make so much difference,” says Adkins, noting that the work is far better, quicker, and more profitable than before.

The combination of new ownership, increased investment, and high-quality stone has Yellowstone Rock poised for growth. “The outlook is really good,” says Adkins.

Harmonious Colors and Finishes

Four different colors are quarried: Ivory, Yellowstone Frost, Continental Buff, and Yellowstone Rose. The color palette ranges from near-white to creamy beige, warm light grey, and even a hint of pink. The colors are easygoing – they blend harmoniously with each other and with just about any architectural style.



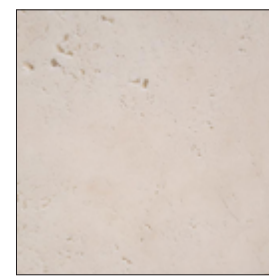
**Continental Buff—
Cleft Cut**



**Continental Buff—
Honed, Vein Cut**



**Cont. Buff—Sandblasted
Vein Cut, Unfilled**



**Frost—Honed, Unfilled,
Cross Cut**



Frost—Unfilled, Vein Cut



Yellowstone Rock quarries supply the highest-quality American travertine.

The stone can be cut perpendicular to the layering, known as “vein cut,” to reveal travertine’s signature intricate texture and small, slightly wavy layers. Cutting parallel to the layering (“cross cut”) produces a flowing texture with organic, curving patterns.

The material is less porous than a typical “holey” travertine, so it needs less filling and has a smoother look and higher

density. Recent testing by the Natural Stone Institute shows the stone is suited to indoor or outdoor applications, even in cold climates.

Expanded fabrication capabilities allow for a variety of surface textures ranging from a satiny smooth polish, to a touchably-textured leathered finish, to natural cleft surface.

Italian Esthetic—American Origins

The company’s most popular stone is Continental Buff vein-cut, which is similar to the Italian Navona travertine but all the

better because it comes from right here in the United States. Yellowstone Frost is an ethereal shade of white, with flowing patterns reminiscent of marble.

Travertine from Yellowstone Rock travels from the Northern Rockies to all corners of the U.S. The stone has found its way to metropolitan areas like Seattle, Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, and Dallas, and of course it’s equally at home near its native environment in buildings across Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming.

Continental Buff has been used for several notable projects such as the Idaho Supreme Court building, Renaissance Atlanta Waverly Hotel, and the Potter County Courthouse in Amarillo, Texas.

American Stone “A Big Draw”

Justin Lindblad is the Director of Sales for Yellowstone Rock. He notes that the response to the stone has been strongly positive, especially because it comes from the U.S. “The response has been remarkable,” he says, citing advantages like LEED benefits, cheaper shipping costs, short lead times, and easy access to visit the quarries firsthand.

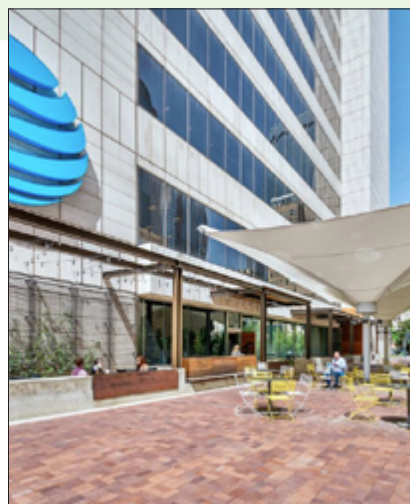
“To have a domestic travertine product that rivals the Italian travertines has been a big draw,” he says, “that the material is quarried right outside Yellowstone National Park amplifies the interest.

“I think the biggest challenge so far has just been educating people that a domestic source for travertine exists,” he says. Lindblad is optimistic that as the company gets its message out about its stone and its capabilities, they are ready to accommodate projects large and small.

Adkins concurs, and is eagerly anticipating the next wave of improvements, increased production, and new capabilities, “We’re so dang excited,” he says, “we can hardly wait.”



Left: Yellowstone Rock’s multi-wire saw can cut multiple slabs at once, which has quadrupled the shop’s slab production rate. Below: The AT&T Building in Dallas features a façade of Frost vein-cut travertine.



The Potter County Court Building, Amarillo, Texas features a façade of Continental Buff vein-cut travertine.

Tile Design Trends and Installation

Continued from page 8

Each course will run from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and is a must-attend for anyone involved in the tile industry, including designers, installers, architects, specifiers, builders, remodelers, general contractors, manufacturers, and distributors. Attendees will leave with a deeper understanding of how to seamlessly integrate the latest tile trends into their projects while ensuring top-quality installation standards.

“This program is the culmination of a concept that has been in the works for several years,” expressed Bettiga. “Thanks to the support of Louisville Tile, we are thrilled to bring this vision to life and provide valuable educational opportunities for industry professionals.”

Attendees can expect informative sessions, hands-on demonstrations, and networking opportunities aimed at enhancing their skills and knowledge in tile design and installation.

For more information about the Tile Design Trends and Installation Techniques program, including event dates and registration details, please visit NTCAtraining.com.

Established in 1947, the National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA) is a nonprofit trade association dedicated to the professional installation of ceramic tile and natural stone. It is widely recognized as the largest and most respected tile contractors' association in the world. For those seeking to improve their tile business, NTCA provides unparalleled educational experiences, supportive peer interaction, unique cost-savings programs, and a commitment to help develop the skills needed to improve your work, recruit, train, and manage your employees, and ultimately, make your business more profitable. Find out more at www.tile-assn.com.

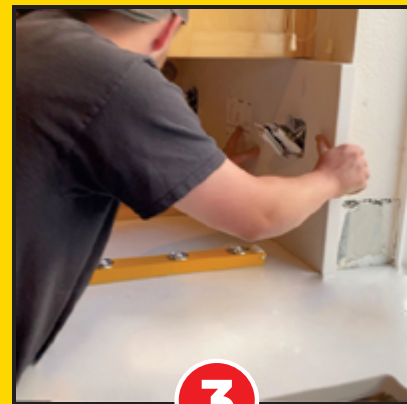
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“Men invent new ideals because they dare not attempt old ideals. They look forward with enthusiasm, because they are afraid to look back.”

— G.K. Chesterton

The Stone Detective

The Case of The Talking Floor

IF only the stone and tile I have inspected over the years could talk. Well, today's case will prove that, in fact, floors can talk.

It all started when I entered the diner. Flo had this smug look on her face like she could detect a crack in a tile floor quicker than a magnifying glass over a forgery. Rather than confront her, I just smiled and motioned for my usual cup of joe. She poured while keeping that smirk on her face. I was about to ask her what was up when my phone rang. I stepped outside to answer, and the voice on the other end sounded desperate. She had a tremble in her tone that echoed across the receiver like a hollow tile floor under heavy footsteps. Little did I know that I'd be taking on a case that would be one of the more

Dr. Frederick M. Hueston, PhD

interesting puzzles I've handled recently.

The caller described a marble tile floor in an old house that she just moved into. She said that the floor seemed to be making these noises as if it was talking to her. Now, this sparked my interest. Was I about to get involved with a haunted house or perhaps my first haunted floor?

I was about to ask her what the floor was saying when she said I would have to hear it for myself. She asked if I could come out right away and take a look and listen. Like a tile layer with a busted trowel, I muttered that I'd be ready once I shoveled down my breakfast.

I finished my breakfast, tipped my fedora to Flo, who still had that look on her face and headed out the door. As I drove to this

dame's house I couldn't help but feel a little excited about possibly seeing—or should I say hearing—my first talking floor. Perhaps it was all a hoax and someone was playing a trick on her. But I had to find out for myself.

I pulled up into this long drive. The place reminded me of the house on the hill in that Alfred Hitchcock movie, *Psycho*. *Hopefully I will survive this inspection, I thought. But I'm leaving if she asks me to inspect the shower!*

The lady was waiting for me on the old front porch. I kid you not, she looked like Natasha from the Addams family. Now this was getting creepy. I introduced myself and she asked me to follow her in the house.

The main foyer had your typical white and black checkerboard tile pattern. There was a dusty chandelier hanging from the ceiling. The tile was dull as if it hadn't been



polished in years. I started to walk across the floor and discovered that stepping on those tiles was like tap-dancing on a ghost's xylophone. I have never heard that hollow sound from a floor tile in all my years in this business. I took out my trusty tile detector (golf ball) to do some testing.

Please turn to page 15

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The Stone Detective

Continued from page 14

I continued to walk across the floor tapping every few feet with my golf ball. The sound was echoing and did sound like it was talking to me. It was clear the floor was hollow and probably not bonded well, but why did it have this weird sound? I had to find out.

I looked up at Natasha and asked if there was a basement. Yes, indeed, there was, she informed me. I reluctantly asked if I could go into the basement, hoping it didn't include some kind of a torture chamber.

She led me down a flight of rickety stairs that I was afraid would collapse with each step. We reached the bottom and I looked up and saw what was causing this unusual hollow sound.

The ceiling sported a covering of metal roofing panels, the kind you'd find adorning the rooftop of a rundown garden shed. It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out where that eerie echo originated.

I leveled my gaze at Natasha and informed her that the sole solution to silence her chatty floor was to strip away those metal panels. Another mystery cracked wide open, teaching me a valuable lesson: in this town, even the floors have a story to tell.

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.

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Just a Reminder

Continued from page 9

Response:

For adults and children over one year: If you know the Heimlich maneuver— do it. Essentially, you stand behind the person, place your fist above their navel, and giving quick, upward thrusts.

For infants under one year: Place the infant face-down on your forearm, support their head, and give up to five back slaps followed by five chest thrusts.

Another first aid relief for choking is to use one of the suction masks on the market these days under a variety of names. They supposedly work on babies and adults, depending on the one you purchase.

Fractures and Sprains

Signs: Swelling, pain, inability to move the limb, or deformity.

Response:

Don't move the injured part. Immobilize it using a splint or sling.

Apply ice packs to reduce swelling.

Elevate the injured part if possible. Seek medical help for suspected fractures.

Nosebleeds

While not usually life-threatening, nosebleeds are pretty common, and have a variety of causes.

Response:

Have the person sit upright and lean forward slightly. Pinch the soft part of the nose and keep pressure for about 10 minutes. Avoid lying down or tilting the head backward.

Fainting

If someone faints, lay them on their back and elevate their legs to improve blood flow to the brain. Check for responsiveness and breathing. If the person doesn't regain consciousness quickly, seek medical help.

Poisoning

Find the source of the poison and remove it if possible. Identifying the poison could be important information for treatment. Do not induce vomiting unless instructed by a professional. Contact emergency services or a poison control center at once.

Seizures

Protect the person from injury by moving harmful objects away. Do not restrain the person or put anything in their mouth. After the seizure ends, place them in the recovery position (move them onto their side and tilt their head back –putting them in this position with their head back helps keep their airway open). Watch their breathing, and seek medical help.

Drug Overdose

Call 911 immediately. Stay with the person. If naloxone (Narcan) is available and you've been trained to use it, do so. If it's available and you haven't been trained, let the 911 operator know you have it and ask for instructions.

Heart Attack

Signs: Chest pain or discomfort, pain in other areas such as shoulder, jaw, arm, back or neck, shortness of breath, and sometimes slurred speech or difficulty speaking.

Response:

Anyone who suspects they or someone they are with is having a heart attack should act fast by taking the following steps:

- First and foremost, call 911...
- Give the person an aspirin.
- Ask if they have any prescribed chest pain medication, like Nitroglycerin tablets. If so, let 911 know so they can advise you.
- Loosen tight clothing.
- Open the door so emergency personnel can enter quickly.
- Get the person resting in a comfortable position and wait for the ambulance to arrive.

You don't have to be a doctor to help someone in trouble. You just need to remain calm, fall back on basic first aid measures, and if there is any doubt call 911. Summer is the season with the most reported accidents and medical emergencies and that's where we are folks: Accident Prime-Time.

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

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Stone Restoration and Maintenance Corner

Accessories are Essential

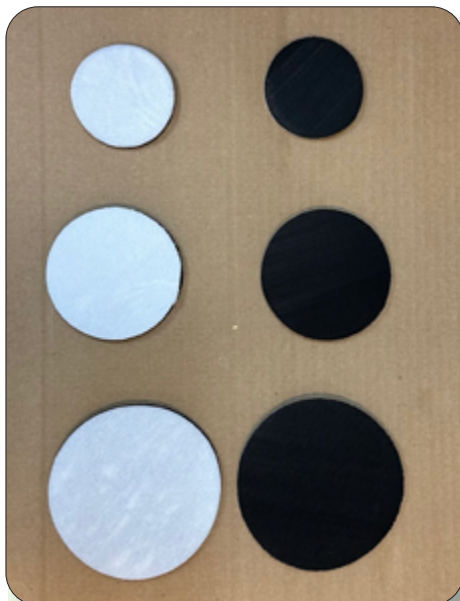
WE use many types of tools and equipment in the stone restoration and maintenance industry. From diamond tooling to masking materials, drive plates, adhesives, chemicals, and more, we need to be able to utilize these products to assist us with our restoration projects. I categorize most consumables in the accessories column but also some products like some specialty products, like adhesives.

I do not categorize diamond tooling as an accessory, but the drive plates necessary to run the tooling, I do. For use on a hand tool, we offer the BP-05 (5-inch Velcro-type driver) drive plate for using 5 inch diamonds, like the AA5-Turbo Resins, DICP5 Premium Flexible resins, ELF5-Flexible Metals, and other Velcro-backed diamonds. The BP-05 is threaded for a standard 5/8"-11 spindle. This particular drive plate has some flexibility, but there are others that are more rigid, for where that may be required. These Velcro pad drivers are available in 3, 4, 5, and 7 inch sizes for hand tool operations.

There are also hand tool-specific drive plates for running pads like the PLP07 diamond impregnated pads, Combo pads for polishing with 5X, MPC, 10X, XXX, or other polishing products. This pad driver is the BP-Hook-7 which is designed with special hooks to hold non-woven and similar pads. Tech tip: use a Combo or natural pad to drive steel wool pads when using Crystallizer.

For floor equipment, we offer a variety of accessories for utilizing diamond tooling, polishing with pads, and other options. The BP-17 is a Velcro-type drive plate for using Velcro-backed diamonds like the TX Triple Thick resins, DICP3 Premium Flexible resins, TYP Typhoon resins, and many other sizes and types of abrasives. This drive plate is available in 13, 17, and 20-inch sizes. Other sizes may be available, too. When utilizing steel wool pads, the same method applies here: use a Combo or similar pad to drive the steel wool. These Velcro drivers are mostly for diamond tooling but you can run a pad, as well. A true pad driver, designed specifically for pads, is more spiked and not the best option for running diamonds. All of our drivers have a shower feed for water or solution delivery.

Bob Murrell
M3 Technologies
Photos by Bob Murrell



Spacers (both front & back) in 3, 4, and 5 inch sizes add a cushion effect when running diamond discs.

This is essential as most all the operations in the stone restoration industry are done wet.

A good scrub brush is an essential accessory, especially for working on textured surfaces. Stones such as slate, sandstone, flagging, and other textured materials can many times be successfully cleaned using a brush and the appropriate chemical. There are many types of scrub brushes to choose from. There are nylon (some of the best), polypropylene, Tampico, and other fibers available. There are also brushes with grit



Red tape, blue tape, 24 and 48 inch wide Tape & Drape – essentials needed for almost every restoration job.



Essential Accessories: Pad drivers in a range of sizes, and replacement Velcro for in-the-field repairs.

(usually silicon carbide or aluminum oxide, but there are other abrasives, too) that have been glued to the fibers or strands. These are available in grits from around 40 grit to upwards of 500 grit. When it comes to cleaning grout, a cylindrical brush machine can do a very good job. Brushes are not cheap, so please consult with your supplier before ordering, to make sure you get the brush you need.

One of the most used accessories is the Tape & Drape masking product. This accessory is used on most every interior restoration project and even some exterior projects. The Tape & Drape we offer comes in two size rolls: 24 inch and 48 inch wide. Twenty-four inch is usually sufficient for masking walls and 48 inch is perfect for protecting kitchen cabinets. Both the 24 inch rolls and the 48 inch rolls are 75 feet long and have blue painter's tape on one edge. This makes masking off areas much faster and neater. I suggest keeping a

good pair of scissors for cutting the Tape & Drape, as well any other masking materials.

Our M3 Red Poly Tape is a polyvinyl material that is water-resistant and is also used to mask off areas. It is especially useful for making water dams on countertop edges. I also use the Red Tape to help feather grits when grinding, honing, and or polishing.

[Please turn to page 18](#)

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"There are conflicting reports, so we're going with the most lurid and try to grab some ratings."

Stone Restoration Corner



Continued from page 17

M3 Technologies also sells replacement Velcro for when the Velcro on your BP-17 floor machine drive plate wears out, and it will wear out. It comes 4 inches wide with both the female and male pieces, and is sold by the yard. We also have 17 x 17 inch and 20 x 20 inch squares for replacing the full-face Velcro on the drive plates. You will need fresh razor blades and good water-resistant adhesive to help with this R&R.

Spacers are another accessory that I recommend keeping a good stock of. These come in 3, 4 and 5-inch sizes and are used for providing additional cushioning for your diamond discs. They will extend the life of both the Velcro on your drive plate and the Velcro on your diamond discs. They can help your diamonds to follow the contours and irregularities of the floor better. Because they raise the machine a little higher (about 1/4 inch), the splatter from

Look at all those accessories! Foam partition walls, Tape & Drape, gloves, spray bottles, oh my.

honing will go a little higher on the wall and further out, so masking sensitive adjacent areas (walls and baseboards, etc.) is definitely required.

A splash guard for your floor machine is certainly a must-have accessory, especially when running diamond discs of any type. These do break and wear out eventually, so take good care of them. Reinforce the thin area at the back with Red Tape to help avoid premature breakage. Keep the splash guard clean and be careful with the Velcro. Always keep some type of Super Glue handy, for in-the-field repairs, on these type items and for Velcro repair, too.

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.

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—Martin Luther

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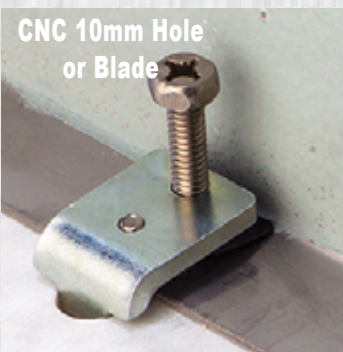
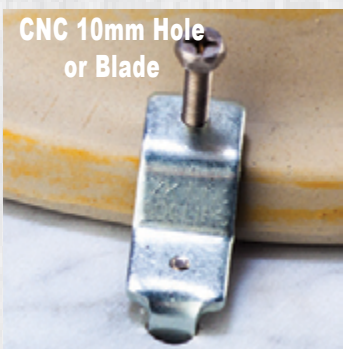
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Call for Entries
2024 ISFA
Awards



The International Surface Fabricators Association (ISFA) opened its annual awards program, the ISFA Awards, on June 1, 2024. The program honors excellence in application design, fabrication and installation of projects using surfacing materials across seven categories. **The deadline for submissions is July 31, 2024.**

The ISFA Awards are open to all ISFA fabricator members representing successful applications. Associate members may submit entries or nominate ISFA fabricators for consideration. There is no cost to enter.

Project submissions must have been completed within the previous two calendar years prior to the entry deadline and comply with all association standards and award category requirements. Entries for consideration in multiple categories are accepted and encouraged, given they meet the criteria.

"Fabricators founded our association to provide growth opportunities for surfacing industry professionals," said Marissa Bankert, executive director of ISFA. "The ISFA Awards program is designed to create awareness around the wide array of innovative surfacing materials on the market today, but above all, it's a platform for our fabricator members to gain recognition and elevate their businesses by showcasing the outstanding work they do every day."

Winners will be announced at the 2024 ISFA Annual Conference, which will take place November 6-8, 2024, in Miami. Entrants should submit their projects with the expectation of attending.

[Please turn to page 22](#)

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2024

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FRIDAY, JUNE 28, 2024

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FRIDAY, JULY 26, 2024

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Granquartz Stone Cycler for Sale – Selling for \$16K. Machine was purchased in 2014. Works perfect. Comes with several shapes of dies. Paid over \$25K originally. Rochester Hills – You Pick Up. Phone: 248-564-2148; Email: lauren@earthstonesgroup.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@delorenzomarmble.com.

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Call for Entries 2024 ISFA Awards

Continued from page 19

Five of the awards are project-based. The categories are as follows:

- **Commercial Excellence in Projects Under \$100K**
- **Commercial Excellence in Projects Over \$100K**
- **Residential Excellence in Projects Under \$20K**
- **Residential Excellence in Projects Over \$20K**
- **Sustainable Project of the Year**



2023 Fabricator of the Year Eastern Surfaces Owner Brian Rocca (R) with ISFA President Austin Maxwell

Projects submitted must be completed using surfacing materials that meet the ISFA minimum standard. In addition, the project must exemplify excellence in all methods of the fabrication process, including safety, training and the use of technology. In recognition of his outstanding service and support, Woody was honored with the Dan Hecox Service Award by the Ceramic Tile Education Foundation in 2021. This award celebrates his financial and volunteer contributions to the organization, underscoring his dedication to advancing tile education and training.

Additionally, two awards are given to individuals or companies that excel in the industry:

The Fabricator of the Year Award recognizes an individual or a fabricator member organization that best exemplifies

excellence in business using the ISFA ideals of quality, innovation, character and service to the association and the surfacing industry. Self-nominations are accepted, or members can nominate a deserving fabricator.

The ISFA Hall of Fame Award recognizes an individual who has, during their career, made significant contributions to the surfacing industry and demonstrated leadership and a commitment to the association's ideals. Self-nominations are accepted, or members can nominate a deserving fabricator.

An independent panel of industry professionals will select the winners for the five project-based awards. The Fabricator of the Year and the ISFA Hall of Fame submissions will be narrowed to two finalists in a vote by the association's board of directors. The general membership will then choose the winners by a vote in August.

Winners will receive:

- Complimentary registration for the ISFA Annual Conference, where they will be honored with a ceremony.
- A personalized award for display at company headquarters or office.
- A feature story on ISFAnow.org and other promotional channels, including social media and newsletters.
- A feature story in *Countertops & Architectural Surfaces* magazine with additional coverage in leading industry news outlets and media partners as a result of the association's official press release.
- Official digital assets for self-promotion, including award-winner logos and more for use on winners' social media channels, websites and other marketing materials.

Previously, the ISFA Award categories were based on applications using specific materials, but the program has been iterated this year to broaden the categories to create additional opportunities for project submissions.

For complete details about the ISFA Awards and to submit an entry, visit www.ISFAnow.org/ISFA-awards.

How to Follow-Up Like a Pro

Continued from page 5

5. It reinforces your reputation as an expert by providing all this free information!
6. It improves the customer experience.

To be clear, when I use the term *follow-up*, I don't mean every contact should be an email, phone call or text message asking if the customer is ready to buy yet!

This is simply a touch-point and an opportunity to provide value to the customer.

Here's some sample email subjects that you can easily automate to send to your customer:

1. Warranty information about a product that they've been quoted on.
2. Common FAQs.
3. What to expect in our process - from time of purchase to time of installation, here's an overview of how we complete the work.
4. Design inspirations for 2024.
5. Product information about the material they are interested in.
6. Meet the team: take an opportunity to introduce your management team, your templater, your fabrication team, your installers, your shop dog, and anyone else who's involved and around the process.

7. Care guides for granite, quartz, porcelain, and other items you sell.
8. Recent projects you've completed that you want to highlight.
9. Community engagement projects your company is involved in, such as sponsorships, events you've attended, or volunteer efforts your team has made. ... and so on.

As you can see, the opportunities to provide value are endless!

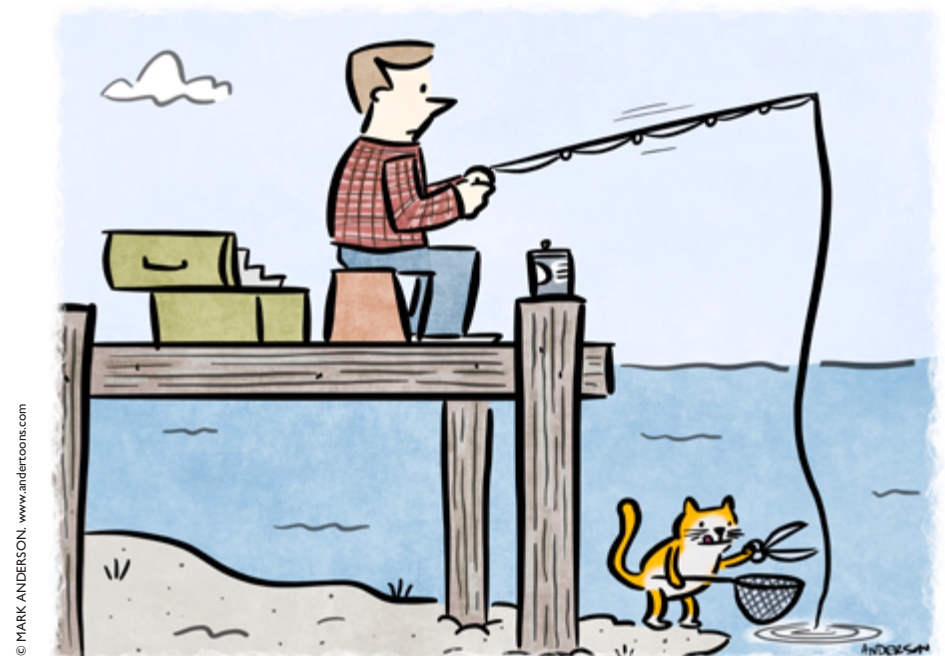
Automating these messages can help nurture the relationship and keep the client engaged. You can send out emails daily, every other day, or 2-3 times a week, whatever you decide is the right frequency. Test and observe the results; there is no perfect answer to how you deliver them.

I suggest on every 2-3 emails, you can include a link to a calendar that says: If you're ready to book your project, make an appointment here, and let's get your kitchen transformation started!

Finally, I recommend taking the time to write these emails in your own voice, add your own quirks and include any local references that you can think might be relevant. The more that you can make the communication feel authentic (it should truly be authentic, not just templated) and personalized, the better the engagement will be.

Steve McKenna is CEO of North Star Productions.

* Source: ircsalessolutions.com/insights/sales-follow-up-statistics/



Preventing Silicosis Conference Held at UCLA

For over 20 years the NSI board of directors and safety committee have invested vast resources to support silica training and industry advocacy for silicosis awareness and prevention. That commitment has been especially evident in the past sixteen months as countless hours have been spent both supporting the fabrication community impacted by regulatory pressures and defending natural stone.

California is at the center of attention in the United States, with confirmed silicosis cases among countertop workers now exceeding 140. While deaths are also slowly increasing, nearly twenty workers have received lung transplants. Only 13% of the silicosis cases reported involved employees with access to health insurance or workers compensation coverage. The plight of these workers is magnified in that they often have few options to seek employment at compliant fabrication facilities who meet legal business requirements

Photos(2) courtesy Natural Stone Institute



From left: NSI members Dolan Williams (B&W Compliance), Ted Sherritt (FloForm), and Nate Kolenski (Block Tops) join Cal/OSHA's Michael Wilson and Jim Hieb during the event.

and provide an emphasis on employee safety.

In May, I joined several NSI members to attend a Preventing Silicosis conference hosted on the campus of the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). The event was the brainchild of Dr. Robert Harrison, a Public Health Medical Officer with the California Department of Public Health

Jim Hieb Natural Stone Institute

(CDPH). He has peer reviewed several scientific articles on silicosis and personally invested time to bring industry to the table with other stakeholders involved. "Dr. Bob," as he is known, has become a resource for NSI staff to help build relationships within both public health and Cal/OSHA.

The attendees at this event represented a broad cross-section of stakeholders, including public health officials, Cal/OSHA workers, the medical community, fabricators and distributors, and industry trade associations. Media and trial lawyers were also in attendance, along with key personnel from the Yale School of Medicine, who have been contracted by NSI and ISFA to help with industry data collection and guidance.

NSI and ISFA participated in two panel



UCLA Conference on Preventing Silicosis: NSI participates in a panel discussion to share insights from the natural stone industry.

What do we want to see happen to reduce/eliminate silicosis?

What are the strategies discussed during the full-day conference which may improve the situation?

What structural barriers will need to be addressed?

UCLA will produce a report in early summer with the collective feedback gathered.

Why was it important for NSI to participate in this event?

Educating key stakeholders. This event allowed us the opportunity to share insight into the industry and training resources that are available. It also provided the opportunity to show the public health community that most of the industry is committed to employee safety and safe work practice that can help prevent silicosis. Many in the public health community only know the companies who are utilizing dry methods with minimal engineering controls, so our involvement with the conference is a continuation of advocacy and educational work and proof of effective proactive efforts being done by industry.

Making introductions. While NSI has several friendly relationships with Cal/OSHA, connecting the certified industrial hygienist and pulmonary medical experts on the Yale team with Cal/OSHA has led to several new discussions that would not have been possible without these introductions.

Support from Cal/OSHA to:

- Engage in broader discussions about the new Air Exposure Monitoring Guidance document recently published by Yale/NSI/ISFA.
- Address problems which existed in exposure data utilized by government officials when they implemented the Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) in December 2023.
- Consider specific amendments to the ETS and draft permanent language.
- Discuss the stone silica thresholds (10% for natural stone) which were selected arbitrarily.
- Consider an alliance program for NSI to assist training federal and Cal/OSHA officials about various aspects of the industry.

Building relationships with leading California officials. We must never underestimate the importance of meeting people face-to-face! Those in-person meetings often lead to better virtual discussions and help everyone better appreciate that industry's concern for employee safety is equal to those within the public health industry who are on the front lines with impacted employees.

The silica discussion will continue. We should all be proud that our industry is at the discussion table.

My very best!

– **Jim Hieb**
CEO/ Executive Director
Natural Stone Institute

My Fourth of July Food Fight is Always a Tasty Success

Happens every Fourth of July, as regular as parades, speeches, flag-waving and fireworks. It starts when my brain goes on a rampage: “Oh, c’mon, man! Don’t tell me you’re thinking about this nauseating nonsense again!”

My stomach fires back: “But it’s the Fourth of July!”

Brain: “Doesn’t matter. Anything made out of bottom-of-the-barrel meat scraps and saturated with preservatives, nitrates, sodium, unpronounceable chemicals and heaven-only-knows-what-else can’t be good for you.”

Stomach: “Whoa! Are you un-American?”

Brain: “Not in the least. I just think you should exercise more prudence.”

Stomach: “My prudence evaporated with the first whiff of glowing charcoal.”

Brain: “B-b-b-but ...”

Stomach: “It’s not like this is the end of the world, pal. Besides, can millions of people be wrong?”

Brain: “Well, maybe an exception in the name of patriotism might be permitted.”

Stomach: “Mmmm! Can’t you just taste it now?”

Brain: “(Sigh), you win.”

Stomach: “That’s the spirit! You want mustard, chili, relish and slaw?”

Brain: “OK, but don’t you dare touch that ketchup bottle! Otherwise, the deal is off, and I’m swearing renewed allegiance to tofu.”

That’s how my brain and my stomach celebrate Independence Day every year: with a hot dog. After our initial exchange of unpleasanties, it becomes a mutually enjoyable experience.

Shhh! Don’t tell anyone in charge of my medical records, but last year my brain and my stomach actually shared hot dog(s), as in plural. Three, to the best of collective memories. If the National Hot Dog and Sausage Council is correct, other brain-stomach partnerships from sea to shining sea accounted for roughly 149,999,997 more.

Yep, 150 million is the estimated number of tube steaks Americans consume on the Fourth. If you can’t imagine what 150 million hot dogs look like, the Washington-based NHDSC says that’s enough to stretch from D.C. to Los Angeles.

Sam Venable
Department of Irony



Five times.

Which makes me wonder (a) if antacid medications also show a July sales spike and (b) has anyone ever considered that five layers of hot dogs might make a better highway surface than asphalt? When you’re doped on dogs, you think all manner of weird thoughts.

Life is full of guilty pleasures, and hot dogs rank high on my list. I know they’re not the healthiest dietary option. And I dang-sure know I don’t want to watch ’em being made. The thought of sitting ringside when meat puree morphs into a hot dog constitutes culinary TMI.

But all is forgiven when one of these savory Jezebels, tenderly tucked in a soft, steamed bun, starts calling my name. Oh, and it all but goes without saying that since it’s the duty of every American to eat hot dogs on Independence Day, it’s also required that leftovers be treated in like manner. So if you’ll pardon my brain and my stomach, they shall tackle this tasty chore like dear old friends.

Happy Fourth feasting!

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.

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Croatia's Mercedes Monument Honors Emigrants



Ivan Topic (right) and sculpture student Fran Marko Vlahinic next to their creation of a life-sized classic Mercedes.

Like a mini Mount Rushmore, a vintage Mercedes is emerging from a pile of limestone boulders on the edge of a small Croatian town.

The life-sized sculpture is a homage to thousands of emigrants who proudly returned home from Germany at the wheel of the ultimate status symbol.

Like many poorer areas across south-east Europe and Turkey, Imotski sent thousands of its sons and daughters to work in Germany as “gastarbeiters” or guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s.

And those that returned home driving a Mercedes-Benz were seen as having made it.

“It was a symbol of success, anyone who had one could have his pick of girlfriends, sit in the front row in church,” said Ivan Topic, who worked in construction in

Frankfurt for 18 years before returning to Imotski in 1997.

Topic came up with the idea for the monument, arguing that the rugged endurance of the ageless “Minika” – as the classic 1960s W115 saloon is called here – mirrors the qualities of the rocky region’s people.

“That car was way ahead of its time, and it’s modern even today,” he told AFP as he helped workers put the final touches to the statue in local white karst stone.

The people of Imotski remain huge fans of the brand. Half of the area’s 16,000 registered vehicles are Mercedes.

As well as being a synonym of success, Mercedes-Benz has become deeply embedded in the identity of the region and its people, said Mislav Rebic, who came up with the design.

The poor agricultural area close to Bosnian border had been marked by emigration for decades, something that continues even today.

In the 1970s nearly a fifth of Imotski’s population was working abroad with some 9,000 living in Germany alone.

“They left looking to work to buy a cow, a bicycle,” Topic told AFP. But as the area’s road network developed, they brought back cars.

“They would buy a Mercedes, drive it back home and leave it as an inheritance.

“Mercedes is something we bought and left to our children and they will leave it to theirs,” he said.

Given the cult of the Merc, Topic said it was obvious to him that a statue of the iconic model would be the perfect show of gratitude for the sacrifices the region’s migrants made.

He knows a thing or two about the cars. He owns several himself, including a 1929 model, and heads the Imotski Mercedes Club, which has an impressive 230 members.

‘You’ve Made It’

But initially not everyone shared his enthusiasm and it took several years for the idea to build up speed.

However, as soon as work started, interest in the unusual monument quickly spread, even beyond Croatia’s borders.

In February, several young sculptors from Croatia, Denmark and Slovenia came to work for a week on the monument.

Nediljko Djuka, a returnee from Australia, hailed the statue.

“Mercedes symbolises safety and our people, who emerged from this (karst) stone,” he said.

Stipan Busic, who helped with the monument, said there is nothing else like it anywhere in the world.

“Here a Mercedes means everything. When you buy one, you can be at peace – ‘You’ve made it!’” said Busic, who has three himself.

Pinball Wizard

The owner of an Ohio arcade was surprised with a Guinness World Record when his daughter secretly counted his collection of 1,041 pinball machines.

Rob Berk, owner of Past Times Arcade in Girard, received confirmation that he holds the world’s largest collection of pinball machines after his daughter, Reilly Berk, applied for the record in secret.

Reilly Berk enlisted the help of Past Times Arcade employees to catalog the machines, as not all of them were out on the arcade floor.

“They basically built this contraption where they would open up the game, slide these four legs on it, take the picture, and take them off,” Reilly Berk told WKBN-TV.

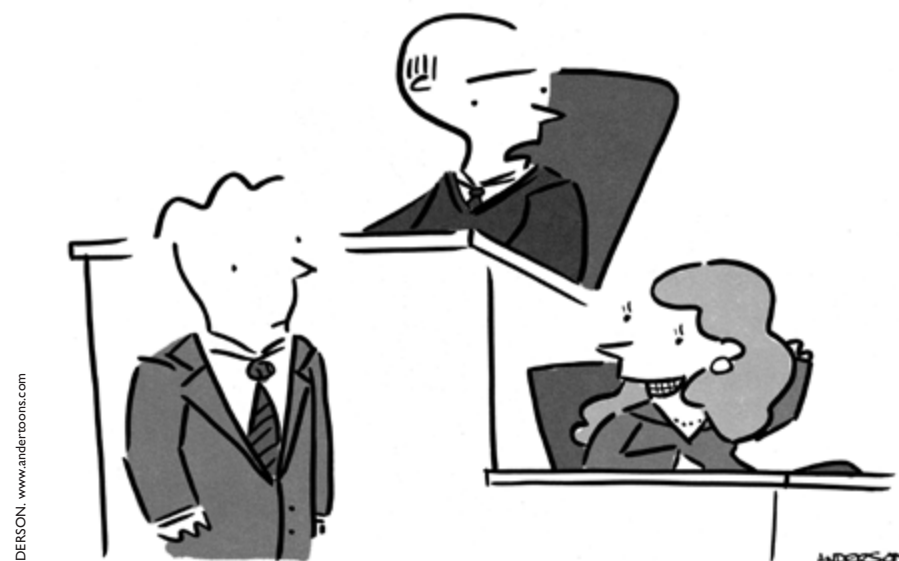
The team arrived at a total of 1,041 pinball machines, after eliminating all of the duplicates.

Reilly Berk said she received word that the record was accepted on May 7, three days after her dad’s birthday. She presented him with the certificate at a party celebrating the arcade’s first anniversary.

“I can’t hardly believe this. This is a great honor,” Rob Berk said. “There’s so much we all do in our lives, you kind of wonder in the back of your mind, will anyone ever recognize you for what you’ve done? In that respect, it was a pleasure and a pleasant surprise.”

“None of the modern machines, none of the modern paraphernalia... have any power except over the people who choose to use them.”

—G.K. Chesterton



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“Sustained. The witness will refrain from posing for the courtroom artist.”

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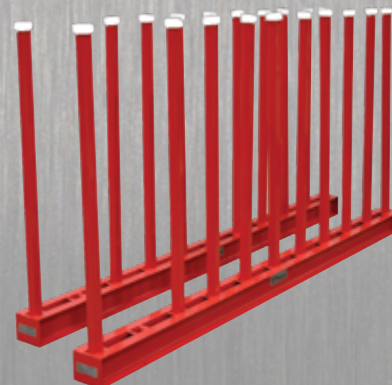
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