

Hard Work Pays Off for Zsolt Granite

When Zsolt Kuntarics immigrated to America in 2001, it was for a better life as well as to support his family who remained in Hungary. Hungary was not one of the fifteen Balkan countries that had been part of the Soviet Union since 1922. However, Hungarians did feel the effect of the USSR collapse in 1991, as Russia's flea market economy spread throughout the area. For Zsolt, who was born in 1979, growing up during this era wasn't easy for him or his family, he recalled.

"I had a very loving family. We were all very close and we learned to work hard,

by Peter J. Marcucci

Photos Courtesy Zsolt Granite and BACA Systems

because the economy was not the same as America. To earn a good living, you had to be a reliable person and at the top of your game or you're not going to have a job!"

Choosing to settle in Florida, Zsolt's first job was at Walmart cleaning floors. Soon after, just by a stroke of luck, he landed a job as an installer's helper with Surface Crafters in Holly Hill, Florida, where he loved learning fabrication, he explained. "I was riding in the company truck with the

lead installer driving, and I imagined and thought, 'Okay, I have a goal. I'm going to open my own company, and be successful.'" Zsolt went from a helper, to installer, to a lead installer, and eventually became the most requested by customers, he continued. "I didn't do anything special! I just cared a lot, and gave 100%, and if I saw someone who was better than me, I wanted to be that much better."

By 2006, Zsolt saw another opportunity, and hooked-up with a fabrication company in Gainesville, Florida as their production manager. Unfortunately, the company soon folded, leaving him and his wife strapped

with house and car payments. With only a part-time job that didn't cut it, the moment of truth had arrived. What to do?

At The Top of His Game

Well, as you might have guessed, Zsolt took a calculated leap of faith towards the pursuit of the dream he imagined while riding in the installation truck years before, he explained. "I was still very young, and I decided that this is the time to open my own business. I started with two of my friends, working fifteen hours a day Monday thru Sunday, with only two circular saws and two grinders. We did amazing customer service that eventually got us to where we are today."

Currently, Zsolt Granite Corporation has two Florida locations. The original, located in Longwood, houses the company's administration, sales, showroom and fabrication, while the second location in Gainesville is strictly sales and showroom. Between these two locations, with the exception of Miami, the company's span of coverage is mostly from the top of Florida's east coast all the way down to Naples on the west coast – basically most of the state. Notable at this point, is that the company is both wholesale to big box and kitchen and bath dealers, and retail to builders and walk-in owners. This dual business model, in many ways, can be tough to handle.

Zsolt attributes his almost two decades of growth to his built-in understanding of hard work, good quality and great customer service. An excellent combination, but not perfect, he continued. "In the beginning, I had no clue how to run a business. I made a lot of mistakes that cost me a lot of money. I was just a hard worker from Hungary who worked my way to owning a company, but I wish I had a better business background when I started. That said, we have had amazing growth over the years."



The focal point of this high-end residential kitchen is the mitered porcelain island that doubles as an eat-at counter, kitchen storage and a work space.

Below: Mitered staircase risers and treads showcases Zsolt Granite's precision fabrication and installation.



Zsolt Granite

Continued from page 1

The Moving Parts

What Zsolt says he lacks in business experience, he makes up for with his machine savvy and production background. His 20,000 square foot shop exudes production coolness with a killer line up of equipment featuring a Robo SawJet 2.0 and a Robo SawJet M Series, a BACA Miter X, two Better Built Machines (BBM) Paladin CNCs, and a Sasso K600 5-Axis CNC Bridge Saw. Both BACA units are dual table. His older unit is the 2.0, while his newer unit and the one he raves about is the new M Series.

“We were the sixth shop in the country to get the M Series that miters using their waterjet technology. Our BACA robots made a huge difference in the speed of our production by preventing breakage and waste, and because the M Series cuts with waterjet, inside corners such as in sink cutouts no longer have to be finished by hand. This made a big, big change. We can push production, and have super reliable machines with a lot of speed and accuracy. A lot of bridge saw manufacturers say that robots are not accurate. Well, I don’t know what they consider “accurate.” I’m not putting together aerospace parts or doing fine surgery on hearts! Our BACA robots are absolutely accurate for working stone. Furthermore, on the average, we do 1,000 square feet per day, sometimes in two shifts, and with the machinery we have we can easily double that to 2,000 per day.”



Left: BACA Systems Robo Sawjet M Series machine has made a difference in speed of production, especially for waterjet sink cutouts, says Zsolt. Below: : Zsolt Granite Showroom kitchen vignette showcases an elegant, modern design esthetic.



Luxury bathroom project includes wall-to-ceiling large format porcelain panels for the walk-in shower. Below, left: Custom residential kitchen features dual 10-foot work counters with mitered aprons. Below, right: one of two Zsolt Granite Paladin CNC work centers.

Zsolt Granite is also looking forward to their purchase of the new D2 Iris Scanner powered by Horus Software, which will enhance their vein-matching capabilities and allow them to showcase their slabs in stunning 12K high-resolution photos. They are particularly excited about the scanner’s augmented reality feature as a sales weapon, which will help them attract new clients by enabling them to see not just the slabs, but also envision the full look of the materials within their project space. This capability is expected to generate significant excitement for their customers about their upcoming projects.

[Please turn to page 3](#)



Zsolt Granite

Continued from page 2

Sourcing Material

With Zsolt Granite's average of 1,000 square feet per day, the volume makes a great case for buying direct from select quarries in India, Vietnam, and Brazil. The company also has close ties with Daltile, MSI and especially Cosentino USA. 60% of their volume is quartz, 24% is natural stone, 5% percent is solid surface, with 11% Dekton and porcelain, he said. "What makes us different is that a growing percentage of our fabrication is using Dekton and porcelain. In the beginning I was not a fan. It took two to three times longer to fabricate than quartz or natural stone, so why wouldn't I hate it? Then one morning, I woke up thinking that if customers want it, let's just learn to work with it, and I ordered a container."

With a total of 73 team members at both locations, 14 operate fabrication, 5 are full-time template makers using Laser Products Industries LT-55's, and 6 subcontracted install crews round out production. "Our people are our family and team members, and our number one assets," continued Zsolt.



Zsolt: "Our BACA robots are absolutely accurate for working stone. Furthermore, on the average, we do 1,000 square feet per day, sometimes in two shifts, and with the machinery we have we can easily double that to 2,000 per day."

This has worked out quite well with 30% of revenue coming from kitchen and bath dealers, about 4% from builders, 36% from big box stores, and 30% from residential and commercial clients.

Zsolt's Thoughts on the Silicosis Controversy

"The heightened awareness and concerns lately about silicosis are actually a very good thing. We need to protect our people as best as possible. I totally understand that old-school fabricators and installers might be resistant to changing the way they do things, but it's a must, and it's up to us owners and leaders to make them understand that they will have no choice. The biggest challenge is that the people who have done fabrication for a very long time may be very stubborn, and just don't want to change the way they do things. They need to understand that it will save their life and their family's life."

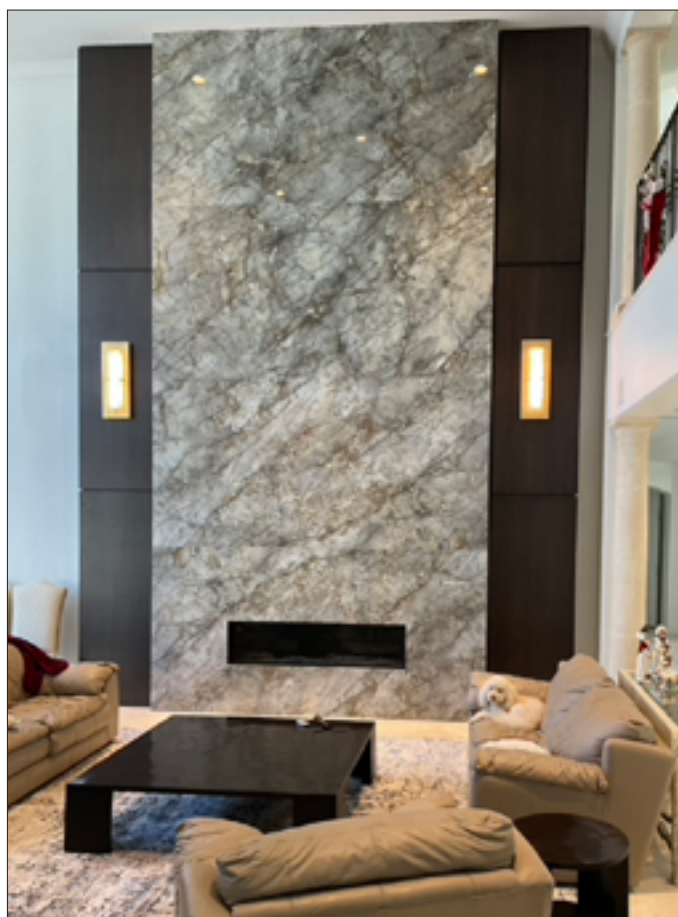
Zsolt Granite Corporation is a member of The Rockheads Group, The Kitchen and Bath Association, The Natural Stone Institute and The International Surface Fabricators Association.

Visit www.zsoltgranitecorporation.com for more information.

"If they don't do their job, I can't do my job. They are secure, awesome and appreciated, and they all work very hard to bring the best out of each other. My first priority has always been creating dream kitchens for our customers, and to make their dreams come true with an amazing space in their house. I cannot do this without creating a dream environment for my people. I can make all the money, and I can be all successful, but without them being happy, those things mean nothing to me. I'm speaking from the heart when I tell you that it's very important that success come about because you've created an awesome environment for your people, and they love working for you. This brings growth that everyone benefits from, and we all can make a good living, because the business is successful due to team work."

"For example, my general manager Amy Teal and I had worked through some tough times, for a few years. She is the most amazing and loyal employee I've ever worked with and perhaps ever will. Without her, I wouldn't be here, and I am forever grateful and want to thank her a lot. I'd also like to thank my brother Joseph Kuntarics, who has helped build this business over the years, and is now my production manager."

Many of Zsolt's clients have been gained through word-of-mouth. However, due to the vast and diverse market covered throughout the state, social media, Google and a marketing firm have also been used.



Zsolt Granite used richly-veined porcelain for this floor-to-ceiling fireplace facade.



This bookmatched 2-story porcelain fireplace facade adds an elegant and stylish flair to this conversational seating area.

"We must take human nature where we find it; perfection falls not to the share of mortals."

— George Washington



Zsolt Granite, by Peter Marcucci Begins on 1
Tucker Design Awards Begins on 16

Training, Safety and Education

Industry Calendar of Events and Training: November to December 2024 5
Stone Fabrication in the Age of the Great Retirement: Adapt or Be Left Behind, by Tim Sadoris 8
The Speed Advantage: Why Fast Response Times Are Your Secret Weapon in Marketing, by Anthony Milia Begins on 9
Countertop Shop Success: What's the Secret? by Ed Young 10
Avoid These Eight Common Mistakes on Your Countertop Shop's Website, by Stephen Alberts 12
Leveraging Customer Experience Feedback to Shape Your 2025 Goals, by Darlene Compagna Begins on 15

Industry Topics, Tips and Featured Columns

AI Enters the Stone Restoration, Fabrication and Installation Business, by Frederick M. Hueston Begins on 4
The Stone Detective in The Mystery of the Cracked Tile, by Frederick M. Hueston Begins on 13
Stone Restoration and Maintenance Corner – Hospital Lobby Restoration, by Bob Murrell Begins on 14
Try Donating, by Sharon Koehler 18
A Lot More Than Days are Counted Before Christmas, by Sam Venable 20

Industry News

Jim Olson Honored with Prestigious NTCA Ring of Honor 13
Global Collaboration on Natural Stone Gains Momentum at Marmomac Begins on 19
Pinnacle and Tucker Design Awards to Combine in 2025 18
Stone Carver, Sculptor, Mentor: Kazutaka Uchida – 1948–2024 20

Marketplace 22
Classified Ads 23

Contributors & Staff

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AI Enters the Stone Restoration, Fabrication and Installation Business

AS someone who's been in the stone business for years—whether you're a stone restoration contractor, fabricator, or tile installer—we've seen the tools of the trade evolve. From new machines to cutting-edge materials, we've adapted to improve efficiency and craftsmanship. But now, there's a new player in town—artificial intelligence (AI). You might be wondering, "What does AI have to do with stone restoration, fabrication, or installation?" Well, AI is stepping into our world, not to replace our skills, but to complement them. Let's break down what AI can do for each of us in the stone industry and how it can enhance the way we work.

AI in Stone Restoration, Fabrication, and Installation: The Game Changer

AI is already making waves in industries like manufacturing and construction, but how can it help with stone restoration, fabrication, or installation? While our work requires skill, precision, and artistry, AI can serve as a valuable tool to make some tasks easier, faster, and more accurate. Here's a look at where AI is starting to make its mark.

Diagnostics and Stone Identification for Everyone

Whether you're restoring stone, fabricating countertops, or installing tiles, identifying the stone correctly is essential. AI-driven tools are now capable of scanning stone surfaces to identify the type of stone, its condition, and even potential weaknesses like fractures or voids. For restoration contractors, this means better diagnosing issues before starting a project. For fabricators, it's ensuring you're working with the right material for the job. And for installers, this tech helps confirm the material's compatibility with the setting and environmental conditions. Imagine the time and effort saved with AI-backed stone identification.

Dr. Frederick M. Hueston, PhD
StoneForensics.com

Stain Removal and Surface Analysis

For stone restoration contractors, AI can take the guesswork out of stain removal. AI systems equipped with imaging tools can analyze the composition of stains and recommend the most effective chemicals or methods for removal. This reduces trial and error, allowing you to deliver better results faster. Fabricators can also use AI to assess the condition of slabs before cutting or polishing, ensuring that there are no hidden issues that could cause problems down the line. Meanwhile, installers benefit from knowing if a slab or tile might require special sealing treatments due to imperfections or irregularities detected by AI.

AI-Driven Estimating and Pricing Tools for All Trades

In all sectors of the stone business—restoration, fabrication, and installation—pricing can be tricky. AI-based estimating tools can help streamline this process by factoring in stone type, project scope, and local labor rates to generate a fair price. For restoration pros, this could mean more accurate bids that reflect both time and materials. For fabricators and installers, AI can help calculate costs related to custom stonework or tile installations, ensuring you're competitive without underbidding yourself. Plus, these systems often account for geographical differences, helping you adjust rates based on your region.

Preventive Maintenance for Restoration and Installation

For stone restoration contractors, AI can assist in creating preventive maintenance programs for clients. These programs can be tailored based on the type of stone and its usage patterns, ensuring regular upkeep and prolonging the stone's lifespan.

Please turn to page 5



How Do You Compare?

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AI Enters the Stone Restoration, Fabrication and Installation Business

Continued from page 4

Installers can offer AI-based maintenance schedules as a value-added service, helping clients maintain their stone or tile installations. Imagine giving your customers a smart, AI-driven plan to keep their surfaces looking as good as new without needing constant intervention.

AI and Automation in Fabrication and Installation

In the world of stone fabrication and installation, machines are already doing a lot of the heavy lifting, but AI is making those machines smarter. Picture a CNC machine that can detect the best cutting path or adjust the speed and pressure based on the density of the stone. This type of AI integration can lead to fewer mistakes, less wasted material, and faster turnaround times. For

tile installers, AI-powered layout tools can optimize the placement of tiles, reducing the number of cuts and ensuring the most efficient use of materials.

Customer Service Enhanced by AI

Across all sectors—whether you're restoring, fabricating, or installing—customer service is key. AI can assist with customer interaction by handling routine inquiries, scheduling, and providing initial quotes. While nothing replaces a personal touch, AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can handle the basic tasks, leaving you more time to focus on your craft and have meaningful conversations with clients.

AI-Powered Design Tools for Fabricators and Installers

For fabricators and tile installers, AI can also assist with design work. AI-based design

Industry Calendar of Events

December 2024

NSI: Virtual Quarry Tour: Colorado Stone Quarries

When: Thursday December 12, 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. ET

Where: Online Event

Visit naturalstoneinstitute.org/calendar for more information.

January 2025

TISE: The International Surface Event

When: Tuesday January 28 to Thursday, January 30, 2025

Where: Mandalay Bay Convention Center, Las Vegas, Nevada

Visit www.intlsurfaceevent.com to register and for more information.

February 2025

KBIS 2025: Kitchen & Bath Industry Show

When: Tuesday February 25 to Thursday, February 27, 2025

Where: Las Vegas, Nevada

Visit kbis.com to register and for more information.

tools can help create 3D models of countertops, walls, or flooring layouts, allowing clients to visualize the final product before any stone is cut or tiles are set. These tools also help installers by offering optimized layouts that minimize material waste, saving both time and money. By integrating AI into the design phase, you can impress clients with high-quality visuals while ensuring your project is executed efficiently.

Should We Be Worried?

The big question on everyone's mind is, "Will AI take away our jobs?" The short answer: no. AI is not here to replace the craftsmanship, skill, and hands-on expertise that stone restoration contractors, fabricators, and tile installers bring to the table. Instead, it's a tool—one that can help us become more efficient, accurate, and competitive. Whether it's polishing a marble floor, cutting a granite slab, or laying intricate tile designs, AI can't replicate the human touch that we provide. What it can do is handle some of the more monotonous tasks, freeing up our time for the creative and technical work that requires our unique expertise.

What's Next for AI in the Stone Business?

The integration of AI into our industry is just beginning, and it's an exciting time to explore what's possible. Whether you're a stone restoration contractor, fabricator, or installer, there are AI tools out there that can make your work easier and more efficient. From diagnostic tools and pricing software

to AI-driven machinery and design applications, the opportunities are vast.

The key is to stay informed and be open to new technologies. By embracing AI, you're not giving up your skills—you're enhancing them. So keep doing what you do best—whether it's restoring a worn-out marble floor, fabricating a stunning granite countertop, or installing a perfect tile backsplash. AI is just another tool in your toolbox, helping you achieve even better results for your clients and your business.

In the end, AI isn't here to take over the stone industry—it's here to make us better at what we do. The future of stone restoration, fabrication, and installation is bright, and with AI by our side, we can continue to innovate and lead the way.

In addition to creating the Stone Detective series, Dr. Frederick M. Hueston, PhD has been writing for the Slippery Rock Gazette for over 25 years. Send your thoughts on this article to fhueston@stoneforensics.com.

“Life's tragedy is that we get old too soon and wise too late.”

— Benjamin Franklin

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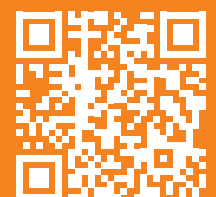
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TRAINING & EDUCATION

Stone Fabrication in the Age of the Great Retirement: Adapt or Be Left Behind

WE've all seen Help Wanted signs popping up everywhere. For years now, we've had trouble finding enough people. Unfortunately, it's likely to get harder due to the significant number of people retiring.

Baby Boomers have hit retirement age, and they're calling it a career in record numbers. Pre-pandemic, about 3 million Boomers retired annually. Post-pandemic? That number hit 29 million a year. By 2030, some 75 million are projected to retire.

Forget about the Great Resignation. It's about the Great Retirement.

The numbers are even worse when it comes to skilled trades.

Younger people aren't seeking out skilled labor jobs at similar rates as in the past. Applications at technical schools are down nearly 50% from 2020. Overall, fewer than 9% of workers under the age of 24 are entering the trades. In the construction and contracting business, there are nearly a million jobs that are going unfilled. 85% of companies looking for skilled labor have open positions and nearly nine in 10 say they are having a hard time filling them.

Over the next decade, it's estimated that there will be some 3.4 million open positions in manufacturing and fabrication. Yet, there will only be 1.3 million workers to fill those spots. Labor shortages will grow larger and get more expensive.

This isn't just a normal workforce transition. It's changing the way businesses have to operate. If you're not preparing for this next phase, you might be in for a bit of a shock.

Just ask bowlers.

In my area, bowling is a big thing. I'm not a fan, but my brother almost went pro and now runs most of the local bowling leagues in Northwest Ohio. He's seeing this workforce shift play out in real time. He says there are only five techs that can now work on the machines that set the pins in his area. One is retiring this

Tim Saddoris
Grand Onyx

year. The remaining four are in the 60s and there's nobody to take their place.

It's changing the way bowling centers will have to operate. They are considering putting a dozen lanes in the area with string bowling because a high schooler can repair them. If you haven't seen string bowling, it's a different experience. Pins suspended by strings fall differently. There's a bunch of physics involved and many bowlers are unhappy with the change. But, there's little choice.

I'm in the middle of building a house. Five years ago, it took three guys working five days to install a home septic system. New technology exists today that is more expensive, but allows one person to install it in just a day. To the homeowner, there's no real cost difference.

These changes are happening right before our eyes across nearly every industry, even those you think aren't depending on technology. Take lawn mowing. Pretty soon you won't see people riding lawnmowers anymore. Already, some landscape companies have transitioned to a fleet of Roomba-style robots. They drop them off and two hours later your mowing is done.

What does this have to do with the stone fabrication business? A lot. Almost every shop has got that one guy in the back who does amazing work. He's the master of his craft, and he's been doing it for 30+ years. But, he's not going to be there forever. What are you going to do when he's gone?

Technology's not always the answer either. Take the example of Stanley Black & Decker as a warning. They spent nearly \$90 million to build a plant in Fort Worth, Texas with the goal of modernizing their Craftsman tool-making process to overcome the shortage of skilled labor. Despite considerable spending on technology and robotics, they simply weren't able to make it work. The plant is scheduled to shut down for good shortly.

Almost every shop has got that one guy in the back who does amazing work. He's the master of his craft, and he's been doing it for 30+ years. But, he's not going to be there forever.

Not every business is going to survive. You need to take stock now and act.

So, where do you get started?

Conduct a Workforce Audit

The first step is to do an audit of your workforce so you know where you stand. Talk to your team members and find out their retirement plans or how long they plan to stick around. Look at your key positions and think about what happens if they leave.

Do you have someone ready to step in and take over their role? Can you train someone to fill their shoes? Do you have documentation in place for steps and procedures?

You can no longer wait until they are about to leave to put out the help wanted sign. A lot of places that do that find no qualified applicants are coming along. You need to have a transition plan in place now. This may require getting commitments from employees and paying them a bit more to train and prepare to be your next generation of talent.

One simple way to get started, especially for skilled positions, is to use your phone and record how that person does things, so you can document it for later. This will come in handy when you have to train new employees or want to refer back to it to learn the tricks of the trade.

Look for New Opportunities

At the same time, this may be the time to look at new opportunities.

Other industries, such as tile installation that requires specialized labor, are struggling with the same shortage of workers. Is this a market niche you can exploit? This could be a big opportunity to revolutionize

the industry with slabs. Think: kitchen backsplashes, bathroom floors, shower surrounds — any areas where tile is used.

Not only might this be an opportunity to expand your business and generate more revenue, but it's a faster install. A tile guy might take a week to get the job done (and make a mess doing it). You can do it faster and skip the mess for the homeowner. This can offer a competitive advantage and turn jobs more quickly, putting more cash in your pocket.

Many of the fabricators we work with are on the fence about products like Dekton, but there are also opportunities there. It might be a replacement for other commercial applications, opening up new product lines for profit.

Find Workers with Similar Skills

This might also be a good time to recruit. You may be able to offer a better job or opportunity to someone who already has some of the skills you need. For example, roofers are often seasonal workers with unpredictable paychecks due to the weather. It's also an incredibly dangerous job. Yet, roofers have some of the same skills as installers. You can offer them a steady paycheck, year-round work, and steady hours.

Think about other occupations that have similar skills and see whether you can provide a better career path.

It's Time to Act

Regardless of your situation, you cannot afford to wait any longer. Assess your staffing, look for new opportunities, identify your next generation, and start planning for the future. No matter how well things are going at the moment, we're in for change. Adapting to the new normal and future-proofing your business is essential to remaining viable and building your business.

Tim Saddoris is the president of Grand Onyx, a firm dedicated to building world-class surface fabricators. Grand Onyx helps companies define operational processes and create road maps to achievements that enable more predictable revenue, stronger margins and foster legacy businesses that stand the test of time. To learn how Grand Onyx can help with hiring or automating your business, visit www.GrandOnyx.Pro.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

The Speed Advantage: Why Fast Response Times Are Your Secret Weapon in Marketing

Speed influences customer decisions more than price — a fact that transforms how countertop fabricators must approach their market. Research proves this shift in buyer behavior, with two-thirds of customers ranking response time equal to cost in their purchasing choices. For countertop fabricators, this means responding to quote requests and customer inquiries faster than competitors can make the difference between winning and losing a contract.

This shift changes everything about marketing in the countertop industry. Traditional marketing focused on showcasing beautiful kitchens and premium materials. Now, successful fabricators combine stunning visuals with rapid response systems. Marketing campaigns must set up clear paths for quick customer contact — whether through website forms, text messaging, or social media.

The data backs this up: businesses losing deals often blame their marketing or pricing, but 78% of customers say they bought from the company that contacted them first. For fabricators, this translates into a clear mandate: build systems that catch and respond to leads quickly, or watch those leads go to competitors.

Consider these industry statistics:

- 82% of customers expect a response within 10 minutes of their inquiry.
- Companies that respond within 5 minutes are 100 times more likely to qualify leads.

Three Core Business Functions

A high-performing fabrication business relies on three interconnected departments, each with distinct roles that build upon each other. Marketing serves as the foundation, focusing on lead generation through multiple channels - they fill the pipeline through showroom visits, manage website inquiries, and cultivate valuable contractor referrals. Once leads are generated, the sales team steps in to transform opportunities into contracts

Anthony Milia
Milia Marketing

by providing precise quotes and guiding customers through material options with speed and expertise. Operations/Customer Experience then takes the reins to deliver excellence through the entire production process, from initial templating through fabrication and final installation, ensuring each project meets exact specifications and timeline commitments.

Research Results

Data shows clear patterns in customer expectations:

Quick Responses Win Business

The numbers tell the story: 52% of buyers choose the first company that responds, accepting higher prices for faster service. This fact changes how fabricators should approach sales and service. One fabricator reported a 40% increase in closed deals after implementing a 30-minute response window for all inquiries.

Real Examples from Successful Shops

The impact of rapid response systems on fabrication businesses has been dramatic across various markets and business sizes. A Florida-based fabricator revolutionized their commercial division by implementing same-day quotes, resulting in doubled contract volumes within six months. Their success inspired others in the industry, including a Midwest shop that transformed their business by responding to all website inquiries within business hours, leading to a remarkable 35% increase in their closing rate. These aren't isolated cases - numerous fabricators across the country report consistently higher margins on jobs won through quick response times, proving that speed creates value customers willingly pay for.

Age Groups React Differently

Baby Boomers want immediate

You Snooze, You Lose

The numbers tell the story: 52% of buyers choose the first company that responds.

responses, making them ideal customers for shops with quick quote systems. Gen Z shows more patience but values quick communication, linking fast responses with feeling valued by brands. This matters for both retail customers picking countertops for their first home and young commercial project managers handling multiple bids.

Slow Responses Cost You Money

Research reveals:

- 50% of potential customers leave if businesses respond too slowly.
- Customers hate making multiple contacts for quotes or project updates.
- Customers expect fast service, with no excuses accepted.
- Commercial clients often award contracts to the first qualified bidder.

Business Results for Fabrication Shops

These facts change how fabricators must operate to stay competitive:

Response Speed Matters

Quick replies beat lower prices, letting shops keep better margins. Many successful fabricators now use automated quote tools for standard projects. The math proves this works:

- Shops with 5-minute response times report 60% higher close rates.
- Fast-responding fabricators maintain 15-25% higher margins.
- Automated quote systems show 40% improvement in lead conversion.

Building Trust Through Speed

Fast responses create stronger customer bonds, particularly with younger buyers. This builds referral networks with designers and contractors. The ripple effects include:

- 70% higher referral rates from satisfied customers.

- 45% increase in designer partnerships.
- 3x more positive reviews mention communication.
- 80% higher chance of winning future bids from the same client.

Market Position and Brand Building

Shops that answer quickly build stronger brands. Speed becomes part of their identity:

- Market leaders use response time guarantees in advertising.
- Quick shops get more media coverage and industry recognition.
- Fast responses lead to better online ratings.
- Companies known for speed attract better commercial clients.

Financial Impact

The numbers tell a clear story about revenue and growth:

- Fast-responding shops grow 2-3 times faster than industry average.
- Quick quotes lead to 35% higher average sale prices.
- Rapid response teams close 50% more high-end projects.
- Speed-focused shops report 40% lower marketing costs per lead.

Competitive Advantage in Digital Marketing

Quick Responses amplify digital marketing efforts:

- Social media engagement rates double with fast responses.
- Website conversion rates increase by 55%.
- Email marketing campaigns show 80% better results.
- Pay-per-click advertising costs drop by 30%.

Employee and Operations Benefits

Fast response systems improve internal operations:

- Staff satisfaction increases with clear response protocols.
- Production scheduling becomes more efficient.
- Material ordering becomes more predictable.
- Customer complaints decrease by 65%.

[Please turn to page 11](#)

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Countertop Shop Success: What's the Secret?

Many say this business can be devilishly difficult. Between problematic retail customers, slow paying contractors, the difficulty finding good employees, and fierce price competition — it's easy to understand how an owner can get frustrated. Yet, there are many shops that are very profitable.

Why is it that some shops struggle and some flourish?

If you ask this question of 10 people, you will likely get 10 different answers — and most of them will be correct. However, every one of those answers will have one key prerequisite to make them work. That prerequisite is solid management and strong leadership.

Rear Admiral Grace Hopper famously said, "You manage things; you lead people."

Management

Some of the essential keys to good management are Goal Setting, Continuous Improvement, and Developing People.

Goal Setting

Good managers set worthwhile goals for the organization. They then break down larger goals into smaller, manageable targets, helping their teams understand not just what to accomplish but why it matters. This clarity fuels motivation and keeps everyone focused.

These smaller more manageable targets form the basis for individual and team objectives. Measuring progress against these objectives allows for real time feedback on performance. An effective manager will use the metrics and feedback as mechanisms to hold individuals and teams accountable for their performance. This combination of metrics and accountability form the basis for creating a culture of high performance — essential for the success of any organization.

Businesses with family members in key roles have a special responsibility to ensure that everyone is held to the same performance standards, regardless of family ties. Also, the so-called "Sacred Cow," or an employee who is exempt from rules, can cause significant friction within the team. Both situations can set a precedent that undermines morale and productivity. A high-performing culture values performance over connections or other special conditions.

Ed Young

Fabricator's Coach

Continuous Improvement

Good managers are committed to continuous improvement, not only for themselves but for their teams and processes. They seek feedback, reflect on their own performance, and strive to enhance team efficiency and effectiveness. This commitment fosters a growth mindset that keeps the team dynamic and adaptable.

Establishing documented processes is foundational for efficiency and quality control. Documented processes help set standards, ensure consistency, and empower employees to work more independently. When the business operates with a documented framework, it can scale more easily, as new employees have clear guidelines and can get up to speed faster. Processes also provide measurable benchmarks, which are essential for tracking performance, setting goals, and driving improvement.

A common pitfall for businesses, especially smaller ones, is the lack of documented processes and procedures. An organization that functions on unwritten policies (also known as tribal knowledge) often finds itself in chaos. If there's a lack of written procedures, confusion about policies and expectations is bound to arise. For instance, employees may frequently ask, "Didn't we change that policy last month?"

Without clarity and documentation, mistakes become more common, quality suffers, and customer satisfaction drops. Without this documentation and standardization, the business ends up being totally reliant on the owner for all decisions. This exhausts the owner and limits the ability of the business to perform and grow.

Developing Talent

Good managers develop people. They invest in their team's growth by providing training, resources, and mentorship. This focus on development helps employees gain skills, overcome challenges, and prepare for future roles, contributing to both individual and organizational success.

In a competitive industry like ours, employee development is crucial. Unfortunately, many businesses lack a structured training plan, relying instead on ad hoc methods like "just



work with Bob because he's our best sawyer." While shadowing experienced employees has some value, it's often insufficient on its own. Without structured training, new employees may not learn essential skills consistently, which can affect both quality and productivity. Over time, this can result in uneven performance across the organization. A business cannot expect excellent performance if it hasn't properly trained its people.

A structured training plan ensures that every employee receives the same foundational skills and knowledge, and it helps them understand their role in achieving the business's overall goals. Training should be complemented with a formal performance review system to provide ongoing feedback, set individual goals, and recognize achievements. This fosters a culture of growth and accountability, which ultimately drives company-wide success.

Leadership

Some of the keys to effective leadership are Vision, Inspiration, Empowerment, and Integrity.

Vision

Good leaders provide a clear, compelling vision that inspires people to work together toward a meaningful purpose. They articulate this vision in a way that connects to team members' values and aspirations, creating a sense of shared purpose. By aligning the team around common goals, leaders give people a reason to invest their energy and talent.

Inspiration

Good leaders inspire by example and through their words and actions. They earn trust and respect through authenticity, consistency, and integrity. Their passion for the mission is contagious, and they inspire team members to go beyond what is expected, often encouraging people to see and reach their potential.

Empowerment

Good leaders empower their team members by giving them autonomy, trusting their judgment, and encouraging initiative. They avoid micromanaging, instead providing the guidance and resources needed for success. This empowerment creates a culture of ownership and accountability, where people feel responsible for their contributions to the larger mission.

Integrity

Integrity is the foundation of trust. Good leaders model ethical behavior, fairness, and transparency in all actions and decisions. They hold themselves accountable, admitting mistakes when they happen and setting a standard of responsibility for the entire team. This honesty reinforces credibility and creates a culture of trust.

While there are many correct answers to the question, "Why aren't more shops successful?", all of them require both solid management and effective leadership to deliver success. Without these traits in the management team, growth and profitability of the business will always be limited.

If you are struggling with your business or if you're just stressed out or want to discuss the content of this article, visit my website and hit the SCHEDULE FREE CALL button or contact me at Ed@FabricatorsCoach.com. We'll talk about your situation, and I'll help you develop a plan to reduce the chaos, make more money, and get your life back, oh, and be more successful!

If you enjoyed this article and want to hear more from Ed on this and other key Fab Shop topics, check out our podcasts (www.fabricatorscoach.com/podcasts) and videos (search YouTube for Fabricators Coach).

The Speed Advantage

Continued from page 9

Action Steps for Countertop Professionals

Success in implementing rapid response systems requires a comprehensive approach across all business operations. Start by establishing robust tracking mechanisms for quotes, templating requests, and installation scheduling to identify bottlenecks and opportunities for improvement. Create clear response time standards for every type of customer interaction, from initial inquiries to project updates. Implement modern tools like automated quote systems and text updates to streamline communication processes. Staff training should emphasize the critical nature of time value and effective customer communication techniques. Regular weekly system audits ensure consistent performance and identify areas needing adjustment. Set up automated follow-up sequences for quotes and leads to maintain engagement with prospects. Develop and maintain a library of template responses for common questions about materials and pricing to enable instant, accurate customer support.

Material Selection and Speed

Fast responses matter even more during material selection. Customers often shop multiple fabricators for the same materials. The shop that responds first with availability and pricing often wins the sale. Smart fabricators keep updated stock lists and pricing sheets ready for quick responses.

Commercial Relations

For commercial work, speed becomes critical. Project managers often work

with tight deadlines and multiple contractors. Being the first qualified fabricator to respond can secure long-term relationships with builders and contractors. Several leading shops now dedicate staff specifically to commercial quote response.

Implementation Strategy

Success with speed requires a systematic approach:

Marketing Systems

- Set up automated lead capture on all channels.
- Create instant response templates for common requests.
- Build a quick-quote calculator for standard projects.
- Implement text message updates for leads.

Sales Process

- Create a speed-based sales playbook.
- Set up response time tracking.
- Build material pricing sheets for quick quotes.
- Train staff on rapid quote generation.

Operations Integration

- Link sales systems to production scheduling.
- Create standard timelines for each project type.
- Build automated status update systems.
- Set up quick response protocols for common issues.

Final Points

Fabrication shops win by responding fast while maintaining quality.

Quick responses show customers you value their time. Smart shops focus on speed without sacrificing craftsmanship or precision. In an industry where quality matters, being fast and accurate sets successful fabricators apart.

Want better performance out of your marketing? Contact Milia Marketing for a complete review of your systems and strategies specific to countertop fabrication. We specialize in helping fabricators grow their business while maintaining quality and craftsmanship. Contact us at <https://miliamarketing.com> to get started.

“The problem is not that people are taxed too little, the problem is that government spends too much.”
– Ronald Reagan

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“Personally, I think it’s terrific. But the other Santas are complaining that you’re showing them up.”

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Avoid These Eight Common Mistakes on Your Countertop Shop's Website

If you have a countertop shop, you're probably pretty proud of your showroom, right? Rows of gleaming samples, crisp photo books with renders and images of installations, a comfy sitting area, maybe even a tasteful plant or two— all of these contribute directly to your success as a business. Your sales staff might wax poetic about the majesty of marble or the goodness of granite, and while practicality is important for customer choice, aesthetics are number one for many people. They don't want to buy a major home renovation from a dingy sales floor... or a bad website. And if you think people are demanding for in-person purchases, just wait until you hear about what they need from the internet!

That's the subject of this article. I'll cover some of the most common mistakes countertop shops make with their websites and how you can avoid them to ensure your online presence works effectively for your business.

Mistake #1: Poor Mobile Optimization

More than half of web traffic today comes from mobile devices. If your website isn't optimized for mobile users, you're likely losing out on potential customers. Many visitors will leave your site quickly if they find it hard to navigate or slow to load on their phones or tablets.

To avoid this mistake, ensure that your site uses a responsive design, meaning it automatically adjusts to fit any screen size. Test the mobile version of your site regularly to make sure it's easy to navigate, loads quickly, and provides a seamless experience for users. You should also check to ensure that all images and text scale properly, and that clickable elements like buttons and links are appropriately sized for touch screens.

Investing in mobile optimization will help keep visitors on your site longer and make it more likely that they'll reach out for a quote or consultation.



Mistake #2: Not Showcasing Your Best Work

For a countertop fabricator, your portfolio is one of the most important features of your website. Potential customers want to see examples of your past projects to get an idea of your craftsmanship and the materials you offer. However, some fabricators miss the opportunity to make their portfolio shine.

Avoid this mistake by featuring high-quality images of your best work front and center on your website. Make sure the images are professionally shot and high-resolution, as grainy or poorly lit photos can reflect poorly on your business. Showcasing your expertise in this way will help potential clients feel confident in choosing your shop for their next project.

Mistake #3: Lacking Clear Calls to Action

Make sure every page of your website includes clear calls to action (CTAs). CTAs should be straightforward and tell visitors exactly what you want them to do. For example, buttons that say "Request a Free Quote," "Schedule a Consultation," or "Contact Us Today" give users a clear path to follow. Position your CTAs strategically throughout your site, such as at the end of portfolio entries, blog posts, or service descriptions.

Mistake #4: Ignoring the Importance of Website Speed

Website speed is more than a convenience. It has a direct impact on how long visitors stay on your site and whether they choose to engage with your business. Slow load times

frustrate users and can cause them to leave your site before it even fully loads. Worse, slow sites can harm your search engine rankings, making it harder for potential customers to find you in the first place. How much time do you have? Three seconds. Any longer than three seconds and you can expect half of your web traffic to leave.

Mistake #5: Failing to Include Relevant Keywords

Search engine optimization (SEO) is essential for any website, including countertop fabricators. Without relevant keywords, potential customers may have a hard time finding your website when searching for countertop services in your area. Unfortunately, many businesses overlook the importance of SEO or don't take the time to properly integrate keywords into their site content.

Avoid this mistake by conducting keyword research to determine what terms your potential customers are searching for. For example, phrases like "granite countertops," "kitchen countertop installation," or "custom marble fabrication" are likely to be relevant for your business. Once you've identified these keywords, incorporate them naturally into your website's text, including service pages, blog posts, and product descriptions.

Mistake #6: Outdated Design

Your website is often the first impression potential customers have of your countertop shop. If your site looks outdated or hasn't been updated in years, visitors may question the professionalism of your business. A modern, well-designed website builds credibility

Stephen Alberts
Countertop Marketing Co.

and helps your shop stand out in a competitive market.

Mistake #7: Not Being Transparent About Your Services

Ensure your website includes detailed descriptions of the services you provide, and consider dedicating a page to frequently asked questions (FAQs) that address common concerns customers may have about choosing a countertop shop. The more information you provide, the more likely potential clients will feel confident reaching out to you.

Mistake #8: Neglecting Customer Reviews and Testimonials

Customer reviews and testimonials are essential for building trust with potential clients. If your website lacks a dedicated section for reviews or testimonials, you're missing an opportunity to showcase the positive experiences of your previous customers.

To avoid this mistake, add a page or section where you can highlight customer feedback. Pull in reviews from Google, or ask satisfied customers to provide testimonials that you can feature directly on your website. Potential customers want to know that others have had good experiences with your shop, and showcasing positive reviews can be the difference between a new lead and a missed opportunity.

Boost Your Website

Your website is one of the most powerful tools for growing your countertop shop. By avoiding these common website mistakes, you can attract more customers and provide a better user experience. If you need help refining your website and expanding your reach, Don't wait— reach out to us here at Countertop Marketing. We specialize in helping fabricators create effective websites that drive sales and grow their business.

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 countertopmarketingco.com, email Stephen at steve@countertopmarketingco.com.

The Stone Detective

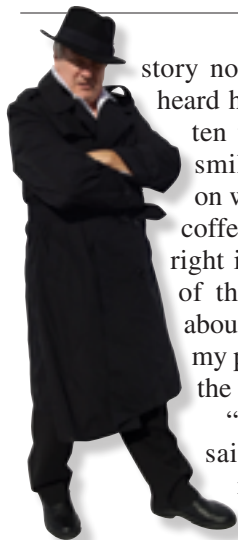
The Mystery of the Cracked Tile

IT was one of those mornings where the rain pounded the city like it had a grudge – the kind of downpour that made you wonder if Mother Nature was in a bad mood or if she just wanted to keep everyone indoors.

I was sitting on my favorite counter stool at the diner, nursing a black coffee and waiting for the caffeine to kick in. Flo was busy behind the counter, flashing her usual smile as she slung plates of eggs and toast to the regulars.

Next to me, as usual, sat the ole Admiral. No one knew exactly why he was called the Admiral—he hadn't seen the inside of a ship in decades—but he sure loved telling tales about the high seas. Every morning it was the same. He'd lean in, tap my arm, and start with, "Back in '42, we were up against a storm so fierce it made grown men cry..." It wasn't that I didn't enjoy a good war

Dr. Frederick M. Hueston, PhD



story now and then, but I'd heard his every tale at least ten times. Today, I just smiled and let him go on while I waited for my coffee to do its job. Then, right in the middle of one of the Admiral's stories about a supposed mutiny, my phone rang. Saved by the bell.

"Stone Detective," I said, barely suppressing a sigh of relief. The voice on the other end was nervous, like someone who had just watched their investment start to crumble—literally.

"We've got a problem, Detective. A



penthouse job in one of the new high-rises. Tile cracking in the master bath. Expensive work, too. It was supposed to be flawless."

I straightened up, the haze from my late night starting to lift. "Cracked tiles, huh? I'll be there in an hour." I tossed a couple of bucks on the counter, nodding to

Flo. "Hold that war story, Admiral. Duty calls." The Admiral gave me a knowing wink, like he thought I was off to fight my own kind of war. And in a way, he wasn't wrong.

The high-rise was one of those luxury towers that screamed "money." The kind where even the door handles looked like they could pay off a mortgage. The building manager met me in the lobby, wringing his hands like he'd just watched the Titanic sink. "It's the master bath, Detective. Imported tile. We're talking top-of-the-line, hand-cut. Clients are coming back in a week, and if they see these cracks... well, it won't be pretty." I followed him to the penthouse, where the scene was laid out in front of me. The bathroom was a marble-tiled wonderland, the kind of place that made you feel like you'd been transported to a Roman villa. But the cracks in the tile were as clear as the clouds outside, running along the grout lines like veins in the stone. I crouched down, running my fingers along the fissures.

Please turn to page 14

Jim Olson Honored with Prestigious NTCA Ring of Honor

THE National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA) is proud to announce that Jim Olson, NTCA Assistant Executive Director, has been awarded the distinguished NTCA Ring of Honor. This prestigious award is presented to individuals who have demonstrated exceptional dedication, leadership, and commitment to both the tile industry and the NTCA. Jim Olson exemplifies these qualities and has made a profound impact throughout his career.

The NTCA Ring of Honor is reserved for those who have devoted their careers to the advancement and success of the tile industry. Jim Olson's journey began in 1983 at Tile Factory Outlet in sales and branch management. His passion and dedication led him to roles at Rubble Tile, Ceramic Tile International, Tile Shop, MN Tile, and Cole Wholesale Flooring, where he helped establish and manage a tile division.

A pivotal moment in Olson's career came when he worked with the NTCA Executive Director Bart Bettiga at MN Tile. This

professional partnership ultimately led to Olson joining the NTCA in 2008 as the Assistant Executive Director. Moving from Minnesota to Mississippi was a significant decision for Jim and his wife, Mary, but one that opened doors to countless opportunities and adventures.

Since joining the NTCA, Olson has worn many hats, leading membership initiatives, overseeing the technical committee, spearheading the training department, and contributing to nearly every aspect of NTCA's operations. His tireless work over the last 16 years has helped shape the association and expand its influence, and his passion for people has been at the heart of everything he does. Through his work, Jim has met and influenced hundreds of friends, colleagues, and industry leaders, always bringing a personal touch to his professional endeavors.

"Through his work, Jim has met and influenced hundreds of friends, colleagues, and industry leaders, always bringing a personal touch to his professional endeavors," said Bart Bettiga, Executive Director



Jim Olson (center) with Mark Heinlein, NTCA Training Director, preparing for a training.

of NTCA. "The NTCA Ring of Honor is a fitting tribute to Jim Olson's career-long dedication to the tile industry, and we are proud to celebrate his many contributions."

Jim was presented the award at Total Solutions Plus in Boston, Massachusetts in October, at the Awards Luncheon.

Established in 1947, the National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA) is a non-profit 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.

The Stone Detective

Continued from page 13



“How long have these been here?”

“Showed up about two weeks ago, out of nowhere,” the manager said. “One day, everything was perfect. The next, cracks. The tile installer swears it’s not their fault.”

I raised an eyebrow. “They always do.”

I pulled out my trusty loupe, inspecting the edges of the tile. The cracks ran deep. This wasn’t a surface issue. Something was shifting underneath. “You have any idea what’s under these tiles?”

The manager shook his head. “Just what the contractor told us. Standard subflooring, thinset, the usual.” I gave him a hard look.

“The usual, huh? Something tells me it’s anything but.” I moved to the corner of the room, where the grout lines met the wall. It was subtle, but there it was—just a hint of lifting around the edges. “Looks like we’ve got some movement in the subfloor,” I said, standing up. “Tile is only as good as the foundation it’s sitting on. If the floor beneath is shifting,

expanding, or contracting, you’re going to get cracks –no matter how perfect the tile is.”

The manager frowned. “But this is a brand-new building. There shouldn’t be any movement.”

I shrugged. “Brand new or not, if the subfloor wasn’t prepped right, or if there’s too much settling, the cracks will come through. It’s called telegraphing. Movement in the subfloor projects right into the tile. You have to use a crack isolation membrane to stop the subfloor’s movement from reaching the surface.”

The manager looked puzzled. “Crack isolation membrane?”

I nodded. “It’s a flexible layer you apply before the tile goes down. It allows the subfloor to move without transferring the movement to the tile. Without it, any shifting in the subfloor shows up as cracks right where you don’t want them. Whoever installed this didn’t think ahead.”

“So, what’s the fix?”

“Well, first things first—you’re gonna need to pull up the cracked tiles. Check the subfloor for any major cracks or shifting, then apply the crack isolation membrane before retiling. Without that layer of protection, you’re just asking for more cracks in the future.”

The manager sighed, clearly calculating the cost in his head. “And here I thought expensive tile meant we wouldn’t have these problems.”

“Expensive or not, it’s all about what’s underneath,” I said, tipping my hat as I made my way to the door. “It’s always the foundation that matters.” I left the penthouse, the rain still beating down as I stepped onto the street.

Another case cracked, another mystery solved. As I made my way back to the diner, I couldn’t help but smile. “Another case solved,” I muttered to myself, pushing open the door. The ole Admiral was still there, mid-story. I slid back onto my favorite counter stool and caught the end of his tale, feeling a strange sense of comfort. After all, even a detective needs a little routine between cracking cases.

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.

Most people work just hard enough not to get fired and get paid just enough money not to quit.”

– George Carlin

Stone Restoration and Maintenance Corner

Hospital Lobby Restorations

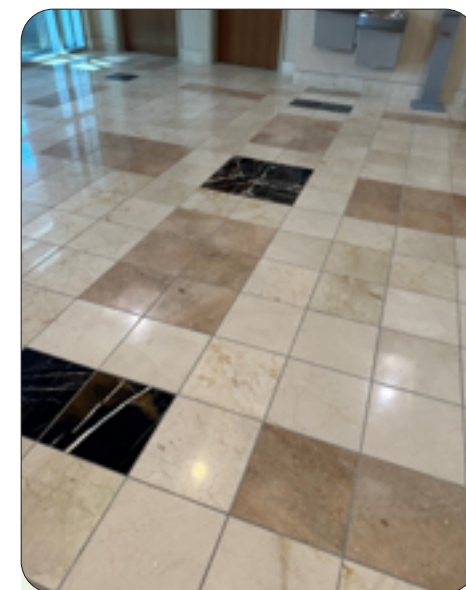
Bob Murrell
M3 Technologies

Photos by Bob Murrell

First, let’s take a moment to remember our fellow Americans who suffered an unimaginable disaster. For many, it’s been a brutal season, heading into the holidays. Two back-to-back hurricanes in October (at the time of this writing), Helene and Milton, both took a tremendous toll on the southeast. I live in East Tennessee, and our eastern most counties were ravaged by Helene. Interstates I-40 and I-26 are closed indefinitely. In Eastern Tennessee, Western North Carolina, Northwestern South Carolina and Northeastern Georgia, hundreds of people lost their lives, and more are still missing. Thousands more lost everything they own. The floods here were said to be of Biblical proportion. The same is true when the two hurricanes hit Florida, albeit the Floridians are more experienced and prepared for this type of natural disaster than we are here in Appalachia. It will take years to recover from this devastation. Volunteers have come from all over the country to render aid to their fellow Americans.

In a local medical facility, multiple almost identical commercial lobbies were a great project to be involved with. There were 8 of these, approximately 1,000 square feet, multi-colored marble lobby floors. The main field of the marble was a buff-colored stone with inserts of darker materials in set patterns. The floors were worn from foot traffic, especially in the pathways and pivot points. The clients wanted the natural polished restored to as close to newly installed condition as possible.

It was a quality original install and fortunately, the lippage condition was mild and there were only a few excessively high areas that gave the operator trouble. It was decided that, with the minimal lippage concerns, honing would begin at a 400 grit level. M3 TX Triple Thick resins were the diamond disc tools of choice because of their flexibility, quality honing performance, and good life. Because mild lippage is not the same as no lippage (ground in place, post install with total lippage removal), some additional cushioning effect was required, to effectively hone the marble. 3-inch x 1/4-inch rubber spacers, plus Velcro-type drive plates with a



Above: Before restoration, with traffic wear and etching from spills.

Below: Floor after honing with 400 grit TX Triple Thick diamond discs and polishing with Majestic 5X Gold.



built-in foam cushion were used to achieve the extra cushioning needed for the diamonds. This helped with both the high and low areas. Remember, in many cases, the lower areas are the hardest to rectify.

Please turn to page 15

Stone Restoration Corner

Continued from page 14

These low areas can show up later as, what I call, picture framing. This can be especially true with darker materials and, in some cases, may require grinding completely flat or monolithic, to better blend the tiles.

The TX-400 pads did a phenomenal job honing the floor while handling the mild lippage. As hoped, the 3-inch spacers helped the TX-400s minimize the picture framing effect. The 20-inch M3 Heavy Duty machine was used with 5 each TX-400s, SPACER3s, 1 each 25lb horse-shoe weight (total machine weight of about 125 pounds), Majestic Stone Soap, used for lubrication (helps extend diamond life) and ease of slurry cleanup, at 1 ounce per gallon of solution in the tank, while a pattern of 10 perpendicular passes, 6 east to west and 4 north to south, was implemented. The key here is to render the surface to a consistent 400 grit hone. If you see scratch patterns or inconsistencies, you're moving too fast. Use of splash guard is essential, especially when using the diamond discs. This helped to reduce the amount of Tape & Drape, masking material, that was needed to protect the adjacent vertical surfaces. Transitions between carpet and the



Another of the eight lobbies restored. Notice there are none of the darker tiles in this floor.

marble floor required both Tape & Drape and additional masking measures, like red polyvinyl tape. Honing was only done to within about a foot of the wall as these tiles still looked good. There was no traffic wear in these areas. The hopes were that the Majestic 5X Gold would blend everything, including to the wall and low area picture framing.

These marble to carpet transition lines were honed using diamond hand pads in 220 grit, 400 grit, and 800 grit and polished some by hand as well with Majestic

5X Gold and a natural pad center. This helped tremendously to keep the transition line looking perfectly sharp.

Once the floor was consistently honed to the 400 grit level and the transition lines were looking good, the main floor was polished using the same weighted machine, a Combo natural pad, and Majestic 5X Gold marble polishing powder. Eight slow perpendicular passes (4 and 4) were used in the same fashion as the honing process. The beige field, as well as the other colors of marble on the floor, responded very well to the Majestic 5X Gold polishing process. Any remaining picture framing from the 400 grit honing process was easily blended and turned out great. The honing and polishing prescription worked as planned.

In case you're wondering how to ensure the best results with the marble polishing step, I recommend using plenty of water to start with, and adjust as needed. Some marble does better with plenty of water and others do better with less. The solution is test, test, test. As I often recommend, the post-5X Gold polishing process was followed with a PLP 12,000 grit DIP, which was run wet. This procedure will help to alleviate any heat swirls or residue still remaining on the marble.

These lobby floors turned out amazing—all 8 of them. The client was ecstatic. The

hardest part of the lobbies were the men's and women's restrooms on each of the lobby floors. Because they were smaller spaces, it was more difficult to maneuver. Other than that, the finished product was a repeatable and efficient project with great results. It was one of those wash, rinse, and repeat things.

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.

As the end of the year closes in on us, there's no better time to count our blessings with family and friends. I wish you and your families a safe and very happy holiday season.

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.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Leveraging Customer Experience Feedback to Shape Your 2025 Goals

IN today's competitive stone fabrication industry, customer experience feedback is an invaluable tool for setting and driving strategic goals. As we look toward 2025, understanding what your customers think, feel, and expect from your business can help you prioritize improvements, refine your offerings, and ultimately increase customer satisfaction. Here's how gathering and analyzing customer feedback can provide the insights you need to shape your 2025 goals and create a roadmap for growth and differentiation.

Identify Customer Expectations

Customer expectations are constantly evolving, and businesses that can anticipate and respond to these changes will have an edge. The rise in demand for sustainable and eco-friendly materials in recent years

Darlene Compagna

Direct Opinions



has influenced many industries, including stone fabrication. Customer feedback can reveal preferences for specific materials and finishes that align with these trends and guide your choices and vendor partnerships in 2025.

By analyzing feedback on outcomes,

communication, and service experience, you can get a clearer picture of what your customers value most. Aligning your company's goals with customer expectations will not only satisfy existing clients but also attract new ones who prioritize these values.

Refine Product Offerings Based on Pain Points

Customer feedback offers a direct line to uncovering potential pain points in your products or services. These might include issues with durability, design, or ease of installation. By collecting data on these common concerns, you can identify areas that need improvement or even inspire new product innovations.

Listening to customer feedback doesn't just highlight problems, it also reveals opportunities. By addressing pain points, you can refine your product offerings to better meet customer needs. In 2025, this focus on continuous improvement will position your company as a brand that listens and adapts, setting you apart from competitors.

Enhance Communication and Customer Service

Strong customer relationships are built on excellent communication and service. Feedback often highlights the quality of customer interactions, and reviews or survey data can shed light on whether your team is responsive, knowledgeable, and helpful. If you're noticing recurring complaints about delayed responses or unclear communication, this could signal a need to improve your processes or invest in additional training.

In 2025, one goal could be to enhance the overall customer journey, from initial inquiries to post-project follow-up. Use feedback to fine-tune your communication strategies and ensure that every customer interaction is timely and supportive. Whether it's setting up automated updates for project timelines or offering more personalized service, a commitment to improving customer communication can drive loyalty and increase repeat business.

Please turn to page 17

Tucker Design Awards

Continued from November Slippery Rock

“Krisheim” is an iconic Jacobean Revival country home designed by the renowned Boston architecture firm of Peabody and Stearns for the Woodward family. The building, situated on 40 acres in Philadelphia’s Chestnut Hill neighborhood, was completed between 1910 and 1912, totaling 28,000 square feet.

In the 1960s, the house was donated to the Presbyterian Church and in the 1980s the family converted the building into nine separate apartments. Recently, the Woodward family decided to restore the building as their single-family home.

The intention of the clients was to fully restore the building to its original early 20th-century appearance and floor plan layout. During its institutional and multi-unit housing phase, the building underwent significant changes, many of which were inappropriate to its historic character. A four-story egress stair tower, added onto the southeastern façade in the 1960s, was removed and the four-story masonry façade was reconstructed, including a second-story sleeping porch that incorporated original

slate roof shingles that were found neatly stacked and numbered in the basement.

The home’s Wissahickon mica schist and limestone exterior walls were repointed throughout, and missing or deteriorated sections of stone were replaced as required. The schist, which is native to the region, was historically used in random rubble patterns, but at Krisheim, the original masons carefully cut, dressed, and carved the stone with precision and textured designs. As part of the restoration process, the new limestone and schist masonry was hand-carved to match the original masonry’s intricate patterns and textures. The stonework also carries into the home’s interior, with similar detailing.

Families of tradespeople have been working on the house for generations, and their highly skilled work was utilized throughout the restoration. Continuing to work with these craftsmen was important for the family and the preservation legacy of their home. Although commonly viewed as cost-prohibitive and time consuming, the restoration was successful in utilizing traditional construction methods and materials.

Krisheim

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Jeffery Totaro Architectural



©Steve Hall, Hall + Merrick + McCaughtery Photographers



Meadow Lane Retreat Lakeside, Michigan

Meadow Lane is a weekend retreat home set in an idyllic landscape along the shores of Lake Michigan that harmoniously integrates limestone as an inherent and integral part of the natural landscape.

Native materials define the architectural palette and are used to create a timeless and enduring connection with nature. A limestone wall wraps the exterior at the main house’s ground level. It extends seamlessly through the home, beneath the feet, and out to a pool terrace, establishing a visual and tactile connection to the surrounding landscape.

The selected sand-colored limestone evokes a sense of belonging within the native dune landscape along the lake. Coming from the Kanfanar quarry in Croatia, Giallo d’Istria Beige is known for its durability, character, and versatility and allows for various thicknesses and sizes, with flamed edge treatments applied where requested. The honed variety with a 60 grit was employed for all the vertical walls and surfaces.

The interior flooring features

Wheeler Kearns Architects Architect

PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS

Lurvey*

Stone Supplier

Kamen-Pazin

Stone Quarry

Bokon Masonry

Stone Installer

STONE

Giallo d’Istria limestone

a brushed finish, and a thermal finish is used for exterior dimensional paving, benches, loose steppers, pool wall, and copings.

The limestone was meticulously detailed in thin, long courses, resulting in a sedimentary stacking pattern that creates a horizontal reading. The prescribed coursing necessitated the development of a highly precise story pole that ensured the heights of each limestone course ran continuously throughout the entire home, seamlessly extending to the landscape patios and retaining walls, and the various retaining walls surrounding it.

Please turn to page 17

John Milner Architects Architect

PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS

Media Quarry Company

Vickery Stone Company*

Stone Suppliers

Joseph Manero & Sons

Stone Installer

Larson & Landis

Structural Engineer

STONES

Indiana limestone

Wissahickon mica schist



Tucker Design Awards

Continued from page 16

Urban Hearth

Situated on a 5,400 square-foot site, Urban Hearth blends the old with the new on a small urban parcel within a historic district. This project exemplifies craftsmanship and dedication through the strategic use of natural stone materials, variations in scale, and flexible programming designed to cater to the homeowner's desires for privacy, work, and entertainment.

At the heart of the design lies the rear courtyard, nestled between the main residence and the detached historic carriage house. The renovated carriage house extends the usable space of the outdoor garden intentionally blending the indoor and outdoor through the implementation of continuous bluestone paving.

Thermal bluestone pavers break free from the linearity of rowhouse living, following a skewed east-to-west axis. Smaller areas of paving pay homage to the site's linear features, utilizing smaller, full color range thermal bluestone as

"welcome mats" in high-traffic areas. Locally quarried soapstone adorns the raised surfaces, forms the "log" sculpture within the hearth, and flanks the benches adjacent to the poured-in place concrete fireplace.

At the front of the house, a sensitive approach to renovation within a historical context takes center stage.

The entrance to the historic residence is accentuated by a wrap-around monolithic bluestone stairway. Extending the original entry patio into the yard enhances the seating and gathering opportunities while offering a glimpse of the modern renovation in the backyard.

In every corner of Urban Hearth, the significance of stone is clear. From the carefully selected natural materials to the integration of locally sourced stone, it serves as a testament to the commitment to craftsmanship and regional identity that permeates the design. The intentional merging of interior and exterior spaces, the artistry exhibited in the stone elements, and the integration with the surrounding context all coalesce to create an inviting environment for the homeowners to enjoy.

Ansel Olson / Waterstreet Studio



Waterstreet Studio Landscape Architect

PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS

ARCHITECTUREFIRM

Architect

Empire Granite

Stone Supplier

Empire Granite

Mark Franco Custom

Building

Stone Installers

STONES

Bluestone

Brazilian Soapstone



BATES MASI + ARCHITECTS

Architect

PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS

ABC Worldwide Stone*

Stone Supplier

HZ Masonry

Stone Installer

STONE

Brazilian Gray granite



Signal Hill Montauk, New York

In the mid-17th century, early settlers of Montauk, New York established what is now the oldest working cattle ranch in America. Their remnants survive today in the form of horse stables, barns, and workers' cottages. One such cottage sat near the top of a hill with almost 360° views of the nearby lake, ocean, sound, and nature preserves. Its new owners sought to maintain the existing structure's unpretentious appearance and pastoral landscape, while creating a larger house suiting the modern expectations of year-round living for a family of five.

The house structure references traditional livestock pens built from glacial rubble that meander through the local landscape. Its stone walls extend to the top of the first floor, organizing its spaces and providing a base for the second story. The stone walls carve into the sloping meadow, reducing

the apparent size of the home when viewed from the exterior. Some of the walls reach out and taper into the ground, cutting strategic sightlines into the hilltop and linking the house with the pool. These apertures brighten interior spaces, provide access to the lawns and meadows, and frame views of the lake and preserves. They carry from exterior, through the interior, and back to exterior. Sliding glass walls disappear into recesses at the central sightline overlooking the lake, providing an uninterrupted connection between east and west, sunrise and sunset.

Perched atop the stone walls sit two simple shingled "cottages" reminiscent of the property's original structures. Because the first floor is largely concealed, they appear as small houses lightly set on the hill when viewed from the road and driveway approach below.

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"Slip him another \$10 and mention the Lego set, but be cool, OK?"



"No government ever voluntarily reduces itself in size. Government programs, once launched, never disappear. Actually, a government bureau is the nearest thing to eternal life we'll ever see on this earth!"

– Ronald Reagan

Try Donating



Every year, right about this time, I go on and on about donating to charity during the holidays. Helping others makes you feel good, etcetera, etcetera. However, these are trying times for a lot of folks, and it may not be in your budget this year – totally understandable. However, if you can, please donate. If you can't donate monetarily, then think about maybe donating some of your time. Charities are always looking for volunteers, especially in the holidays when the need seems to be the greatest.

There are many great charities to support during Christmas. Below is a VERY INCOMPLETE list of charities that address a lot of different needs, from helping children and families in poverty to supporting local food banks and shelters. They offer meaningful ways to give back during the holiday season. Research and donate to local charities to impact folks in your area.

1. Toys for Tots

Toys for Tots is a well-known charity that collects new, unwrapped toys and

Sharon Koehler

Stone Industry Consultant

distributes them to less fortunate children during the holiday season. Run by the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, this charity makes sure that every child can experience the joy of receiving a gift on Christmas morning. You can donate toys, money, or even host a toy drive in your community. It's an excellent way to directly spread holiday cheer to children in need.

Why support them: Toys for Tots brings joy to millions of children each Christmas, ensuring that financial hardship doesn't take away from the magic of the season.

2. The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is one of the most recognizable charitable organizations during the holiday season, thanks to its iconic red kettles and bellringers. They offer a range of services, from emergency shelter and food for the homeless to toy drives and financial help for families. Around Christmas, they run specific

holiday campaigns like Angel Tree to help those in need, making it easy to contribute either through direct donations or by taking part in their annual gift programs.

Why support them: The Salvation Army has a longstanding reputation for helping struggling individuals and families, not only during the holidays but year-round.

3. Make-A-Wish Foundation

The Make-A-Wish Foundation grants wishes to children with critical illnesses, giving them hope and joy when they need it most. Around Christmas, these wishes often take on a holiday theme, with children asking to visit Santa Claus, receive special gifts, or even take memorable family trips. You can donate directly to their cause or volunteer your time to help make wishes come true.

Why support them: Make-A-Wish creates unforgettable experiences for children facing life-threatening conditions, providing them and their families with lasting happy memories.

4. Operation Christmas Child (Samaritan's Purse)

Operation Christmas Child, run by Samaritan's Purse, collects and distributes shoeboxes filled with toys, school supplies, and hygiene items to children in over 100 countries. The goal is to give a gift to children in some of the world's poorest and most remote communities. Participants pack their shoeboxes and can track their donations online to see where they go.

Why support them: Operation Christmas Child combines the act of giving with spreading global goodwill, reaching children who might otherwise never receive a gift.

5. Feeding America

Feeding America is one of the largest hunger-relief organizations in the U.S., and their work is especially vital during the holiday season. Many families struggle to afford basic groceries, let alone a holiday meal. By donating to Feeding America, you help provide meals to individuals and families facing food insecurity. They also offer the option to support local food banks in your community.

Why support them: Feeding America makes a direct impact by ensuring that families don't go hungry during the holidays and beyond, serving over 40 million people each year.

6. St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

St. Jude is a leader in pediatric cancer research and treatment, providing care to children with serious illnesses at no cost to their families. During the holiday season, many people choose to support St. Jude as a way to help children who are battling life-threatening diseases. You can donate directly or take part in their holiday-themed fundraisers and gift campaigns.

Why support them: St. Jude offers life-saving care and cutting-edge research that benefits children around the world, ensuring that no child is turned away based on their ability to pay.

7. Angel Tree (Not the Salvation Army version – The Prison Fellowship one)

Angel Tree, a program run by Prison Fellowship, helps children with incarcerated parents. Volunteers buy and deliver Christmas gifts to these children on behalf of their parents, allowing families to stay connected despite difficult circumstances. This charity offers a heartwarming way to provide gifts, as well as hope, to children who might otherwise feel forgotten during the holidays.

Why support them: Angel Tree strengthens family bonds and gives children the reassurance that they are loved, even when a parent cannot be present.

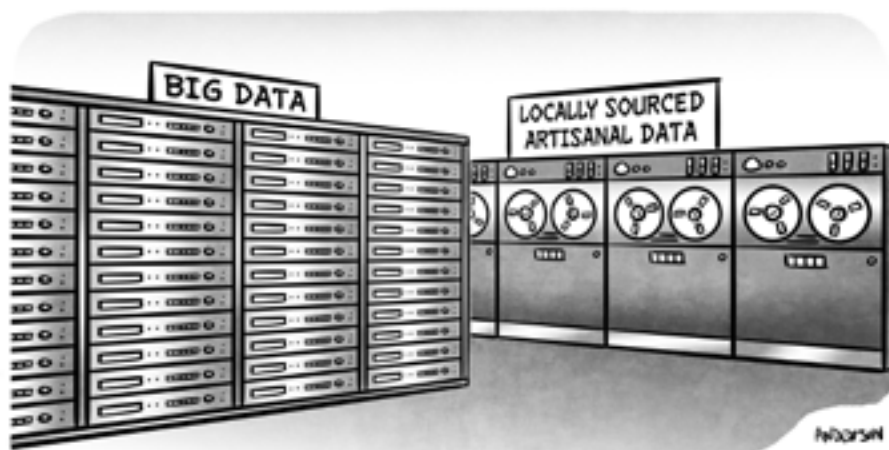
8. Ronald McDonald House Charities

Ronald McDonald House provides free or low-cost housing for families of seriously ill children who are receiving treatment away from home. Their homes offer comfort and support to families during the most challenging times. Donations help provide meals, accommodations, and other services to ease the burden on families during the holidays and beyond.

Why support them: Supporting Ronald McDonald House means providing a "home away from home" for families, so they can focus on helping their children heal.

Christmas is a time for generosity, and there are so many ways to make a difference through charitable giving. Whether you want to help children in need, fight hunger, support families, or work toward global solutions, these organizations offer numerous opportunities to spread joy and kindness during the holiday season.

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



TRAINING & EDUCATION

Leveraging Customer Experience

Continued from page 15

Prioritize Technology and Innovation

As technology continues to reshape the stone fabrication industry, feedback can help you stay attuned to customer preferences regarding digital tools and innovations. For example, the most challenging part for customers is visualizing the end result so more customers are interested in seeing digital renderings of their projects before fabrication begins.

So, consider investing in 3D modeling software or virtual reality tools as part of your 2025 goals.

The integration of technology can also streamline your internal processes, making it easier for customers to track orders, communicate with your team, and receive updates. Adopting customer-focused technology can create a more efficient, transparent experience, making your company

more appealing to tech-savvy clients in the coming year.

Measure Success and Set Benchmarks for Improvement

Finally, feedback provides the metrics needed to set tangible goals and benchmarks. By consistently monitoring and analyzing feedback, you can measure how your improvements are impacting customer satisfaction. If you implement changes in response to customer feedback, track subsequent feedback to see if complaints in that area decrease. This approach helps ensure that your 2025 goals are not only aligned with customer expectations but also measurable and actionable.

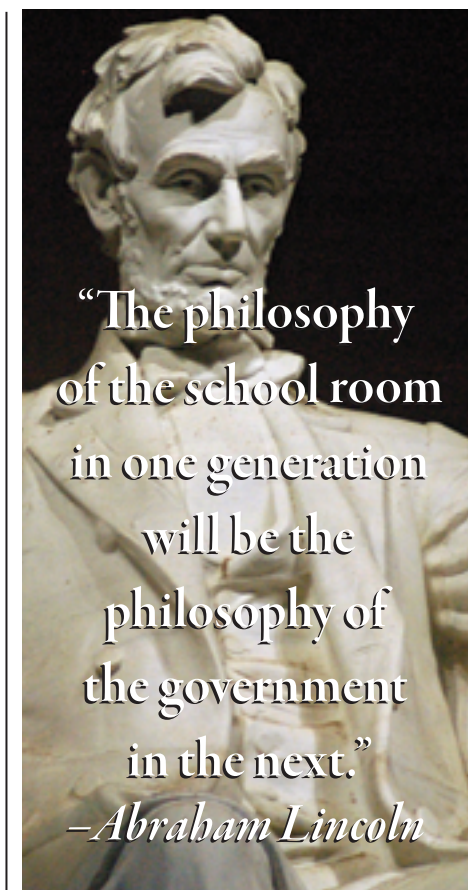
Use feedback to create key performance indicators (KPIs) tied directly to customer satisfaction metrics. This might include target ratings on satisfaction surveys, improved response times, or a reduction in complaints. Regularly reviewing these

KPIs will keep you focused on your goals and allow you to make data-driven adjustments as needed.

Embrace Customer Feedback as Your 2025 Growth Tool

Incorporating customer experience feedback into your 2025 planning process is a strategic approach to growth. By actively listening to your customers, you can align your goals with their needs, setting your business up for success in a competitive landscape. This year, make feedback a cornerstone of your strategy and watch as it drives customer loyalty, streamlines operations, and positions your company as a leader in the stone fabrication industry.

Consider applying these Customer Acceleration® tips – they will help you make more money from your customers AND make them happier in the process! If you'd like some help, please reach out to Darlene Campagna at dcampagna@directopinions.com or call 216-867-1165.



Global Collaboration on Natural Stone Sustainability Gains Momentum at Marmomac

AT Marmomac 2024 in Verona, Italy, the Natural Stone Strategic Alliance (NSSA) convened natural stone trade associations from around the world to advance sustainability initiatives. Key figures in this effort include Flavio Marabelli (Confindustria Marmomacchine), Fabio Cruz (Centrorochas), Nelson Cristo (Assimagra), and Jim Hieb (Natural Stone Institute).

The top agenda item was the Global EPD Collaboration initiative. A phased approach to publishing region-specific Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs), was presented and discussed. The EPDs, which will ultimately be combined into a global industry average, will be used to promote natural stone as a low-carbon building material. This effort has great potential for strengthening the industry's position within the building sector, particularly as global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to combat climate change intensify.

Facilitating the discussion was Sarah Gregg, the sustainability leader for the

Natural Stone Institute, who has been instrumental in organizing and driving these strategic discussions. Gregg commented: "The design community is increasingly focused on combating climate change, and the natural stone industry has a significant opportunity to position itself as a sustainable choice. The Global EPD Collaboration initiative is a critical step toward showcasing the industry's commitment to sustainability on a global scale. By pooling our resources and expertise, we can establish the quantified data sets and messaging needed for stone to be recognized as a solution for reducing the embodied carbon of building projects worldwide."

Initial research into the life cycle impacts of natural stone production has demonstrated its low global warming potential. With growing pressure to reduce emissions, natural stone stands out as a sustainable option compared to alternative materials, which often involve more complex manufacturing processes, multiple ingredients, and potential health hazards.

Given that several of the attending

organizations have experience with environmental reporting, the NSSA is well-positioned to establish best practices on data collection, member company engagement, and effective marketing strategies.

At the meeting, representatives from 10 countries committed to participating in the Global EPD Collaboration initiative. The next steps involve reaching out to additional countries and encouraging their involvement. Each participating association will appoint a local program operator to contribute to this effort, beginning with submitting feedback on a draft PCR Guidance document. The goal is for the global natural stone EPD report to be ready for distribution in early 2026.

The following associations have already committed to participating in the Global EPD Collaboration:

- **Brazil:** *Centrorochas*
- **Portugal:** *Assimagra*
- **United Kingdom:** *Stone Federation of Great Britain*
- **Finland:** *Kivi*

- **Italy:** *Confindustria Marmomacchine*
- **Turkey:** *Aegean Mineral Exporters Association (EMIB)*
- **Greece:** *Greek Marble Association*
- **Germany:** *Deutscher Naturwerkstein-Verband*
- **Spain:** *Cluster del Granito, Marmol de Alicante, and Centro Tecnológico del Mármol*
- **United States:** *Natural Stone Institute*

Marabelli commented: "Confindustria Marmomacchine is extremely pleased for the outcomes of the meeting and for the very good attendance by the main national sector associations around the world. They are committed to bringing to term, in the agreed-upon timing, their national EPD and afterwards work together to verify the opportunity and feasibility of creating a global EPD for stone materials."

Please turn to page 21

"Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little."
– Edmund Burke

Pinnacle and Tucker Design Awards to Combine in 2025

The Natural Stone Institute is pleased to announce that beginning with the 2025 Call for Entries, the Tucker Design Awards will be partnered with the Pinnacle Awards program. Both awards will be given annually beginning in 2026. This streamlined approach to NSI's architecture awards entry, submission, judging, and celebration efforts will elevate the work of both the natural stone industry and the design community.

This joint awards program will culminate in a combined Awards Ceremony at StonExpo in 2026 and will provide award-winning design teams an opportunity to engage with natural stone experts. Held annually in Las Vegas, StonExpo is a showcase of domestic and international stone that provides a wealth of natural stone education and social events with stone industry leaders.

While Pinnacle Awards are given to NSI member companies, Tucker Design

Awards will continue to be given to a project's design team. Individuals in the design community may still enter their project for Tucker Design Award consideration. New for 2025, every Tucker Design Award entry must include a Natural Stone Institute member company.

Those entering a project for a Pinnacle Award, regardless of category, may also enter that project for a Tucker Design Award. A project entry may win both a Pinnacle and a Tucker Design Award. The Pinnacle Award jury, consisting of three industry experts and two design professionals, will determine winning projects for both awards programs.

A Call for Entries for the 2025 Awards Program will be announced in early 2025. Entries will be due on June 20, 2025. To view examples of award-winning submissions and learn more about each award, visit www.naturalstoneinstitute.org/awards.

A Lot More Than Days are Counted Before Christmas

Among the hundreds of joys that fill my heart every Christmas, one comes readily to mind: I'm ever-so-thankful I'm not an adjudicator for Guinness World Records.

Those are the people Guinness dispatches to every nook and cranny of the globe to make certain all the T's are dotted and the I's are crossed when someone applies for a record. Or, in the case of Christmas light competition, all the bulbs are counted.

Even if these people make \$10,000 an hour, it's not enough.

Consider what happened in 2015 when David Richards of Canberra, Australia, set the world record for most lights on an artificial Christmas tree at 518,838.

Please note: not "more than 518,000" or "nearly 519,000" or "a little over half a million."

Instead, precisely 518,838. As in "1, 2, 3, 4, (calculate-calculate)-DON'T-INTERRUPT-ME!-278,356; 278,357; 278,35-ahh-choo!-Aaarrrrgh!-1, 2, 3, 4..."

The poor soul was not named by Guinness. I know it's a woman, though, because I saw her on a YouTube account of the feat. Even all these years later, she's probably still crawling across the floor of some 24-hour Canberra pub, chugging 32-ounce Foster's fast and furious and mumbling incoherently.

But if you think she had it tough, consider the person(s) who tallied the most Christmas lights in a public square (1,529,103 in Myoko, Japan) or most Christmas lights on a house (601,736 in New York.)

Guinness adjudicators are up to their armpits in numbers at Christmas. Consider a few other Yule goodies they've recorded through the years.

- Largest human Christmas tree: Chengannur, India, 4,030 individuals — color coordinated in red, green and brown clothes, depending on their respective role as ornaments, foliage or trunk. (Don't know whether I feel sorrier for the counter or the organizer trying to keep everyone in place.)
- Largest artificial Christmas tree: 236 feet, 6.58 inches, Colombo, Sri Lanka. (Hope they had an extra-long tape measure and weren't afraid of heights.)

Sam Venable
Department of Irony



- Largest gingerbread house by internal volume: 39,201.8 cubic feet, Bryan, Texas. (Were sample nibbles deducted?)
- Longest Christmas wish list: 13,052.66 feet, Lapland, Finland. (No word on the most-requested item.)
- Largest Christmas tree ornament: 15 feet, .31 inches in diameter, Forst, Italy. (How loud a noise would it make if dropped?)
- Heaviest Santa Claus sled: 35,163 pounds, 11.73 ounces, Cobourg, Ontario, Canada. (PETA should sue on behalf of the reindeer.)
- Largest gathering of Santa Clauses: 18,112, Kerala, India. (But which one was the Real McCoy?)

Thanks just the same, but I'll settle for a half-dozen sugarplums.

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.

Stone Carver, Sculptor, Mentor: Kazutaka Uchida – 1948-2024

Word has reached us regarding the passing of stone carver and sculptor Kazutaka Uchida. We wish to offer condolences to his family, students and his many friends in the stone carving community. He was very proud of his many summers spent in the United States in the Pacific Northwest; Marble, Colorado, and Northern New Mexico teaching and working on his own carvings.



The museum director Stephen C. McCough describes Uchida's sculpture... "It is an art of large and simple gestures which lead the eye through and around the piece and then into the surrounding space. His forms are elegant and refined. They consist primarily of the sphere, the plane, the disk, the straight line and the rectangle."

He was born and lived in Japan where he first studied sculpture. He received an advanced degree in sculpture from the Ecole Des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1975. He returned to Japan and was commissioned to researched artisan traditions for the Japanese government. His experiences in Nepal greatly affected his art and his life.

Uchida found resonance in clear lines, subtle beauty, harmonious relationships, and the quiet power of elemental forms to evoke the transcendence and a feeling of Zen-like monastic tranquility and peace.

"The same prudence which in private life would forbid our paying our own money for unexplained projects, forbids it in the dispensation of the public monies."

– Thomas Jefferson

**Global
Collaboration
on Natural Stone**

Continued from page 17

“A further reason for satisfaction with the meeting was the decision to broaden the number of national associations participating in the Natural Stone Strategic Alliance (NSSA) and above all to have decided on the formal constitution of an entity of global representation, a permanent organization that brings on board all the sector associations worldwide to deal together with any issue of obvious strategic importance for the world’s stone industry, starting from the global EPD.”

This landmark collaboration marks a significant step toward positioning natural stone as a leader in sustainable building materials on the global stage.

About the NSSA

The Natural Stone Strategic Alliance (NSSA) is an alliance of trade associations who come together to work together on key industry initiatives. It creates opportunities for collaboration on a variety of topics. Past issues of focus have included strategies for increasing natural stone preference in the North American market. For more information on the associations leading this alliance, visit the following websites:

- Natural Stone Institute:
naturalstoneinstitute.org
- Confindustria Marmomacchine:
assomarmomacchine.com
- Centrorochas:
centrorochas.org.br/en/
- Assimagra:
assimagra.pt/en/home

“There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that’s your own self.”

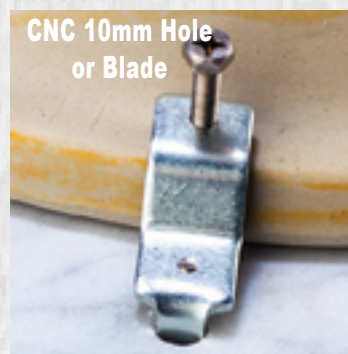
– Aldous Huxley

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'Twas the Deadline Before Christmas

'Twas the night before deadline, and all through the house,
not a creature was stirring—except for my mouse.

The coffee was brewing, the snacks piled with care,
In hopes that my brain would soon actually care.
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of Wi-Fi danced in their heads.
And I in my sweatpants, and you in your cap,
Had just settled in for a late-night work lap.
When out on the lawn, there arose such a clatter,
I tripped over Legos to see what was the matter.
Away to the window, I flew like a flash,
Stubbed my big toe and fell with a crash.
The moon on the grass, barely needing a filter,
Made me wish I'd gone to bed—
not played HALO till winter.
When what to my sleep-deprived eyes did appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and a dude chugging beer.
With a little old driver, so lively and spry,
I knew in a moment it was That Guy.
More rapid than giggles, his sarcasm came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called out some names:
"Yo, Dasher! Yo, Dancer! You better not lag!
On, Prancer! On, Vixen! Get that snack bag!
To the top of the roof! To the top of the wall!
And don't trip on the shingles, we're on the job, y'all!"

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When meet with an obstacle, soar to the sky.
So up to the rooftop, then quickly they flew,
With a sleigh full of memes and *That Guy*, too.
And then, in a twinkling, I heard from the roof
The stomping, and groaning—like they'd lost a shoe.
As I rubbed my tired eyes and was turning around,
Down the chimney *That Guy* came in with a bound.
He was dressed all in flannel, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with crumbs and some soot.
A bag of last-minute gifts was flung on his back,
And he looked like he'd raided the dollar-store rack.
His eyes—how they twinkled! His dimples, how scary!
His cheeks were like pizza, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
As if thinking of TikToks he'd already posted, ya know.
The stump of a vape he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke circled up like a foul mini-wreath.
He had a broad face and a round dad-bod belly,
That shook when he laughed, like a bowl full of jelly.
He was chubby and plump, like a midwinter snack,
And I laughed when I saw him, though I needed a nap.
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
Wrapping gifts with duct tape—oh boy, what a quirk.
Then, laying his finger aside of his nose,
He sneezed once, and poof! Up the chimney he rose.
He sprang to his sleigh, to his squad gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like a surface to air missile.
But I heard him exclaim, as he drove out of sight...
"Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night!"

— Sharon Koehler, with apologies to Clement Clark Moore

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JANUARY 2025 ISSUE
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2024

FEBRUARY 2025 ISSUE
MONDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2024

Classified Ads not meeting guidelines will not be published.

For Sale

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

Turrini Claudio MB 50 Waterwall Dust Control Cabinet Stainless steel waterwall dust extraction cabinet. Unit used in natural stone shops to collect dust from the air during sanding. The MB water wall follows the guidelines of HSE Health and Safety Executive. 98.3% Dust suppression. 2 units available. \$5000 per unit. Located in Miami FL. Contact via email omar@stoneworksinc.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@delorenzomable.com.

INTERMAC MASTER STONE 4000 Used Parts: I have disassembled and salvaged 2 machines. Too many parts to list. Cables, switches, breakers and relays, motors, drives, motor controllers, tanks (1 set custom made), vacuum fittings, pumps, and on and on. Please feel free to inquire about any part you may need, send a picture, and I'll see if I have it. Prices negotiable and reasonable. Buyer pays shipping. Since these are used parts, no guarantees but will refund for returned non-working parts. Contact: Bob Armstrong: (440) 233-9458; Email: largestcanine@gmail.com.

Denver Slot Bridge Saw For Sale: Denver Slot, 230-240 volt, fixed table, rotating head, 15 hp motor, 18" max blade, power x, y & z axis, Manual head rotation, No longer under power. Price reduced: \$6,500. Contact: Jeff

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