

Factors and Forecasts Affecting the Plastering Craft

By JOSEPH A. SCARCELLA

Plasterers have always kept up with new innovations. Perhaps this is what has increased the popularity and notoriety of the craft, and is probably the reason plastering has become much more specialized than it was a quarter-century ago.

Let's face it: whatever caused these changes in the past, plastering contractors will have to continue to adjust to meet high-production demands and increased volume rates if they want to remain competitive. This may seem difficult. After all, change can

be expensive and inconvenient from both management and operational perspectives. So why change?

Simply, contracting is a competitive business. Often the real challenge in the industry is to quickly adjust and adapt to new methods and products being used to make a profit. In light of this, the following information is provided to promote reflection and introspection about the plastering craft.

Changes On The Horizon

Most experts agree that the plastering craft has changed the way it

functions in the construction industry. Contractors, manufacturers, suppliers, and other professionals have altered the way they market their products and services. Competitive plasterers need to know about new trends before they happen so they can be proactive, not reactive. Which new trends will be important? How do we know the next trend isn't just another bandwagon?

While there are no easy answers, the future success of the plastering industry will depend largely on the ability of contractors to operate in this ever-changing environment. Like

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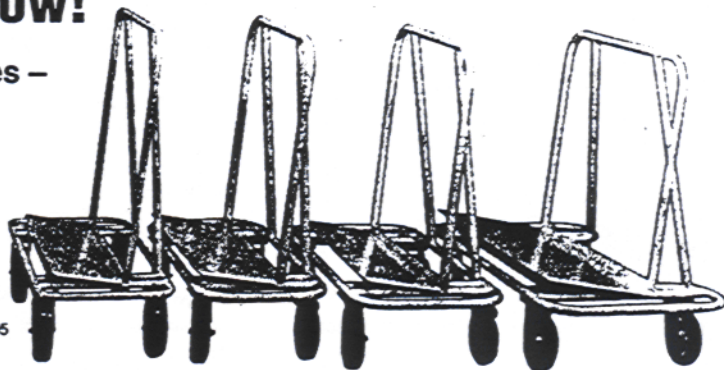
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many industries, the plastering craft has moved away from traditional methods toward more specialized techniques. The following examples can be cited:

Resurgence In Popularity

Plastering is currently enjoying notoriety because of newer, less costly materials and techniques. Technological improvements have allowed the craft to implement alternative methods of developing, remodeling, upgrading, and finishing existing interior and exterior structures.

Demand For Ornamental and Decorative Work

Interest is increasing in ornamental and decorative work. Plasterers now have access to more systems which are offering architects, builders, and developers greater opportunities in design at considerably lower cost-with added aesthetic advantages. In addition, there has been increased interest in preserving and restoring historical structures which are reflections of our architectural heritage.

Renovation and Retrofit

Construction industry experts predict that renovation and improvements will outpace new construction because of anemic national economic conditions. It is estimated that more than half of residential and commercial construction expenditures in the future will be improvement-related, including retrofits, renovations, maintenance, and repairs.

Computer Technology

Streamlining office automation, operations management, estimating practices, architectural design, and the like, has affected the way all construction professionals process information. Business productivity in the future will depend on the efficient processing of information.

General Alteration In Business Practices

If quality in the profession is to be maintained, we all must be able to accurately account for our actions. This will reduce callbacks, and isolate problems in operations, management, and finance when production rates are high and profit margins are low.

Tooling and Techniques

Manufacturers have simplified, standardized, and unified tooling used in the industry. Although traditional tools, like hawk, trowel and darby, are still common to the craft, new applications require new tools. Knowing

which tools to use and how to use them can provide cost-effective alternatives when bidding and doing a job.

What Can You Do?

Each one of us plays an important part in the plastering craft.

However, in order to contribute to the development of the profession, we must be prepared to upgrade, retrain, and encourage positive change. As we know, with change comes resistance, and if the profession is unable to adjust to the changes that are on the horizon, the oldest of all construction

crafts will be stifled.

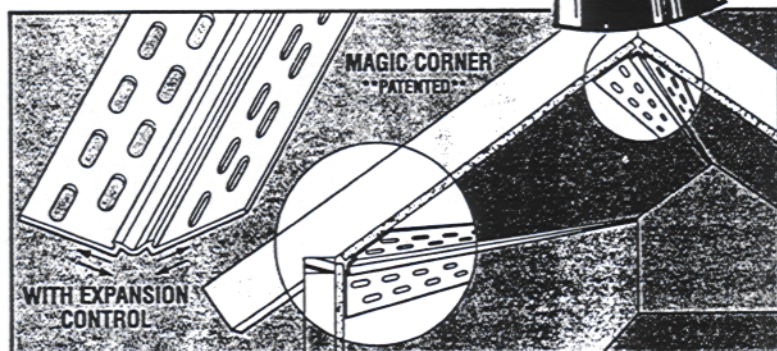
To prevent this from occurring, we need to be able to accept change while providing constructive criticism and guidance to contractors, suppliers, manufacturers, and other professionals. Here are some ways that may help:

Keep Abreast of New Technologies and Changing Trends

Our competitors aren't intimidated by technological advances, so why should we be? We must be familiar with how other contractors are taking advantage of technology to competitively package their bids. Keeping current with innovations allows much

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more flexibility on the job site and in bidding.

Attend Conferences and Association Meetings

Affiliating with other plasterers strengthens and enhances the profession and provides perspectives on changes in business and production practices.

Moreover, it keeps one abreast of new technologies and trends, and offers a forum for us to discuss new methods with professionals in the craft.

Enrich and Upgrade Skills

The plasterer should have enough opportunities to know, understand, and observe modern skills, techniques, and practices. Ultimately, this enhances the image of the profession because it shows outsiders that we know our craft and use the most appropriate techniques.

Promote Your Profession

If the plastering profession is to enter new markets, we must promote our services to others. It is important that

generations of plasterers follow in our footsteps. The future of the profession depends on its leaders' ability to prepare and train tomorrow's work force.

Provide Continual Input

Who else is better prepared to evaluate the processes and performance of plastering than the plasterer? Many involved in the building trades do not understand that plastering processes take time and skill. So, the better our membership communicates the professions' capabilities, the greater consumer confidence will be about the craft.

Oversee and Testify

We all need to be critical of the work that is taking place in the industry. Learn to monitor and assess the trades' performance by observing work visibly and critically. This allows the plastering craft to police itself, make progress toward meeting higher expectations and standards, and set a precedent so that onlookers will know that quality is in the minds of those working the trade.

Have Well Trained Personnel

As the adage goes, "Good help is hard to find." Once you have trained employees working as a team, do what you can to keep them working together.

Understanding employee knowledge and attitudes is also critical. Obviously, employee efficiency and productivity increase potential profits.

A Final Word

The success of the plastering craft will depend on its members' ability to accurately plan their futures. Our talented profession has a great deal of potential to enhance commercial and residential construction.

Luckily, we are aware of newer and more innovative techniques on the horizon, so solutions can be found and problems can often be avoided. Time is money, and those who can perform many tasks effectively and efficiently will always be in demand.

About the author:

Joe Scarcella is a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia, Technology and Industry Education Program. He has been involved in the walls and ceilings industry his entire career. Formerly, he was a Division Manager of Expo Industries Architectural Foam Shapes Division. Earlier in his career he served as an apprentice plasterer for Joe Scarcella Plastering.



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