




LUMBER CO-OPERATOR

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A photograph of five wooden stars of varying sizes and orientations, arranged on a light-colored wooden surface. The stars are made of a light-colored wood with a visible grain. The background is a blurred green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

LBM's Guide to 5-Star
**SALES &
MARKETING**

MAY/JUNE 2026

NRLA
Northeastern Retail
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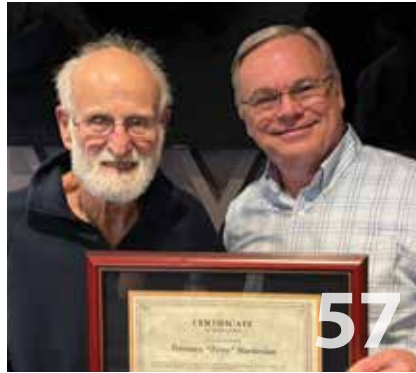
**Tougher than
the elements**

*Based on Freedonia 2022 Global Siding (Cladding) demand estimates and James Hardie sales in North America.
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Lumber Co-operator Mission Statement:

Lumber Co-operator is committed to broadening awareness of critical issues shaping the lumber and building material industry. We promise to equip our readers with the necessary tools to compete in an ever-changing business environment.


Contact the *Lumber Co-operator* at 800-292-6752 or 518-286-1010.



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Tom Glauber, Sherwood Lumber Corp., Islandia, N.Y.
Lee Slomkowski, Kamco Supply Corp. of New England, Wallingford, Conn.

If you would like more information on how to become part of the Lumber Co-operator's Editorial Advisory Board, contact publications at 800-292-6752 or publications@nrla.org.



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Rita Ferris
NRLA President

Thank you to the 75 NRLA members who attended the American Building Materials Alliance (ABMA) Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C., this April and to all who financially supported this event! Your support of NRLA’s federal lobbying efforts is essential to improving the business landscape of our industry, and it reflects the power of working together to advance the issues that matter most to our members.

This year, our legislative agenda focused on making housing more affordable—a priority that felt especially timely coming off a hard winter. During Advocacy Day, your voices were heard on key issues, including the Credit Card Competition Act, which would lower credit card swipe fees; the 21st Century Road to Housing Act, which would help reduce the cost of building housing; and the Prove It Act, which would ensure that business regulations account for both hard and soft costs. While there is no single solution to making housing more affordable, taken together, these efforts can meaningfully move the needle and increase the supply of attainable housing. We found that there was mixed support for the Credit Card Competition Act, wide support for the 21st Century Road to Housing Act, and an interest in learning more about the Prove It Act. We will be using the feedback gained as a tool to continue to foster relationships with our elected officials with the goal of gaining their support.

You will find a full recap of this event in the July/August issue; however, reflecting on the experience today, I’m reminded that there are both hard and soft benefits to participating in any legislative advocacy event. As one attendee shared, advocating together fosters a sense of being “brothers and sisters in arms” and being part of a shared community. Other examples include feeling empowered when walking the halls of the House and Senate and meeting directly with elected officials and their staff, gaining a deeper understanding of the legislative issues impacting our businesses, and even enjoying a well-earned dinner prepared by Chef José Andrés.

Advocacy is an investment, and while Washington can be expensive, the collective financial support of NRLA’s state and local associations, along with our sponsors, ensures that every member can have a seat at the table. Please review our ABMA sponsors by visiting www.abmalliance.org/advocacyday and thank them for their financial commitment to advancing our industry.

On a related subject, communication is key to NRLA’s success on your behalf. In the coming months, we will be reaching out to you to confirm we have the correct contact information for your organization.

Thank you in advance for taking a moment out of your busy day to help us serve you better, and thank you for the opportunity to serve you!

Rita

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Genn Howley
NRLA Chair, GNH Lumber

I had the opportunity to attend NRLA’s IDEAS Show in March. It was encouraging to see so many professionals from the industry attending this one-day show. I found it uplifting to see students from trade schools attending the show and the large number of young people entering the trades. The show was, by my estimation, very successful. I enjoyed being able to meet new associate members and retailers that I haven’t had the pleasure of meeting yet.

During that show, I had the chance to talk to several members about the importance of NRLA’s American Building Material Alliance (ABMA) and Advocacy Day. My goal was to encourage attendance from all the states we represent and highlight the need for collaboration. The conversations varied, but the message was the same: Traveling to D.C., although an expense of time and money, is an investment in our livelihood, in the very industry that sustains us.

Francis Palasieski, NRLA’s director of government affairs, has taken my focus on legislative priorities to heart! As the current chair of the NRLA, I’ve stepped far outside of my comfort zone, having faith over fear. I’ve done a brief roundtable discussion on tariffs with several small business owners organized by the governor’s office. I had the opportunity to list three challenges small business owners are facing, including tariffs, insurance, and the cost of energy. I joined a press conference spearheaded by the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) to deal

with insurance fraud, which is impacting our budget with the rising cost of insurance. Most recently I was asked to host the governor at our retail store and yard in Greenville, N.Y. My goal wasn’t to promote GNH but to put a face to the battles we are collectively fighting. In my home state, the threat to small businesses is real and is causing a lot of pressure to dealers of all sizes. But New York dealers are not alone; the cost of doing business with rising overhead expenses is crippling. One of the ways to move our initiative forward is with a collective voice; when given the opportunity to be the face of small businesses, take it, knowing you’re representing all the membership.

As I write this, I’m gearing up to head to Washington, D.C., for Advocacy Day, and I’m excited that ABMA has its largest contingent of dealers; we currently stand at 75 members. We will have a great mixture of new faces, and I’m excited about the possibilities of bringing new fresh views and voices to our elected officials.

When I return to New York, we will be in the last 10 days of April. The weather is finally breaking, traffic in stores is increasing, and spring projects are starting. My prayer this year is for a successful 2026 for all.

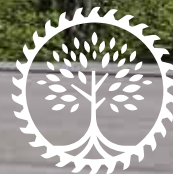
Genn Howley

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Kylie Holland
NYLE President, Curtis Lumber Company

I hope everyone is enjoying the transition into some more spring-like weather. I know for me, a little warmth and sunshine couldn't be more welcome! Sales should be getting a much-needed boost in the upcoming weeks as well, and I know we are all looking forward to that.

Fresh off Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C., I wanted to take a moment to share my gratitude for the opportunity to join NRLA and ABMA in their efforts to influence legislative change within our industry. This was my first year attending, and while my expectations were high based on the positive feedback I had heard, the experience far exceeded them. It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the challenges we face in this industry each day, but spending time discussing those concerns with peers and legislators was energizing. It sparked a genuine sense of optimism and accomplishment. I'm certainly looking forward to becoming a repeat attendee and encourage others to take that first step and join us in Washington next year.

As I write this letter, NYLE is also looking ahead to our Spring Leadership Conference in Providence, R.I., April 22–23. We'll be diving into meaningful discussions on sales best practices and operational efficiency, with insights from industry experts in both areas.

At NYLE, our goal is to provide valuable and engaging educational experiences for all members. I encourage you to reach out to me or any member of the NYLE executive board with topics you'd find beneficial for yourself, your team, and your business at future events.

While we're on the topic of planning ahead, be sure to join us the week of October 19 in Denver for NYLE's Timber Tour. Based on your feedback, we're returning to our roots with a focus on touring more forestry industry facilities to offer a unique, meaningful educational experience. The more we understand the origins and processes behind the products we work with every day, the better stewards of this industry we can become. Timber Tour is our best attended event each year, so be on the lookout for registration coming out this summer!

As always, I appreciate the opportunity to connect with and learn from NRLA and NYLE members. I look forward to the months ahead and hope to see many of you at our upcoming events.

Kylie L. Holland

EST'D 1987

NYLE

NORTH AMERICAN YOUNG
LUMBER EMPLOYEES

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR THESE UPCOMING 2026 NYLE EVENTS

Monday-Friday, October 19-23
NYLE Timber Tour
Denver, Colorado

Wednesday-Thursday, December 9-10
NRLA LBM Expo
Mohegan Sun, Uncasville, CT

Wednesday, December 9
NYLE Annual Meeting
Mohegan Sun, Uncasville, CT

Thursday, December 10
NYLE Past Presidents Luncheon
Mohegan Sun, Uncasville, CT

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Complete both puzzles below and submit your answers to publications@nrla.org by **June 19** for a chance to win a fantastic prize pack* of unique industry items from your favorite brands—plus bragging rights! Whether you submit a screenshot from your mobile device or a picture of your handwritten entry from the LC itself, make sure your submission lands in our inbox by the deadline!

*We encourage everyone to play in print or online, but note that the prize packs are intended for retail lumber dealers.

Your Name _____

Company Name _____

Valid Email Address (to notify you if you win) _____

5-STAR SALES & MARKETING (All answers can be found within this issue.)

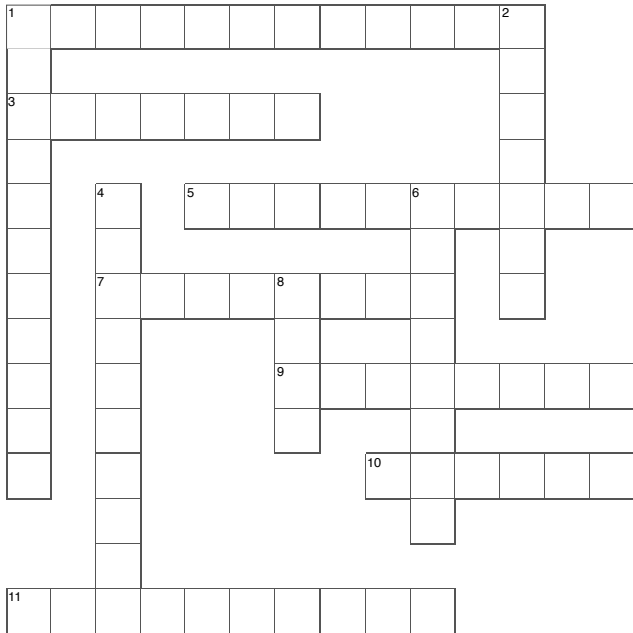
ACROSS:

1. Design approach centered on integrated lifestyle moments
3. Bilingual access can create stronger customer _____
5. What finishing materials are at risk for
7. How sales and marketing work to build something solid
9. Many family businesses benefit from what outside service
10. Returning to the fundamentals to win new customers

11. You're building this before the first conversation even happens

DOWN

1. Your website's hardest-working role
2. From a tax standpoint this can be attractive
4. What live support shouldn't feel like a wall of
6. What tool dynamic retail management is
8. Dealers should treat the physical showroom as an active sales _____



PLAY ONLINE—TAKE A SCREENSHOT & SUBMIT!



5-STAR SALES & MARKETING
<https://nrla.org/5-star-sales-marketing>



FLOORS GALORE
<https://nrla.org/floors-galore>

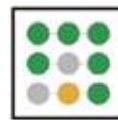
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HARDWOOD	NEUTRALS	TILE
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 U G L A L O R R N D I E S T
 P N A D W A E S T B P N U A
 V I F D C E I R T R N O B I
 L D R I N S S I A L L B F N
 T A O I N N I U N I A G L A
 H S G G T I L E L L R N O B
 D N A S H T S N E R U I O I
 E L L P F O O H A E T R R L
 P E N O E V E H E U A R I I
 H I I O A L I D O D N E N T
 S E O I U D E E D N U H G Y

Each LC publication has games you can play:



LC Wired:
 Get your mind buzzing with WordroW, the LC's word/phrase guessing game just like NYT's Wordle. Check each week for a link to play!



LC SupplySide:
 Test your knowledge of all things NRLA with the LC's NRLA Trivia Game. Check every other week for a link to play!



NRLA Promotes Pam McHale to Senior Event Coordinator



The NRLA is pleased to announce the promotion of **Pam McHale** to senior event coordinator.

In 2021, McHale undertook the critical role of event coordinator, assuming responsibility for managing events across 10 state and local associations. The position requires a high level of accuracy, organization, and adaptability, and the ability to effectively manage multiple priorities and stakeholders.

Since that time, McHale has consistently demonstrated strong performance and leadership in this role. She has maintained a high standard of execution, earning the confidence of state and local associations, NRLA leadership, regional directors, and association partners.

This promotion recognizes McHale's sustained contributions to the organization, including seven years of service as an education coordinator and five years as event coordinator. Her experience, professionalism, and commitment to operational excellence have been instrumental to NRLA's success.

Please join us in recognizing her on her well-deserved promotion!



Sherwood Lumber Announces New Distribution Facility In Danville, PA

Sherwood Lumber announced the opening of a new distribution center in Danville, Pa., a strategic expansion designed to better serve customers across Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, and western New York. The facility is expected to significantly increase inventory availability and delivery frequency across the region.

The Danville distribution center expands Sherwood Lumber's logistics footprint and is positioned to deliver more service days into the market while holding increased on-the-ground inventory of building materials, exterior building, and outdoor living products.

Learn more at <https://nrla.org/news>.



ODL Announces Strategic Partnership with BROSCO, a Boise Cascade Location, to Expand Distribution of ODL Entry Doors in the Northeast

This partnership represents a major expansion to distribute ODL entry doors throughout the Northeast region and builds on a longstanding relationship between ODL and BROSCO. For decades, BROSCO has incorporated ODL door glass into its entry door programs—delivering quality, craftsmanship, and performance to building professionals across the Northeast. The new agreement expands that collaboration, positioning ODL as BROSCO's primary supplier of fiberglass and steel entry doors at both of BROSCO's distribution centers in Hatfield, Mass., and Portland, Maine.

Together, ODL and BROSCO will provide dealers and builders with a compelling portfolio of entry door solutions—combining in-demand styles, exceptional durability, and the reliable support professionals expect from trusted industry partners.

Learn more at <https://nrla.org/news>.



Study Shows PVC Recycling Rates Rise and Are Poised for More Growth

This new report by the Vinyl Institute is just the latest in the industry's ongoing strides to increase PVC recycling. Among these is the VIABILITY recycling grant funding program, which is seeking to increase post-consumer PVC recycling.

Based on the survey results, the amount of PVC recycled in 2024 surpassed that of 2019 by more than 45 million pounds. While the industry saw overall growth, the data reveals a significant shift between industrial and consumer sources:

- **Post-Industrial Growth:** Recycled volume rose to 1.056 billion pounds (a 10% increase), driven in part by high landfill costs and strong manufacturer demand for recycled content.
- **Post-Consumer Decline:** This sector fell to 71.3 million pounds, missing the 2020-set goal by 58%. This unexpected drop is primarily attributed to a significant slowdown of vinyl flooring replacement projects in the retail market that peaked in 2019.

Read the full report at <https://nrla.org/pvc-recycling-rates>.



ECI Software Solutions Brings Purpose-Built Dealer Technology to Canada with RockSolid MAX

The expansion brings one of the industry's most trusted cloud-based POS and inventory systems to Canada, now fully optimized for local operations through integration with Moneris, a leader in Canadian commerce.

The launch of RockSolid MAX in Canada closes this gap, offering a "right-sized" cloud solution specifically built for the workflows of independent hardware stores and lumberyards.

ECI Software Solutions Named 2026 Great Place To Work in Eight Countries for Employee-Driven Culture

ECI Software Solutions, Inc. announced that it has been certified as a 2026 Great Place to Work in eight countries. Eighty-two percent of employee feedback described ECI as a Great Place to Work, a 7% increase from the previous year and 25% higher than the average for U.S.-based companies.

This marks the eighth consecutive year of ECI's recognition in the U.S.; the fifth straight year in Canada, the U.K., and Australia; the fourth straight year in the Netherlands; the second straight year in Portugal; and a first-time certification in Norway and India.

Read these two press releases at <https://nrla.org/news>.

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Manufacturers Reserve Supply (MRS) to Distribute RISE Siding and Trim

MRS has announced a new distribution partnership with RISE siding and trim by CertainTeed. Through this partnership, MRS will bring the innovative composite siding product to retailers across the region with local inventory and rapid fulfillment.

RISE siding has already generated strong demand in the marketplace due to its durability, curb appeal, and versatile product offering. By stocking the product locally, MRS will enable dealers to place orders ranging from single pieces to full units and receive them within days—helping retailers respond quickly to contractor demand.

MRS is widely recognized for bringing premier building product brands to market through a strong distribution network and a commitment to service. The addition of RISE expands the company's specialty exterior building materials portfolio and fills an important need for retailers seeking innovative siding solutions.

MRS Expands Partnership with CertainTeed, Adds Restoration Millwork PVC Trim to Product Portfolio

Building on the recent launch of RISE Siding, MRS will now distribute CertainTeed's well-established Restoration Millwork PVC Trim product line. This strategic addition strengthens MRS' exterior product offering and reinforces its commitment to delivering premium, in-demand materials to its dealer network.

"Expanding our relationship with CertainTeed is a natural next step for MRS," said Brian Boyd, president of Manufacturers Reserve Supply. "Restoration Millwork PVC Trim fits seamlessly into our exterior product strategy across roofing, siding, decking, trim, and weatherization. We are excited to bring this high-quality, trusted product line to our customers and support their continued growth with a dependable supply partner."

Read these two press releases at <https://nrla.org/news>.

IN MEMORIAM

Alfred D. Young, of Medford, Mass., passed away on February 28. Alfred dedicated many years to his career working as a salesperson and accountant for Moynihan Lumber.

Joseph A. "Tony" Morgan, 86, of Revere, Mass., passed away on March 31. Morgan was co-owner of Boston Cedar and recipient of MRLDA's Lifetime Achievement Award in 1999 and Lumber Person of the Year in 2009.



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◀ Envision Outdoor Living Products Introduces Modern Aluminum Railing

The new railing offers a sleek design—a slim, eased-edge profile for a versatile contemporary style and optimal visibility to views beyond, plus post brackets that are less bulky than traditional brackets.

Learn more: <https://nrla.org/envision-aluminum-railing>

FastenMaster Introduces Zip Hidden Fastening System ▶

The new Zip Hidden Fastening System is the industry's first concealed fastening solution engineered to deliver precision accuracy without sacrificing speed.

Learn more: <https://nrla.org/fastenmaster-zip-system>



◀ BenWrap SA Self-Adhered Flat Housewrap

Benjamin Obdyke has launched BenWrap SA, a self-adhered version of its traditional flat wrap, BenWrap (previously known as FlatWrap HP). This addition truly rounds out the company's wall weatherization lineup, allowing customers to use systems-based approaches throughout the building envelope for projects across every climate, cladding type, and budget.

Learn more: <https://nrla.org/benwrapsa>

Atlantic Plywood Introduces Unilin Master Oak Across East Coast Markets

Atlantic Plywood, a Parksite, Inc. brand, announced the launch of Unilin Master Oak, a high-performance oak veneer alternative from Unilin Panels, now available across all Atlantic Plywood locations throughout the East Coast.

Learn more: <https://nrla.org/unilin-master-oak>



Westlake Royal Building Products Introduces Lap Siding Profile for TruExterior Siding & Trim

The new profile combines the coveted appearance and shadow lines of traditional lap siding with the high-performance attributes of TruExterior's poly-ash material.

Learn more: <https://nrla.org/wrbp-lap-siding-truext>

Russin Announces Availability of Norx Composite Cladding

Russin is expanding its portfolio with the availability of Norx composite cladding. A high-performance exterior solution for dealers, architects, and contractors across the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic market. Norx composite cladding is designed to meet growing demand for contemporary exterior aesthetics without the common challenges associated with traditional materials.

Learn more: <https://nrla.org/russin-norx-cladding>



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NRLA WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS: STEP-Powered Training and HR Resources for Lumber & Building Materials Employers

A practical, scalable member benefit designed to support safety, manage controllable risk, ensure compliance, and adopt consistent workforce-people practices across your business and locations.

NRLA member companies operate in fast-moving environments—yards and warehouses, delivery operations, showrooms, and multiple jobsites—where training, documentation, and HR policies and procedures need to be managed consistently. Effective April 1, NRLA Connect is sunsetting and is now called the **NRLA Workforce Solutions** program, delivered in partnership with **Arthur J. Gallagher** and included for members in good standing as part of your NRLA membership.

WHAT IS INCLUDED:

STEP Training and Risk Management Resources

The NRLA Workforce Solutions experience is supported through the **STEP Risk Management Center** (powered by KPA), which provides access to a risk management library, training tools, and related safety resources. The training catalog includes a broad set of topics across key areas such as environment, health and safety, and human resources, with content available in **English and Spanish**, so employers can align training to operational risk and workplace requirements.

Training Access and Tracking

Members can assign training and track completion to support documentation and consistency. Topics include common safety and HR areas such as forklift safety, lockout/tagout, harassment prevention, and drug-free workplace practices. Many courses include built-in knowledge checks to support completion tracking.

Note on access: Earlier communications referenced a “10-module” limit; the current STEP offering for this program is communicated as **not subject to that cap**.

Onboarding and Enablement

STEP includes resources to help employers get started, such as overview materials and guidance for setting up users and assigning training. Program communications also reference tools and webinars that walk administrators through common setup steps, including employee import and role management.

HR Guidance Resource: Gallagher HR Now

Beyond training, Workforce Solutions includes Gallagher HR Now, an HR guidance resource that offers access to experienced HR professionals and compliance information for general guidance on common workplace situations (e.g., employee relations, disciplinary actions, and leaves of absence). Gallagher guidance is not intended to be and should not be construed as legal advice.

Industry perspective (illustrative only): Organizations with multiple locations often benefit from centralized training libraries and consistent documentation processes that support supervisors and help reduce preventable issues.

How NRLA Members Request Access

NRLA members who want to activate the NRLA Workforce Solutions should follow the NRLA’s member access request process in the member portal as communicated by NRLA or reach out to memberprograms@nrla.org for assistance. Once enrolled, administrators start their exploration and training on the platform or can sign up for regular live webinars scheduled each month. Member users can begin assigning roles, training, tracking completion, and using the available HR and risk management resources immediately.

This article for publication is provided for informational purposes only and is not intended to offer legal, tax, regulatory, or client-specific risk management advice. Coverage, training, and risk management needs vary by organization. NRLA member organizations should consult with their advisors or talk with a Gallagher representative and appropriate advisors regarding their specific circumstances. Insurance brokerage and risk management services are provided by Arthur J. Gallagher Risk Management Services, LLC, and/or its affiliates.

INTRODUCING... NRLA WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

TRAINING, TRACKING, AND HR GUIDANCE FOR YOUR TEAM

**ENROLL
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known as
NRLA Connect.

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Now Upgraded!**

**NRLA WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS—STEP®-POWERED
TRAINING AND HR RESOURCES FOR LBM EMPLOYERS.**
A PRACTICAL, SCALABLE MEMBER BENEFIT SUPPORTING SAFETY, MANAGING
RISK, ENSURING COMPLIANCE, AND CONSISTENT WORKFORCE PRACTICES.

Here are just some of the resources included in your STEP® Training and Risk Management Center:

TRAINING CATALOG:
Topics in key areas include
environment, health
& safety, and human
resources in English
and Spanish!

ACCESS & TRACKING:
Assign training and track
completion. Topics in
forklift safety, lockout/
tagout, harassment
prevention, and more!

**ONBOARDING &
ENABLEMENT**
Overview materials
and guidance for
setting up users and
assigning training.

**HR GUIDANCE RESOURCE
with Gallagher HR Now**
Access to experienced
HR professionals and
compliance information
for general guidance.

Contact memberprograms@nrla.org for more information or for assistance getting enrolled.

NRLA Workforce Solutions is **free** for all NRLA members to participate in.

Workforce Solutions is brought to you by:



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IDEAS SHOW

For the Lumber & Building Materials Industry **2026**

"Provided an opportunity to make genuine connections, and enjoy a day with exposure to new and existing products."

HIGHLIGHTS

IDEAS Show 2026 was a solid gathering of more than 1,600 LBM professionals from five states, that brought energy, innovation, and peer-to-peer connection to the Valley Forge Casino Resort in King of Prussia, Pa., on March 11. With 108 exhibitors showcasing the industry's latest and greatest products and services, attendees enjoyed a full day of industry-specific education, valuable networking opportunities, fantastic food, and an abundance of fresh IDEAS.



See more highlights
on YouTube!



<https://nrla.org/IDEAS2026>



"It's a great event to see existing customers and get our products out to those that don't know us yet."





"There was a lot of new vendors, products, and innovations, its an exciting place to begin working with new people."



CHANGING YOUR BUSINESS for the Future...

By Tom Zimmerman



When a business is started, it is in growth mode. It needs to increase its revenue, requiring sales initiatives, and capturing new customers becomes paramount. As the revenue reaches a certain point, it is easy for an organization to get caught up in the day-to-day, reactionary process of doing business, such as filling orders, addressing customer concerns, correcting a mis-shipment, or adjusting quotes, which allows the sales team to take their eye off the ball (in this case, “growth”).

Yes, the age-old adage of “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” tells us that we need to serve the customers we have before chasing new customers. Though, the fundamentals that it took to build the business have been superseded by the daily tasks of operating the business.

This unintended shift in moving from a growth-based business to steady-state operation may leave the leaders to look back on the business to ask, “Why aren’t we growing...?” Either through internal review of the business or the (less-than) eloquent insertion of a consultant, it is deemed that the business needs to “adopt a new process” for increasing revenue to start growing again.



“Changing the sales trajectory of a business really isn’t all that difficult. Often it is as simple as taking the business back to the basics of calling on new customers, understanding their needs, and helping them see how your business’s “solution” can make their situation better.”

Changing the sales trajectory of a business really isn’t all that difficult. Often it is as simple as taking the business back to the basics of calling on new customers, understanding their needs, and helping them see how your business’s “solution” can make their situation better. Voilà, with the wave of a magic wand, we have cured the ills of the business, and we have started to grow again. Problem solved, disaster averted; you can stop reading now...

In all reality, a new set of expectations must be set and adopted by the team to drive the required change in the organization. Anytime this type of change needs to happen in the business, whether it’s a function of sales, operations, customer service, etc., it will require both immediate adoption as well as long-term staying power.

I am sure there are plenty of “Ted Talks” out there that discuss how one of the most efficient ways to drive organizational change is to involve the team in “developing and implementing the new process.” This ensures their voices are heard, they are a part of the solution, and, in turn, they have a vested equity or ownership in the outcomes. This is great, so long as this particular group of team members stays with the business in their current roles and the conditions around the business don’t change. Unfortunately, that isn’t reality.

As our country and economy have evolved over the last several decades, we have seen the “generational shift” in business, where the

- First generation: Identified a need and *started a business*.
- Second generation: Took the business from the first generation, saw ways to improve it, and *grew the business*.
- Third generation: Lived off the work of the prior two generations, didn’t appreciate what it took to run things, and *killed the business*.

The generational shift listed above is summarized and generalized but also relatable, as it has been a recognized pattern across many businesses for years. This “generational shift” doesn’t just play out in business ownership; it happens on a smaller scale within the business as well.

Anytime a new initiative, process, or concept is created, implemented, and adopted, it carries a similar lifecycle risk and faces the risk of certain death. Your business may make a standard practice of involving the various stakeholders to develop a new program, but as the program becomes a part of the daily cadence of business operations, the reason the program was created starts to lose meaning, and it veers into the dangerous realm of “That’s the way we’ve always done it.” Those words can quickly drop what was a valuable new initiative to the level of a “meaningless task,” the team stops utilizing it, and you are back to where you started.

To help avoid this, each department in the business should adopt some lean or “lean-like” principles or a continuous improvement approach where the team sets aside time to intentionally review common business practices. They should evaluate each task on its effectiveness and alignment/support of the company’s broader initiatives and desired direction.

Based on the outcome of their evaluation, each task can be

- Renewed—resulting in the team maintaining equity in completing the task
- Adjusted—resulting in the team owning an improved process
- Retired—resulting in the team feeling freed up to achieve other core initiatives

This will help eliminate procedures that are no longer relevant (for efficiency) and drive improvement to other key areas (for effectiveness) and will keep everyone actively engaged in the success of each process (for equity and delivery). Thus, removing the “set it and forget it” culture that causes successful and growing businesses to slowly drift into mediocrity and alleviating the negative generational shift of the business. **LC**

Want more insights on how help your customers recognize your value? Or take your company’s performance to the next gear? Tom Zimmerman, principal of SHIFT Sales Training & Consulting, has helped many companies better position themselves as valued-added partners for their customers, which has resulted in increased revenues and customer loyalty. Tom can be reached via email at tzimmerman@shift-stc.com. To learn more about SHIFT Sales Training and Consulting, visit www.shift-stc.com.

Which Came First—
SALES

OR

MARKETING?

By Jack Leary

**We've all heard the age-old riddle:
Which came first, the chicken or the egg?**

It's a philosophical question that's sparked debates for centuries. Most scientists lean toward the egg coming first. But if you're talking chicken eggs specifically, then the chicken had to come first to lay one, didn't it? That got me to thinking of a similar question in the LBM world: Which came first, sales or marketing? And unlike the egg question, this one has real-world implications for your yard, your team, and your bottom line.

Defining the Players

Before we dive into the chronology, let's define the roles in the context of a lumber and building material dealer:

- **Marketing** is about creating awareness, generating interest, and shaping perception. It's the signage out front, the social media post about your new engineered wood line, and the email blast promoting your contractor breakfast.
- **Sales** is about converting that interest into revenue. It's the counter conversation, the jobsite visit, the quote follow-up, and the relationship that turns a lead into a loyal customer.

They're two sides of the same board, but which side was cut first?

A Brief History

Historically, sales came first. In the early days of the building supply trade, there was no need for elaborate campaigns or brand storytelling. Dealers built relationships face-to-face, stocked what builders needed, and made deals based on trust and a handshake.

Marketing emerged later, as competition grew and product lines expanded. Dealers needed to differentiate—why choose your yard over the big box down the street? Enter advertising, branding, and eventually digital marketing: websites, SEO, and Instagram-worthy displays of reclaimed barnwood.

So if we're talking historical sequence, sales was the first cut. Marketing followed to smooth the edges.

But Wait—It's Not That Simple

Today, the relationship is more symbiotic than sequential. Marketing warms up leads—maybe a contractor saw your Facebook post about bulk fastener discounts or a homeowner clicked on your deck design tool. Sales then steps in to guide the purchase, answer technical questions, and close the deal.

But sales also feeds marketing with insights from the front lines—what builders are asking for, what objections they raise, and what promotions actually move the needle.

It's no longer about which came first. It's about how they work together to build something solid.

The Modern Take: Alignment Over Order

Modern LBM businesses thrive when sales and marketing are aligned. That means:

- **Shared goals:** revenue, retention, customer satisfaction.
- **Integrated strategies:** Marketing campaigns that support seasonal sales cycles, like pushing insulation in fall or decking in spring.
- **Feedback loops:** Sales insights that refine marketing messages, like knowing that "preferred-grade" resonates with their customers more than "premium grade."

When these two functions collaborate, the result isn't just more leads or more orders—it's a better customer experience, from the first visit or click to the final delivery.

So...Who Wins?

If you're still wondering which came first, here's the twist: It doesn't matter; both are essential! If you're only doing one, you're leaving money on the table. But if you align both, you're building something that lasts.

If you're an independent dealer serving contractors day in and day out, now's the time to align your sales and marketing like never before. Because when your messaging reflects what your customers really care about, you don't just sell more—you build loyalty, reputation, and long-term growth.

Sales and marketing aren't rivals. They're your most powerful crew when they're working from the same blueprint.

In the world of independent LBM dealers—especially contractor-focused yards—sales and marketing aren't competing for importance; they're interdependent. But if we're talking boots-on-the-ground impact, here's how to think about it:

Sales: The Relationship Engine

- Sales is what keeps the lights on. It's the face-to-face trust, the jobsite visits, the "I'll get that delivered by noon" promise.
- In contractor yards, relationships drive repeat business. Your sales team knows which builder prefers SPF over SYP and which GC needs quotes turned around in 24 hours.

Marketing: The Growth Accelerator

- Marketing builds visibility, credibility, and pipeline. It's how you reach new contractors, showcase your capabilities, and stay top-of-mind.
- Without marketing, your yard risks being the best-kept secret in town.

Why You Need Both

- Marketing warms up leads. Sales closes them.
- Sales provides real-world feedback. Marketing amplifies what works.
- Together, they create a seamless customer experience—from first impression to final invoice.

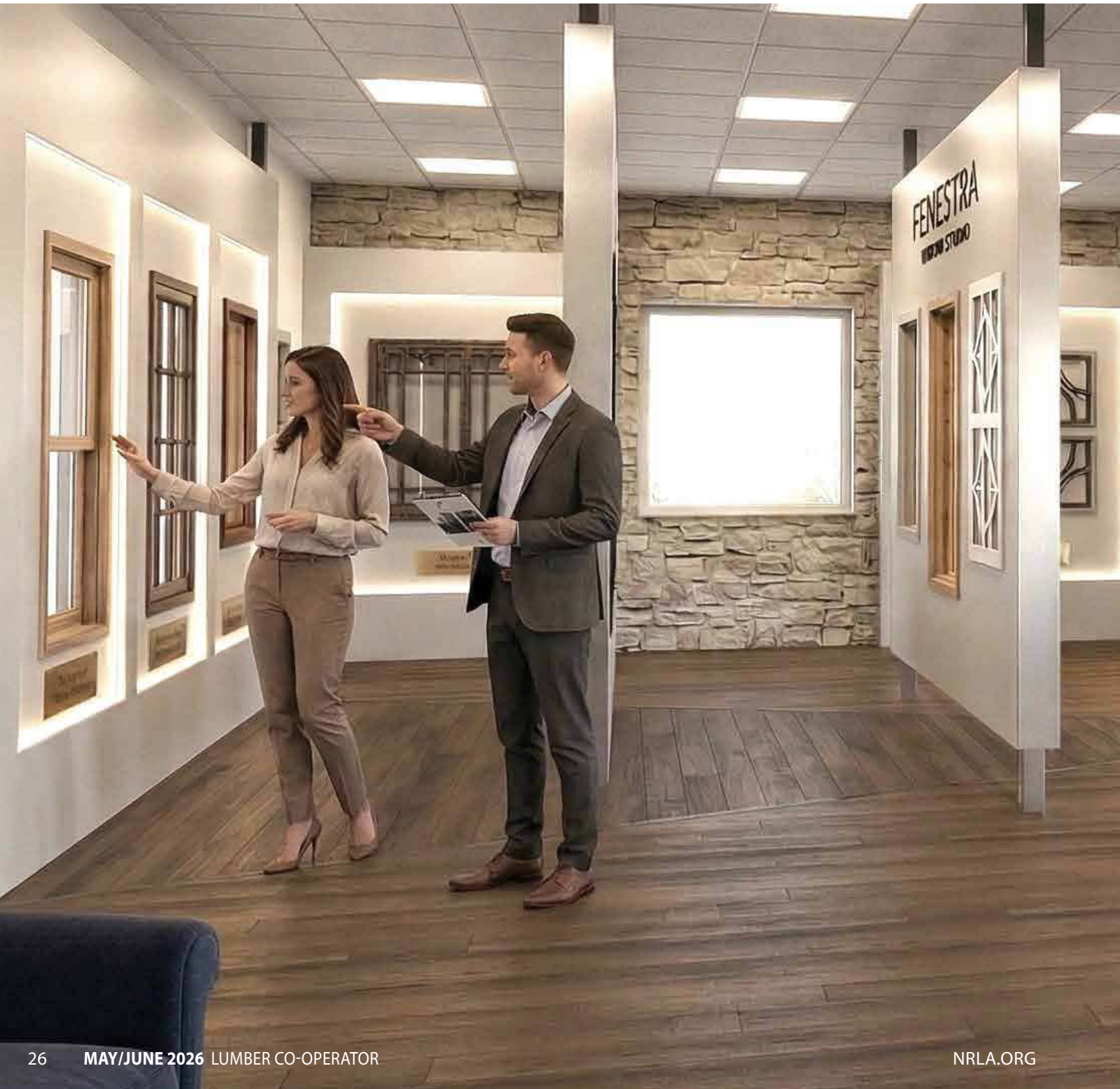
In conclusion, I would like to use a music metaphor, "Words & Music." You can have great music and you can have great lyrics. In order to have a great song, you need both working together in concert! When they're in sync, they produce something powerful. For your business that means growth, loyalty, and a reputation that builds itself. 🎵

Jack Leary of Impact 180 Consulting Group has 40+ years of LBM industry experience in key leadership roles working in retail, manufacturing, and professional services. Jack can be reached at 216-408-9306 or leary.jack@impact180group.com.

BEYOND THE SAMPLES:

Rewriting the Retail Playbook for Modern Dealers

By Chris Kennedy, AIA, LEED AP, principal and H. Sloane Mayor, AIA, NCARB, principal, MA+KE Architects





In an era where convenience often replaces brand loyalty, independent lumber dealers are facing a new kind of competition. It isn't just the big-box store down the street anymore; it's the infinite, frictionless world of e-commerce. To stay relevant, dealers must offer something a website cannot: a high-touch, immersive experience that builds immediate trust. However, a beautiful showroom is only half the battle. To truly thrive, dealers must overhaul their sales playbook to treat the physical showroom as an active, high-performing member of the sales team rather than a passive backdrop.



The Death of Aisle-and-Bin Thinking

For decades, the retail playbook for lumberyards was strictly utilitarian. The philosophy was simple: Put the product in a bin, put a price tag on the shelf, and wait for a contractor to ask for it. This is aisle-and-bin thinking. While it works for commodities like bulk fasteners or pressure-treated studs, it fails miserably for high-margin, high-consequence design decisions like windows, cabinetry, or fixtures.

When approaching retail showroom design, we advocate a shift toward vignette-driven storytelling. Instead of a sterile wall of 50 disparate door handles, we show a door, a casing, and a handle integrated into a lifestyle moment. This allows your sales staff to stop being order-takers and start being guides. Instead of a window, you are selling the morning light in a renovated kitchen. By showing products in context, you remove the imagination gap that often stalls a sale.

Below: Showcasing multiple floor plan approaches to help dealers evaluate layout strategies and select the best fit for their showroom.



Choreographing the Journey

A high-performing showroom manages the customer's cortisol levels. Most homeowners walk into a lumberyard feeling slightly out of their element, overwhelmed by technical jargon and the sheer volume of choices. The physical layout must act as a calming influence. This starts with the threshold, the first 10 feet of the store. If that space is cluttered with no smoking signs or stacks of clearance buckets, the customer's stress rises. If it is open, well-lit, and features a clear hero display, they instantly feel they are in expert hands.

Beyond the entryway, the most critical design element is the Huddle Space. In the old playbook, sales happened over a high, laminate counter, which served as a physical barrier between the dealer and the client. In the new playbook, we design neutral zones. These are comfortable tables where a contractor, a homeowner, and a dealer can spread out drawings and material samples together. When you sit at the same level as your client, the psychology of the sale shifts from a transaction to a collaborative partnership.


Frictionless Technology

You don't need robots in the aisles, but you do need digital assistants. The modern customer journey doesn't end when

they walk out the door. By integrating technology, like QR codes on vignettes that link to digital project inspiration galleries or instant spec sheets, you allow the customer to continue the sales journey on their own terms. This technology shouldn't replace human interaction; it should empower your sales staff to provide more information with less friction.

The Silent Upsell

The goal of retail design isn't just to look nice; it is to increase the average ticket size. A well-choreographed, technology-infused showroom performs a silent upsell by showing the customer what is possible. If a homeowner comes in for a front door but sees a beautifully lit display of integrated smart locks and matching exterior trim, the conversation naturally expands.

If your physical footprint doesn't ask the customer, "What else are you building?" you are leaving money on the table. It's time to rewrite the playbook and let your space do the heavy lifting. By aligning your physical layout with the modern customer journey, you turn your showroom into your most powerful competitive advantage. The future of the independent dealer isn't in being a warehouse; it's in being a destination. 

MA+KE Architects provides architectural design services to the Upper Valley of Vermont and New Hampshire as well as all of Northern New England. Find them online at <https://ma-ke-arch.com>.



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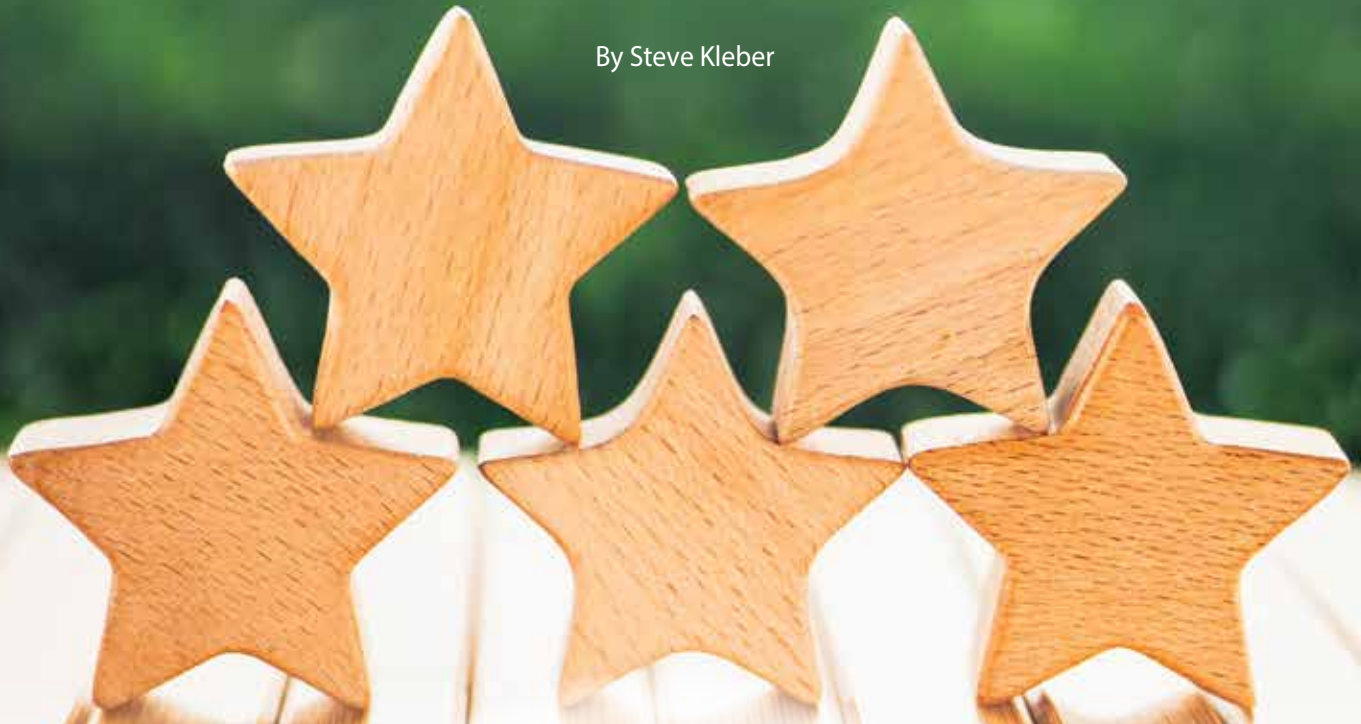




WHEN ANSWERS CAN'T WAIT:

Building the Support System for Today's Lumber Channel Needs

By Steve Kleber



The lumber counter has never been a 9-to-5 operation. Yet the questions today continue to escalate, frequently requiring mission-critical response.

A contractor texts after hours about a delivery sequence. A Spanish-speaking crew lead opens a chat window from the field because picking up the phone is not an option at the time.

These are no longer exceptions—they are the daily rhythm of business—and for successful dealers, the support systems behind the counter must keep pace.

Where Automation Helps

Automated tools have earned their place. Pre-programmed chatbots can route basic requests, confirm order status, and surface standard product documents.

Leveraged appropriately, these tools reduce friction and free up staff for more complex work.

A dealer's hardest questions, however, rarely fit a "frequently asked" menu of options.

Consider the framer who needs to know whether a substitution will hold under a specific load. Or a contractor who is coordinating delivery around a crane schedule. In those moments, speed matters—but so does judgment and accountability. The inability to solve problems can cost the dealer time and trust. Sometimes, even the job itself.

How to Create a Layered Live Support System

The first layer is self-serve: clear FAQs, accurate product documentation, order-status visibility, and easy-to-find contact paths. This is a layer to handle the routine requests without requiring staff involvement.

The second layer is real-time triage chat—text or messaging—that meets customers where they are. These channels work because they are fast and low-friction, quickly separating a simple question from a more serious inquiry.

The third layer, and the most valuable opportunity, is the handoff. When an issue becomes urgent or high stakes, the path to a real person must be obvious. No dead ends. No looping back through menus. That handoff is where live support earns its name. And it's where all too many systems fall short.

In the near term, AI-powered voice agents may become another useful layer in this system. Not as a replacement for knowledgeable people, but as a hands-free way to answer routine questions, surface information faster, support after-hours inquiries, and improve routing before an issue reaches the wrong desk. For dealer teams, that same kind of tool may also help shorten the learning curve for newer employees by giving them faster access to answers in the moment.

Why Bilingual Access Is a Competitive Advantage

For many dealers, better live support also means broader language access. And the window to get this right is now.

A bilingual chat option, text path, or dedicated service contact removes friction fast. Especially when questions come from the jobsite or a fast-moving counter conversation.

Spanish-speaking crew members represent a significant and growing share of the construction workforce. Dealers who can be

reached clearly in the moment—in their language—build loyalty that generic support simply cannot match. In increasing ways, the difference between a resolved issue and a delayed response is not product complexity. It is communication clarity.

"These are no longer exceptions—they are the daily rhythm of business—and for successful dealers, the support systems behind the counter must keep pace."

Support Is Now Part of the Brand Promise

Too many solutions today treat customer support as a back-end function. Something to manage rather than something to invest in. The best dealers know this.


Support shapes how customers judge reliability and influences repeat business. The goal is not to replace people with technology. The goal is to use technology to make people easier to reach, better informed, and faster to respond.

The dealers who get this right will not be the ones with the most sophisticated chatbot. They will be the ones with the clearest—most human—support system behind it.

How Dealers Should Evaluate Their Live Support

Before adopting new tools or assessing a supplier's support model, ask these questions:

- Can customers find answers to routine questions quickly, without calling?
- Can chat or text channels triage and route requests efficiently?
- Is the path to a real person clear when the issue becomes urgent or complex?
- Are bilingual support options available when and where they make the biggest difference?
- Does the system reduce friction for both the customer and your team?

Live support should not feel like a wall of automation with a human hidden behind it. It should feel like a smarter, faster path to clarity. Because when answers cannot wait, customers do not remember the software. They remember how their dealer helped. 

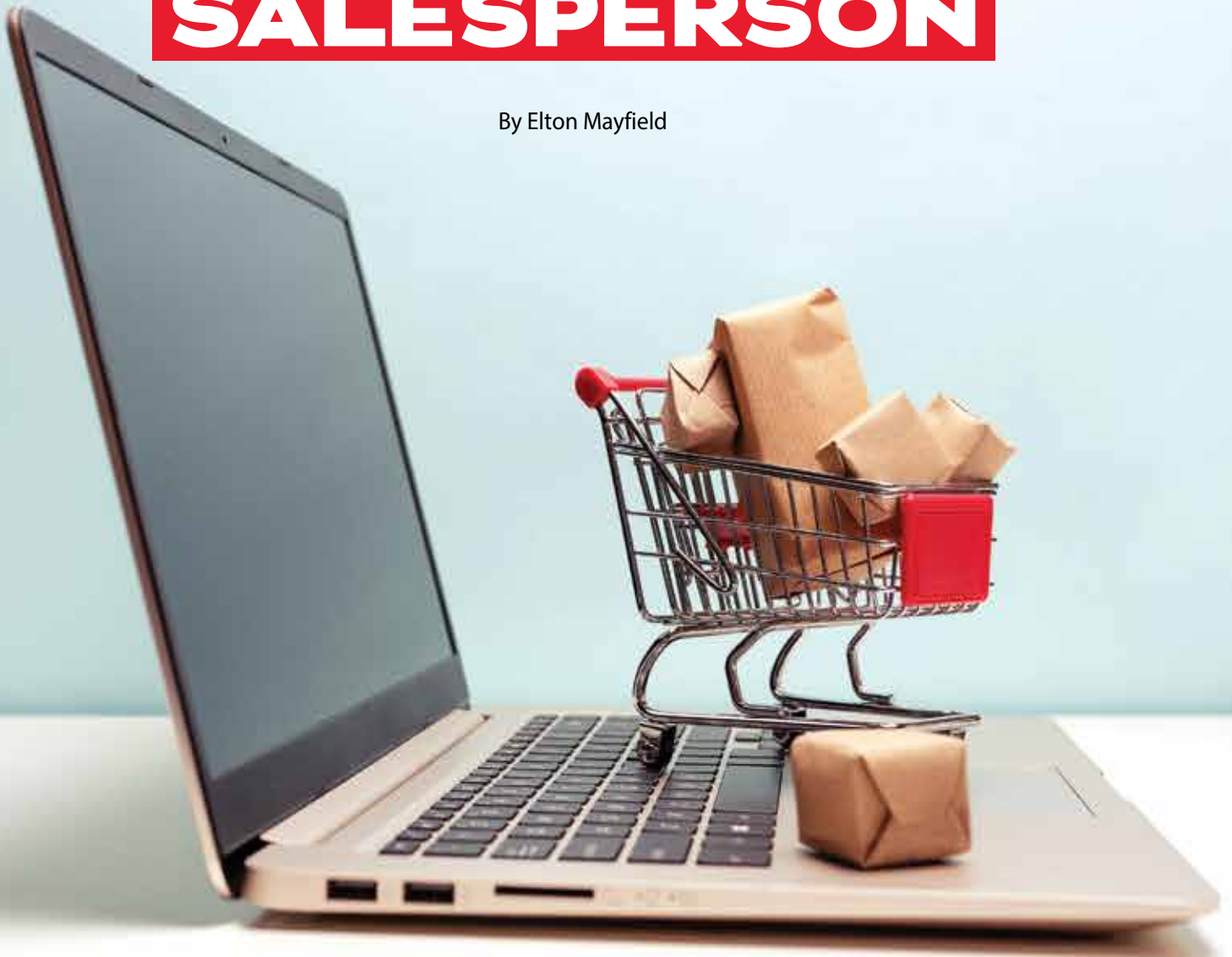
Steven (Steve) Kleber is the founder of Kleber & Associates (K&A), a full-service marketing and communications agency founded in 1987 with a focus on the home and building channel, specializing in lumber and building materials. For content marketing strategies to help your building product brands excel in a digital environment, visit www.kleberandassociates.com. Steve can be reached at skleber@kleberandassociates.com.

YOUR WEBSITE ISN'T A BROCHURE.

It's Your Hardest-Working

SALESPERSON

By Elton Mayfield



For many building supply dealers, the website is still treated like a digital brochure. It lists products, shares location details, and checks a box. But today's buyers do not engage that way. They are not looking for brochures. They are looking for answers.

Your website should function as your most consistent and scalable salesperson, working around the clock to educate buyers, build trust, and move prospects closer to a decision before your team ever gets involved.

Buyers Are Doing the Work Without You

Contractors, builders, and homeowners are more independent than ever. They often research products, compare options, and evaluate suppliers before ever stepping into a location or calling your team.

By the time they reach out, they have already formed opinions about who they want to work with.

Where does that happen? On your website.

If your site does not clearly explain what you offer, who you serve, and how you help, buyers will not wait. They will move on to a competitor who makes it easier to understand.

What Your Website Should Be Doing

Think about what your best salesperson does at the counter or on a jobsite. They ask questions, provide guidance, and help customers make confident decisions. Your website should mirror that same experience.

Clear messaging is the starting point. Within seconds, a visitor should understand what types of projects you support, what products you specialize in, and why they should choose you over another supplier.

From there, your content should do the heavy lifting. Buyers are looking for practical information such as product options, installation considerations, timelines, and what to expect. When your website answers those questions through helpful content, you are not just informing. You are building confidence before the first conversation even happens.

**“YOU ARE BUILDING
CONFIDENCE
BEFORE THE FIRST
CONVERSATION
EVEN HAPPENS.”**

Content That Builds Confidence

The most effective dealer websites do more than list inventory. They help customers make decisions.

Content like project guides, product comparisons, and planning resources helps reduce uncertainty and positions your team as knowledgeable and reliable. It also reflects the same expertise your team brings in person.

When a customer comes in already informed, conversations are more productive. Instead of starting from scratch, your team can focus on specifics, recommendations, and moving the project forward.

Navigation That Supports the Buyer Journey

Many websites are structured around internal departments instead of customer needs. That creates friction.

Your navigation should make it easy for visitors to quickly find what is relevant to them, whether they are working on a new build, a remodel, or sourcing materials for an ongoing job.

If users must search too hard to understand how you can help, they will leave and look elsewhere.

A strong website removes guesswork and makes the next step clear.



Turning Traffic Into Better Leads

Not every inquiry is a good fit, and your website should help set expectations. By clearly communicating your offerings, capabilities, and areas of focus, you naturally attract better-fit customers.

The result is stronger conversations and more efficient use of your team's time.

Pair that with clear calls to action such as “Request a Quote,” “Find a Location,” or “Talk to Our Team,” and your website becomes an active part of your sales process.

Stop Thinking Like a Brochure

A brochure informs. A salesperson helps customers make decisions.

Your website should do the same thing every hour of every day.

If it is not helping buyers move forward with confidence, it is not just underperforming. It is costing you opportunities. **LE**

Elton Mayfield is the co-founder of ER Marketing, a B2B marketing agency with a special love for the building industry—quite possibly, because they've been building clients themselves. For more than 25 years, ER Marketing has been dedicated to improving the marketing channel for all things building.

Dynamic Retail Systems Are No Longer a Luxury for Lumber Sales



By Brian Bullock

Selling lumber is a little different than selling most products for hardware stores. There aren't many items where you buy something one way and sell it another. Take paint, for instance. You buy 5 gallons of paint, 1 gallon of paint, and a quart of paint, and you sell it that way. Lumber is all by footage. You can buy it in different lengths than what you sell it in.

The lumber market, too, complicates its sales. It fluctuates drastically, taking retail prices with it.

An example is that in the months following the pandemic quarantines, DIY projects soared. Residential deck and fence construction increased 275% and 144%, respectively. During this period, lumber prices increased 170% and peaked at roughly \$950 per thousand board feet. It's not often markets for other building materials fluctuate so drastically.

These variations directly impact margins, inventory decisions, and customer expectations. Because of this, retail hardware stores and lumberyards can no longer rely on static pricing, manual inventory checks, or slow decision cycles.

Dynamic retail management systems—platforms that continuously adjust pricing, inventory, forecasting, and purchasing—are no longer optional. They are business-critical.

So, what digital tools can help lumber retailers maximize both their efficiency and profitability?

Pricing Adjustments

You can't manually re-price every SKU every time costs move. Systems must update margins automatically. Technology that provides real-time cost alerts helps prevent selling lumber at below replacement cost.

Why Dynamic Systems Matter

- Inventory planning must adjust to demand spikes and demand dips.
- Automated forecasting prevents overstocking when demand cools and understocking when spikes reappear.
- Dynamic systems help segment customers (pro vs. DIY) and predict mix changes.

Margins Are Thinning

Retailers must manage margins in real time to avoid selling too low during cost spikes or too high during demand dips.

Why Dynamic Systems Matter

- Automatic margin-protection rules—such as “never sell below X% margin after freight”—are essential for survival.
- Dynamic systems can raise or lower prices strategically by SKU, category, region, or customer type.

Supply Chain Disruptions Are Now the Norm

COVID protocols, mill shutdowns, labor shortages, and global disruptions caused huge gaps between log prices and lumber



Sources: Hardware Market Watch: Consumer Purchase Trends in Hardware and Fasteners, [Farnsworth Group, June 20, 2025]. USA Hardware Stores Market Size, Share, Growth & Trends Report, 2030 [Ken Research, October 2024]. Hardware Stores in the U.S. Industry Analysis, 2025, [IBISWorld, October 2025].

retail prices. Mills misread the early pandemic demand and cut production, worsening shortages. And supply constraints collided with historic demand spikes, creating extreme price surges.

Why Dynamic Systems Matter

- Dynamic replenishment lets stores restock faster when supply loosens and avoid overbuying when mills are about to reduce output.
- Lead time forecasting helps stores plan around unpredictable mill or distributor delays.
- Real time stock visibility across locations (for multi yard operators) reduces lost sales.

Customers Expect Fair, Up-to-Date Pricing

In a market where prices may go up or down weekly, customers (DIY and pro) expect accuracy.

Why Dynamic Systems Matter

- Live price updates prevent the embarrassing situation where a posted price no longer covers rising costs.
- Integrated POS + e-commerce ensures online and in store prices match, even during volatile periods.
- Pro accounts expect quotes that update as the market moves (“dynamic quoting”).

Future Outlook Requires Adaptability

Industry analysts forecast moderate recovery from 2026–2028 driven by a structural U.S. housing shortfall of 3 to 4 million homes.

This means another demand surge is likely ahead, and retailers must prepare.

Why Dynamic Systems Matter

- Flexible systems scale for rapid growth phases.
- Analytics help position inventory for future demand spikes or droughts.
- Promotional engines can target categories likely to see renewed demand.

Why Dynamic Retail Management Systems Are Now Essential

Because the lumber and building materials market behaves with high volatility, rapid shifts, and constant cost changes, retail hardware stores and lumberyards must have systems that can:

- Adjust prices dynamically.
- Forecast and react to demand spikes or drops.
- Manage margins automatically.
- Optimize purchasing and inventory in real time.
- Provide accurate customer-facing pricing and quotes.
- Improve resilience to supply-chain disruptions.
- Prepare for future market cycles with data-driven planning.

In today’s environment, dynamic retail management isn’t a luxury; it’s a survival tool. **LD**

Brian Bullock is the communication content specialist for Paladin Data Corporation. He can be reached at brianb@paladinpos.com. To learn more about Paladin Data Corporation, visit paladinpos.com.

TRANSITION PLANNING: Keeping Business in the Family

Should I transfer my business to my family, and if so, how?
What challenges must I address?

By Mike Ferraro





In the last article, we talked about why business owners should plan for succession on their own terms, not in response to a crisis. This time, let's focus on what happens when the plan is to keep the business in the family.

It sounds simple enough. In practice, it rarely is.

Start with the most basic question:

Do your children actually want the business?

Many lumber dealers assume their kids will come back after college or a few years on their own. Sometimes that happens. Often it doesn't. Some choose different careers. Some don't want the early mornings, weekend emergencies, or the responsibility that comes with keeping yards stocked and customers happy.

There's nothing wrong with that—but it does change the plan.

If no one wants the business, forcing the issue usually creates frustration for both generations.

"From a tax standpoint, gifting shares can be attractive. It can reduce your taxable estate and shift future appreciation to the next generation. But gifting only works if you don't still need the income from the business."

If one or more children do want in, the next question becomes financial:

Can you afford to give the business away?

From a tax standpoint, gifting shares can be attractive. It can reduce your taxable estate and shift future appreciation to the next generation. But gifting only works if you don't still need the income from the business.

For many dealers, most of their net worth is tied up in the company—inventory, yard facilities, trucks, equipment, and often the real estate under the operation. If you still rely on distributions to live, a full gift probably isn't realistic.

Some owners look at alternatives such as:

- Salary continuation or deferred compensation arrangements
- Partial redemptions over time
- Or, in certain cases, selling shares to a trust in exchange for payments, while moving future growth out of the estate

Each approach comes with different income-tax and estate-tax consequences, so this is an area where good planning can make a meaningful difference.

Next comes leadership.

Who's actually going to run the company?

The oldest child isn't always the right choice. The best operator might be the youngest—or none of them.

Running a lumber business requires more than knowing products. It means managing inventory turns, credit risk, vendor relationships, pricing pressure, and seasonal cash flow swings.

Ask yourself:

- Who has earned the respect of employees, vendors, and contractors?
- Who understands the numbers, not just the yard operations?
- Who can make tough decisions when margins tighten?

“Many family businesses benefit from an outside advisory board—people who understand the industry but aren't emotionally involved.”

Many family businesses benefit from an outside advisory board—people who understand the industry but aren't emotionally involved. Independent voices can help keep discussions objective when family dynamics start to creep into business decisions.

Then there's the issue no one likes to talk about:

What about the kids who don't work in the business?

Putting non-working children on the payroll is usually a mistake. It creates resentment and undermines the credibility of the working management team.

If some children work in the business and others don't, it's often better to use other assets—life insurance, investment accounts, or non-operating real estate—to balance things out.

If everyone will own shares, be clear about the difference between:

- **Pay for work**, and
- **Return on ownership**

Working children should receive fair-market compensation. Ownership returns should follow ownership percentages. Mixing the two almost always leads to conflict.

Another area that deserves attention is governance.



How will decisions get made when you're not there?

If ownership is split evenly, what happens when there's a disagreement about opening a new yard, taking on debt, or selling the real estate?


Some owners keep voting control while transferring non-voting shares. That can work for a while, but eventually control has to be handed over—and it's better to plan for that than ignore it.

Finally, a reality check.

Not every family business should stay in the family.

If there's no capable or interested successor, selling to a strategic buyer—or in some cases private equity—may be the best option for the owner, the employees, and the customers who depend on the business.

If that's even a possibility, tax planning becomes critical. How inventory is valued, whether real estate is inside or outside the company, and how the sale is structured can dramatically affect what you keep after taxes.

We'll dig into those issues in the final article, which will focus on planning for a sale to an outside buyer and how to position your business—and yourself—for the best result. 

Mike Ferraro is a director at Conifer Hill Advisors. He has more than 45 years of experience providing financial, tax, and management advisory services to companies in various industries. Mike sits on several boards and assists clients with establishing corporate governance, advisory boards, evaluating and growing enterprise value, and crafting exit strategies for business owners and their families. He can be reached at mferraro@coniferhilladvisors.com or 617-877-5800.

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Hazardous Finishing Materials:

The Risks Facing the Lumber Industry

By Jeff Evans

Finishing operations are a unique source of risk in the lumber industry. The often-volatile chemicals related to the finishing of hardwood and softwood products like cabinets, stairs, and decking all hold a universal risk of spontaneous combustion. Whether finishing is completed in the field or in a facility, the solvents, lacquers, varnishes, and coatings utilized in the process can generate a significant risk to employees, facilities, and products if the right precautions aren't taken.

What Risks Are Business Owners Facing?

Incidents related to the finishing of hard and softwood products typically fall under property insurance coverage where the finishing takes place. Many of these claims are linked to the improper disposal of soiled rags. Soiled rags that are not disposed of properly in a Factory Mutual/Underwriters Laboratories (FM/UL) approved/listed self-closing oily waste can are prone to spontaneous combustion. If soiled rags ignite, this could cause injury, property damage, or worse.

Although most cases are related to improper disposal of soiled rags, in one case in the Midwest, an employee used a metal scraper to clean a buildup of overspray that had accumulated on a spray booth wall. Typically, a scraper made of plastic, or any nonmetallic material, is best for scraping spray booth walls. So, when a metal scraper was used to scrape the buildup, it generated a spark, and flames erupted inside the spray booth.

Whether it's financial shortcuts or an employee skirting established processes, human error is a huge factor in claims

related to improper disposal of soiled rags. It takes a concerted effort from every level to ensure the right materials and standards are used to prevent these accidents from occurring.

Reducing the Chances of a Claim

When it comes to mitigating the risk surrounding the use of these hazardous materials, the best course of action is to be proactive and thorough with safety practices in your lumber business.

There are a few key points to start with, including:

- **Follow General Safety Protocols:**

An important step in mitigating risk from material disposal is to ensure your business is closely following the safety protocols set by its local jurisdiction, as well as the standards established by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) for the use and disposal of flammable materials. Lumber business owners need to conduct comprehensive training for any employees handling flammable materials. Supervisors also need to verify employees wear proper PPE and provide thorough training on how to properly handle the material from the designated finishing area to the disposal area. Additionally, any outside disposal area should utilize the right signage so no cross-contamination with flammable waste occurs.

- **Safe Storage:**

Properly storing flammable liquids reduces the chance for leaks, spills, and fires. One way to safely store flammable/combustible liquids is with approved flammable liquid


storage cabinets. The flammable liquid storage cabinets need to be grounded, as do the drums of flammable liquids if they are dispensed from inside the cabinets. The drum the flammable liquids are being dispensed from and the container the flammable liquids are being dispensed into should be bonded to help lessen a spark being produced from static electricity. In a finishing area, three flammable liquid storage cabinets with a maximum storage capacity of 120 gallons of flammable liquids are permitted.

The other way to store these materials is in a bulk flammable liquid storage room. Many requirements, as seen in NFPA 30, depend on the square footage of the room, but all rooms need to have a self-closing door and a sill for spill containment. The storage room should also contain both a high and low vent for the vapors. To mitigate further fire risks, storage rooms require explosion-proof wiring and lighting (Class 1 Div. 1 or 2) as well as automatic sprinklers.

- **Spray Booth Maintenance:**

NFPA 33 has very specific standards for the protection needed for finishing spray booths, including a dry chemical extinguishing system, automatic sprinklers, or carbon dioxide fixed-pipe automatic extinguishing systems. Additionally, the electrical wiring must be explosion-proof, with vapors needing to be filtered and vented to the outside of the building according to the specific requirements set by the National Electrical Code.

The booth set-up is critical to reducing occupational hazards related to working with these materials, but regular maintenance is just as important. Often, the walls close to spray booths can become loaded with buildup of overspray. When this buildup is removed, close attention should be paid to the tools being used. Otherwise, a single metal scraper could cause enough friction to spark a fire. One cost-effective way to avoid this is flame-retardant coverings, an adhesive that binds to the wall and collects buildup, which can peel away and ease removal.

Safety is paramount to reducing the financial and personal risk in your lumber operations. The good news for lumber business owners is that the safety protocols needed to keep employees and products safe from hazardous materials are readily available. An insurance carrier specializing in the wood niche can be a great resource for safety and risk mitigation practices for finishing operations and more. By following these best practices, the risks related to finishing materials can be minimized. 

Jeff Evans is a loss control consultant for Pennsylvania Lumbermen Mutual Insurance Company. He can be reached at jevans@plmins.com.





Flooring Trends in 2026:

Warmth, Performance, and the Renaissance of Real Wood

By Ed Godek

Flooring trends in 2026 reflect a clear shift in priorities: homeowners want spaces that feel warmer, more natural, and more personal without sacrificing performance. Across consumer design media, professional flooring publications, and industry data, consistent themes emerge. Cooler gray tones are fading, while warm neutrals, authentic materials, and thoughtful layouts take center stage. At the heart of these trends lies a renewed appreciation for real wood flooring, both solid and engineered, alongside the continued dominance of high performance alternatives like luxury vinyl plank (LVP).

Warm Neutrals Replace Cool Grays

One of the most defining flooring trends for 2026 is the move away from gray and ashy tones toward warm, organic color palettes. Honey, caramel, chestnut, mid oak, and muted browns now lead the market. Designers emphasize that these tones create a grounded, inviting foundation that works across traditional, transitional, and contemporary interiors. This shift is especially evident in wood flooring, where natural grain and color variation are once again celebrated rather than muted or bleached.

This warmth connects directly to biophilic design principles, bringing interior spaces closer to nature through color, texture, and material choice. Flooring is no longer a neutral backdrop; it is now a key design feature that sets the tone of the home.

Solid Wood Flooring: Timeless, Authentic, and Resurgent

Solid hardwood flooring has been and remains a premium choice and continues to benefit from the return to warmer tones and natural finishes. While it never truly fell out of favor, solid wood is enjoying renewed attention thanks to trends that highlight authenticity, longevity, and craftsmanship.

Solid wood floors shine in 2026 trends because:

- Richer midtones and darker stains highlight natural grain and depth.
- Matte and satin finishes showcase wood's authentic character.
- Wide planks, when available, feel intentional and luxurious.
- Solid wood offers unmatched refinishing potential, often lasting generations.

Homeowners choosing solid wood today typically prioritize permanence and long-term value. Species such as white oak, red

oak, walnut, maple, hickory, and cherry are especially popular. White oak stands out as the leading species, prized for its stability and tight grain. Walnut and cherry appeal to buyers seeking drama and richness, while hickory and maple attract households that value strength and durability.

Solid wood remains best suited for above grade applications, and it continues to define the gold standard of residential flooring.

Engineered Wood Flooring: The Growth Engine of Real Wood

While solid wood holds prestige, engineered hardwood is the fastest growing segment of real wood flooring—and a major trend driver for 2026. Engineered flooring pairs a genuine wood veneer with a layered core, offering greater dimensional stability while preserving the look and feel of authentic hardwood.

Engineered wood aligns perfectly with current trends:

- Extra wide and long planks are more readily available.
- Performs well over radiant heat and varied subfloors.
- Factory finishes deliver consistent, matte, or satin sheens.
- Ideal for open concept homes and modern layouts.

Designers are increasingly specifying engineered wood for main living areas, citing its balance of realism and performance. In patterned installations, such as herringbone, chevron, and parquet, engineered boards often make installation more predictable and accessible while maintaining visual impact. Engineered hardwood is no longer viewed as a compromise; it is seen as a smart, design forward evolution of traditional wood flooring.



Patterned Wood Flooring: Herringbone Leads the Way

Patterned installations are continuing to surge in popularity in high-end and large projects. Particularly herringbone, which designers consistently describe as timeless rather than trendy. Chevron and parquet styles also feature prominently, especially in entryways, kitchens, and large open spaces where floors are used as a focal point.

Both solid and engineered wood are used for these layouts, though engineered flooring often provides greater flexibility for full floor installations. These patterns add rhythm, movement, and architectural interest, reinforcing flooring’s role as a primary design element.

Wide Planks and Expansive Scale

Across wood and tile categories, scale matters. Wide planks—often 7 inches or more—remain highly desirable, reducing visual seams and creating a calmer, more expansive feel. This trend strongly favors engineered wood, but solid wood wide planks are also in demand where conditions allow.

Similarly, **large format tile** continues to grow in popularity for kitchens, baths, and open living spaces, offering a sleek aesthetic with minimal grout lines.

Sustainability and Natural Materials

Sustainability remains an undercurrent across all flooring categories. Reclaimed wood, responsibly sourced hardwood, low VOC finishes, cork, bamboo, and natural stone continue to gain traction. Wood flooring, especially when certified or reclaimed, fits naturally into this eco conscious mindset, reinforcing its appeal beyond aesthetics.

LVP: The Market Leader by Volume

Despite the renewed focus on real wood, luxury vinyl plank (LVP) remains the popular flooring choice overall. Its dominance comes from unmatched practicality: waterproof performance, durability, affordability, and increasingly realistic wood visuals.

Many homes now combine materials strategically, using engineered or solid wood in main spaces and LVP in kitchens, baths, basements, and high traffic areas. This reflects a pragmatic, room by room design approach, instead of a single flooring type for the whole residence.

Tile and Carpet: Targeted Roles

Tile continues to excel in wet areas and design driven spaces, with large format and updated checkerboard patterns leading trends. Carpet, while no longer a whole home default, is making a measured comeback in bedrooms and family rooms, driven by comfort, warmth, and acoustic benefits.

Final Thoughts

Flooring trends in 2026 are less about rigid rules and more about thoughtful choices. Warm tones, real materials, practical performance, and intentional design define the moment. Solid wood remains timeless and aspirational. Engineered wood bridges authenticity with modern performance. LVP delivers versatility where durability matters most. Together, these trends reflect a flooring landscape that values beauty, comfort, and longevity that is grounded in the simple idea that floors should feel as good as they look. **LC**

Ed Godek, III has worked for Rex Lumber Company for over 30 years and is currently the director of marketing.



PARTICIPANTS

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Nutmeg Forest Products 48

The Quikrete Companies 48

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FLOORING PRODUCT SHOWCASE

Photo Credit: Goodfellow Inc.



Goodfellow Inc.

Contact: Pascal Roy **Email:** salesusa@goodfellowinc.com **Phone:** 800-361-0625
Website: www.goodfellowinc.com/en/categorie_produit/flooring



What flooring products do you sell?

Goodfellow offers a complete flooring program designed to simplify selection and support a full sale. Our assortment includes hardwood, engineered wood, laminate, vinyl, SPC, and ceramic tile, covering a wide range of styles, budgets, and applications. Coordinated trims and installation products, including STAUF adhesives and SONOpan X underlayment to help ensure consistent performance, sound control, and comfort. Backed by strong inventory and experienced support, Goodfellow gives dealers the tools to present cohesive flooring solutions with confidence.

What is one product you'd like to highlight?

Made in Canada, Goodfellow Original Solid Hardwood Flooring is a classic 3/4-inch solid format that highlights the natural character of maple and red oak. Designed for nail-down installation, it follows a straightforward, time-tested approach to wood flooring. Performance is carried through the finish, with added resistance to scratches and wear, UV protection to help limit yellowing over time, and an antimicrobial treatment applied to the surface. Available in 3 1/4-inch and 4 1/4-inch widths, with a micro-beveled profile and three grade options, it offers a reliable, well-balanced hardwood solution.



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What flooring products do you sell?

We are proud to offer the highest quality custom solid wood and engineered wood flooring, run to your specifications. Although we can make any size or species of flooring, our specialty is wide long plank solid and engineered flooring. We run our flooring from our own diverse, high-quality hardwood inventory. Our custom flooring is available in widths up to 10-1/4" (10" face) end matched, and 11-1/4" (11" face) not end matched. Our flooring typically runs 3 to 12 feet, with lengths up to 16 feet available depending on the species.

What is one product you'd like to highlight?

Rex Engineered Wood Flooring is made using a lamella that is glued to premium-grade Baltic birch plywood. The lamellas used in our engineered flooring are saw-cut from our own solid high-quality hardwoods, not rotary cut like many commodity products. The use of saw-cut lamellas provides an identical appearance to solid wood flooring. Our Baltic birch plywood uses exterior-grade/water-resistant glue, which adds additional durability to the flooring. Engineered flooring is available in custom widths up to 10-1/4" (10" face).



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What flooring products do you sell?

We stock Huber Advantech T&G flooring in 19/32", 23/32", 7/8", 1-1/8", Huber PerformMax SE shed flooring in 23/32", fir underlayment (B&C Crossbands) in 3/8", 1/2", 5/8", 3/4", 3/4 T&G, OSB 7/16", 15/32", 5/8", 3/4" T&G & SE, Luan in 5.2mm and 5.5mm.

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- Flooring can be run as flat sawn (plain sawn), rift sawn, or quarter sawn for most species.

Our solid wood and engineered wood flooring is available in any of the species we stock including FSC® Certified species.

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Engineered wood Flooring is available in virtually any species available in today's marketplace, ask our Rex Team if your customers have a specific need. Our most popular request include:

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- Character Grade White Oak
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- Rift Sawn Red Oak
- Plain Sawn Red Oak
- Plain Sawn Hard Maple
- Plain Sawn Cherry
- Plain Sawn Hickory
- Plain Sawn Sapele

Our team is available to meet with you and your workforce to set up customized solid wood and engineered wood flooring programs for your retail locations.

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Nutmeg Forest Products

Contact: Bill O'Brien **Email:** billobrien@nutmegforest.com
Phone: 800-695-3864 **Website:** www.nutmegforest.com



What flooring products do you sell?

NFP sells a full line of unfinished and pre-finished flooring in many different species and sizes from standard 2-1/4" strip to 8" and wider in plain sawn, rift and quartersawn, engineered, and long lengths. We sell our flooring in truckloads, units, and job lots, whatever you need!

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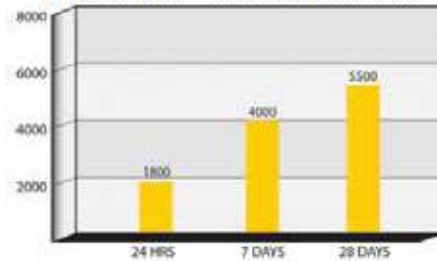


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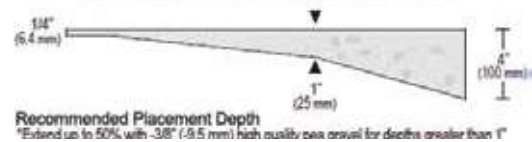
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What is one product you'd like to highlight?

QUIKRETE's FastSet Self-Leveling Floor Resurfacer produces a smooth surface ready for the installation of ceramic tile, resilient flooring, carpet, or other finishes. It can also be used as a wear surface for light-duty industrial floors. The following are typical substrates: Precast concrete plank; new concrete floor slabs with unacceptable finishes; existing concrete floors with damaged finishes; over wood floor systems, utilizing expanded metal lath reinforcement; and it may be used outdoors. For information, please contact your local Quikrete representative.



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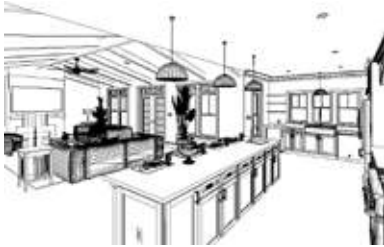
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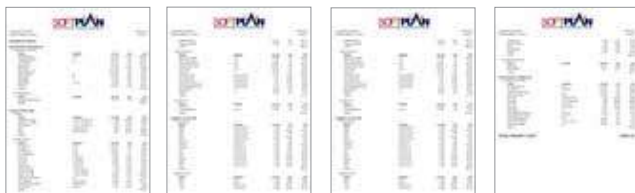
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“HealthiestYou is a game changer. The day after Christmas last year, I came down with an awful stomach bug. I used the app, received a call from a doctor within minutes, and had a prescription ready at my pharmacy shortly after. I’ve used HealthiestYou three times in 2025, and it saved me hours in waiting rooms and nearly \$900 in doctor’s fees and co-pays.”

Melissa Stankovich, NRLA staff

The program includes 24/7 access to doctors by phone or video, mental health support with licensed therapists and psychiatrists, dermatology consultations, specialist medical guidance, nutrition counseling, and neck and back care coaching. For businesses with high-deductible health plans—or employers contributing toward those deductibles—the savings can be substantial for both parties.



“Following a family member’s passing, I turned to HealthiestYou for grief and bereavement therapy. Weekly sessions helped me face my grief and take intentional steps toward healing.”

Kimberlee Freer, NRLA staff

Staff members who rely on the service say the combination of speed, convenience, and cost savings makes a noticeable difference in their day-to-day lives.



“I used the HealthiestYou app when I suspected I had conjunctivitis. After submitting a photo, they contacted me almost immediately. A doctor reviewed my symptoms, confirmed the diagnosis, and quickly called in a prescription to my local pharmacy. The entire process was fast, convenient, and incredibly reassuring. HealthiestYou made getting care so simple when I needed it most.”

Pam McHale, NRLA staff

Mental health support, which is often one of the most expensive and time-consuming services to access through employer insurance, is available without any co-pay. Employees can select a therapist or psychiatrist, receive personalized treatment plans, and access evidence-based therapy sessions as needed. Dermatology services operate the same way, offering fast, digital review by board-certified specialists.



“The NRLA embraced the Healthiest You program to support employees and their families. Independent of insurance, it saves both employees and employers money while limiting downtime from work. Calls to doctors are completely free, offering convenient, timely care. It is one of our most valued employee benefits.”

Rita Ferris, NRLA president

For employers, administration is simple. Enrollment is straightforward, usage is unlimited, and many businesses see fewer high-cost claims because employees can resolve common health needs early—without triggering expensive visits.

For more information or to get started, contact Keaton Anderson at 612-298-2440 or visit www.nrla.org/member-benefits/insurance/healthiestyou-by-teladoc/.

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ABMA Led. Washington Acted.

FIX THE HOUSING CRISIS

In Spring 2025, ABMA members asked us to take on one of the biggest challenges in the country: Fix the housing crisis. Not as a policy exercise—but because it directly impacts your business.

Why This Matters to You

When fewer homes are built:

- Fewer orders are placed.
- Less material moves.
- Growth slows.

Getting America building again isn't abstract. It's how our members prosper.

The Insight That Changed Everything

We focused on one part of the market:

Homes priced at \$300,000 and under. That's where demand is strongest. That's where buyers are ready. But it's also where building has become the hardest.

What's Holding Building Back

It's not demand, it's cost.

Layered regulations, delays, and mandates. It's all adding up and built into the final price of a home.

The Breakthrough

We reframed the problem:

This isn't a housing issue. It's a cost issue.

More specifically:

The hidden cost of government in every new home.

What We Found

Those costs are significant:

\$100,000 per home. And they matter because they push homes out of the price range where the market is strongest.

The Plan ABMA Built

We kept it simple:

Cut the cost of government in every new home.

That became:

Building Homes—Not Costs. A plan built by the industry, for the industry.

Taking It to Washington

More than 250 businesses, associations, and labor partners backed the plan. We brought it directly to the White House with a clear message:

If you want more homes built, start by lowering the cost to build.

Making the Connection

With the leadership of ABMA Lobbyist Jim Thompson, the *Building Homes—Not Costs* plan was brought directly to senior White House staff, ensuring that the realities our members face every day were part of the conversation at the highest levels.

That connection helped move this from an idea to action.

From Plan to Action

Washington responded.

A new executive order now focuses on:

- Cutting regulatory barriers.
- Reducing delays.
- Lowering government-driven costs.

The same approach ABMA put forward.

What This Means for Your Business and Where It Matters

When costs come down:

- Homes move back into reachable price ranges.
- Builders can build where demand exists.
- More projects move forward.
- More materials are needed.

That means more volume, more activity, and more opportunity for our members.

The Bigger Picture

This is about changing the conversation:

- From adding costs to removing them.
- From slowing building to accelerating it.
- From missed demand to unlocking it.

The Bottom Line

ABMA didn't wait for a solution.

We built one based on what our members experience every day. And now, we're seeing it put into action. When America builds more homes, our members sell more materials...and grow. **LC**

Learn more about **Building Homes—Not Costs** and other ABMA priorities by visiting www.abmalliance.org.

NYLE Spring Leadership 2026



The North American Young Lumber Employees (NYLE) Spring Leadership 2026 conference, held April 22-23 in Providence, R.I., was attended by 27 members from 17 NRLA companies. The group enjoyed a lovely cocktail reception at Aloft Providence Downtown following the NYLE board meeting on Wednesday afternoon. This was a wonderful opportunity for networking with board members and attendees who had never been to an NYLE event. On Thursday, April 23, the group spent the day at the SBP/Reeb facility in nearby Smithfield, R.I. The morning kicked off with an operations panel, which presented on warehouse management systems (WMS). This panel included Richard Fontaine, branch manager for Reeb Providence, along with folks from Arnold Lumber: Dave LeBlanc, process improvement/store manager; Adam Bartlett, data systems manager; and Chris Beagle, operations manager.

This panel did a phenomenal job presenting the “good, bad, and ugly” of WMS implementation. Attendees were provided with ample time to ask questions on everything from inventory control to process improvements.

The group included 35% first-time NYLE event attendees who participated in a full tour of the SBP/Reeb facility, which was very educational.

After lunch everyone benefited from a sales/sales management panel, which again included sales experts from Arnold Lumber—Brian Vandal, sales and business development manager, and Jeff St. George, sales and business development manager— and from SBP/Reeb—Dan Struebing, territory sales manager, and Justin Bethune, sales manager.

NYLE President Kylie Holand, executive vice president of Curtis Lumber Company, moderated the panel exceptionally. The panel offered so much guidance and knowledge from their impressive decades of sales experience by answering questions such as:

- “How do you see the LBM market evolving in the next three to five years, and what skills will be most valuable?”
- “How do you ensure smooth communication and collaboration between inside and outside sales teams?”
- “How do you balance technology with the personal touch that’s so important in LBM sales?”
- “If you could give one piece of advice to someone starting in LBM sales today, what would it be?”

Everyone in attendance agreed, even if currently not in a sales role, the information provided by this panel would benefit any LBM employee, no matter their position. 📌



LDAC Hosts Successful 2026 Product Knowledge Event




The Lumber Dealers Association of Connecticut (LDAC) brought together industry professionals at its annual Product Knowledge Event, held March 17-18 in Southington, Conn. The two-day program delivered valuable, hands-on learning opportunities designed to strengthen product expertise and support success across the lumber and building materials industry.

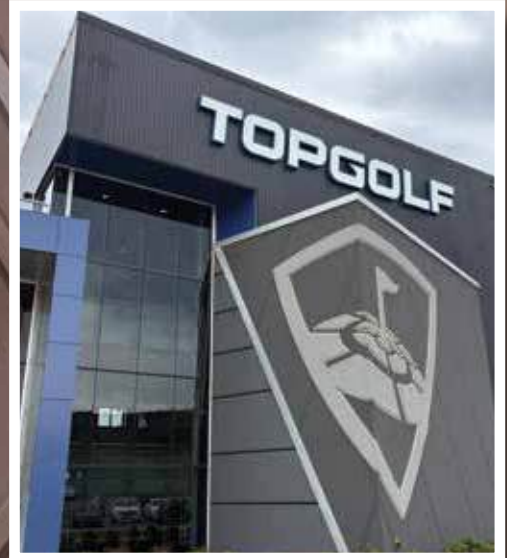
Day One focused on millwork, offering attendees in-depth training from leading manufacturers. BROSCO led sessions on exterior doors and interior frameworks, while MDO highlighted specialty moulding products. Woodgrain provided comprehensive doorway training, and Wolf Home Products showcased deck railing solutions. Rounding out the day, Parksite demonstrated Tyvek weatherization systems, emphasizing proper installation and performance benefits.

Day Two shifted to lumber and building materials, continuing the momentum with a strong lineup of vendors. Culpeper Treated Lumber presented treated lumber solutions, while BlueLinx covered a range of mixed-use building products. Weyerhaeuser shared insights on engineered wood applications, and Boise Cascade highlighted its Westlake Royal Building Products stone offerings. Huber Engineered Woods concluded the program with a deep dive into building envelope solutions, including ZIP System and AdvanTech products.

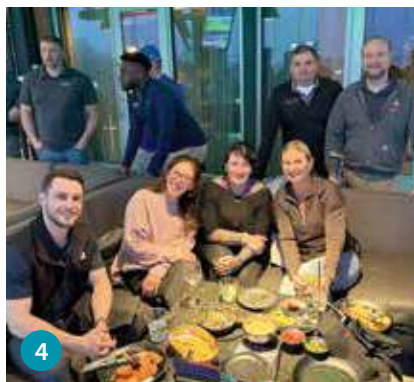
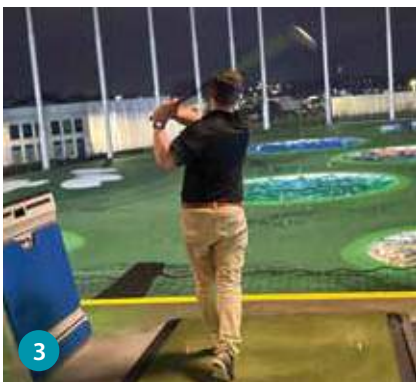
Throughout the event, attendees gained practical knowledge on product applications, installation techniques, and industry best practices directly from 10 leading manufacturing partners. The interactive format encouraged questions, discussion, and peer engagement—ensuring participants left with insights they could immediately apply in the field.

LDAC extends its sincere appreciation to all participating vendors and sponsors for their continued support and commitment to education within the industry. Special recognition is also given to Jeff Bickel, event committee chair, whose leadership and coordination were instrumental in delivering another successful and impactful program. 

RILBMDA Honors Longtime Lobbyist Terry Martiesian at Topgolf Event



For the second straight year, the Rhode Island Lumber & Building Materials Dealers Association (RILBMDA) held a board and dinner meeting at Topgolf in Cranston, R.I. This year's was extra special though, as Legislative Committee Chair Mike McDole of Firing Line LBM Advisors honored longtime RILBMDA Lobbyist Terry Martiesian for his 30-plus years of service. Following the dinner meeting, the 42 attendees took to Topgolf's bays to enjoy food, drinks, and some laughs while getting in a few swings to gear up for the very popular RILBMDA Golf Outing & Clambake being held on July 8. [LG](#)



1. Longtime RILBMDA Lobbyist Terry Martiesian was presented with a certificate of appreciation by Legislative Chair Mike McDole. 2. Jason, Dorothy, and Terry Martiesian listen on as Terry is honored for his years of service to RILBMDA. 3. RILBMDA President Evan Finnegan, Finetco-Coventry Lumber, launches one off into the Rhode Island night. 4. RILBMDA Dinner Meeting attendees at Topgolf, Cranston.

EBMDA Sales Seminar with Mike McDole




Last fall, the Eastern Building Material Dealers Association (EBMDA) board of directors gathered to develop a strategic plan, creating a practical, actionable roadmap to best serve retail and associate members. Within this framework, education was identified as a core purpose of the chapter, including credits to support members participating in asynchronous and live virtual education as well as offering in-person seminars throughout the region.

On February 10, 45 attendees representing 13 retail companies attended a full day of training hosted by REEB's Bethlehem, Pa., location.

The focus of the day was sales training. "Prospect, Prep, and Profit," presented by Mike McDole of Firing Line LBM Advisors, was a series of four sessions: "A Three-Pronged Approach to Prospecting," "Counter Sales," "Understanding LBM Dealer Profitability," and "Improving GM and Profitability." Attendees left with accomplishable, doable, constructive tools that they could easily implement when they returned to their yards.

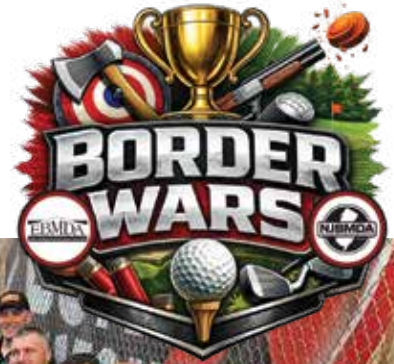
During the lunch break, Dan Hitman of Federated Insurance led an eye-opening segment on cyber risk and security. Participants were surprised to learn that small businesses are often targeted more frequently than large companies and were given tips to help protect themselves personally and professionally from attacks and hacks.

REEB hosts Troy Sinks and Zac Grafton were joined by other team members to lead the group on an extensive facility tour. Innovations in functional warehouse design, pre-finish areas for customization, and production units were on display, giving attendees a new insight on REEB operations.

EBMDA extends its thanks to REEB, an SPB company, for allowing the group to use their fantastic education center, for providing breakfast and lunch, and for providing the staff to host our group. We also thank titanium sponsor Federated Insurance and Dan Hitman for their support of the event. 



EBMDA Hosts Its Annual Bury the Hatchet Event



The Eastern Building Material Dealers Association's (EBMDA) annual Bury the Hatchet axe-throwing event was held on March 10 with a new spin this year. It was the first event in the inaugural Border Wars competition between EBMDA and the New Jersey Building Materials Dealers Association (NJBMDA). The competition was fierce, but in the end, EBMDA prevailed thanks to the strong and accurate throwing of Zach Jacobs of WindsorONE. In addition to bragging rights, Jacobs won the coveted Golden Axe trophy.

Runners up, representing NJBMDA, were David DiCostanza of Sherwood Lumber and Jeff McLaughlin of Jaeger Lumber. Best effort recognition went to Bob Long of Garden State Lumber.

Upcoming competitions in the series include EBMDA's Clay Shoot on May 6 in Coplay, Pa., NJBMDA's Golf Outing on May 19 in Bedminster, N.J., and the final event, yet to be determined, which will be held as part of EBMDA's Annual Meeting at Bear Creek Mountain Resort in Macungie, Pa., on November 19.

Thank you to event sponsor Federated Insurance for their continued support of EBMDA. 



MRLDA Swings into Spring



The Massachusetts Retail Lumber Dealers Association (MRLDA) teed up its second annual Swing into Spring event at Topgolf Boston-Canton on April 9, and they aced it! A record 54 players drove in for the fun, getting in the swing of things as they gear up for MRLDA’s marquee golf outing at Pinehills in Plymouth on August 3. MRLDA extends a big thank-you to reception sponsors Culpeper Treated Lumber and Boise Cascade for helping MRLDA finish atop the leaderboard! 🏆

1. Andy Collins (Huber Engineered Woods) with Richie Goulding (New England Building Supply). 2. Bobby Ford of event sponsor Culpeper Treated Lumber takes a big swing. 3. MRLDA President Jay Mahoney (Fairview Millwork) working on his iron game. 4. Networking reception sponsored by Culpeper Treated Lumber and Boise Cascade. 5. Topgolf Boston-Canton.

Bright Futures Shines in Vermont



The Vermont Retail Lumber Dealers Association's (VRLDA)

5th Annual Bright Futures Industry Awareness & Recruitment Day has officially become one of the state's most exciting workforce development events—and this year proved why. Held on April 2 at Vermont State University in Randolph, the event drew nearly 300 students from across the state, along with industry leaders and top state officials, for a powerful day focused on the future of the industry and the trades.

The momentum behind Bright Futures was impossible to miss. Governor Phil Scott joined the event for the second year in a row and spoke about the growing importance of career and technical education and the critical role skilled trades will play in Vermont's future. Also in attendance were Secretary of Education Zoie Saunders, Deputy Commissioner of Labor Christopher Winters, and members of the House Commerce Committee led by Chairman Michael Marcotte—a strong signal that this initiative is being recognized at the highest levels.

Students had the chance to experience the industry up close through hands-on activities, equipment demonstrations, design

applications, and direct conversations with professionals working in the field. More than just a career day, Bright Futures gave students a real look at the opportunities available in Vermont's lumber and building material industry—and the meaningful careers that can grow from it.

Bright Futures launched five years ago through the vision and leadership of Claudia Homan of Bethel Mills Lumber, with strong support from the entire VRLDA Board.

"Bright Futures is about creating connections that matter," said Homan. "It's an honor for VRLDA to bring together students, industry leaders, and state officials in a way that supports young people and strengthens Vermont's future."

At a time when Vermont needs both more housing and more skilled workers, Bright Futures continues to do exactly what its name promises: shine a light on opportunity. **LC**

1. Vermont Governor Phil Scott returned for a second straight year to encourage students to consider careers in our industry. 2. VRLDA President Claudia Homan (Bethel Mills) addresses the crowd, flanked by the VRLDA Board, Governor Phil Scott, and the Bright Futures team. 3. Vermont Governor Phil Scott presenting the Shining Star Awards.



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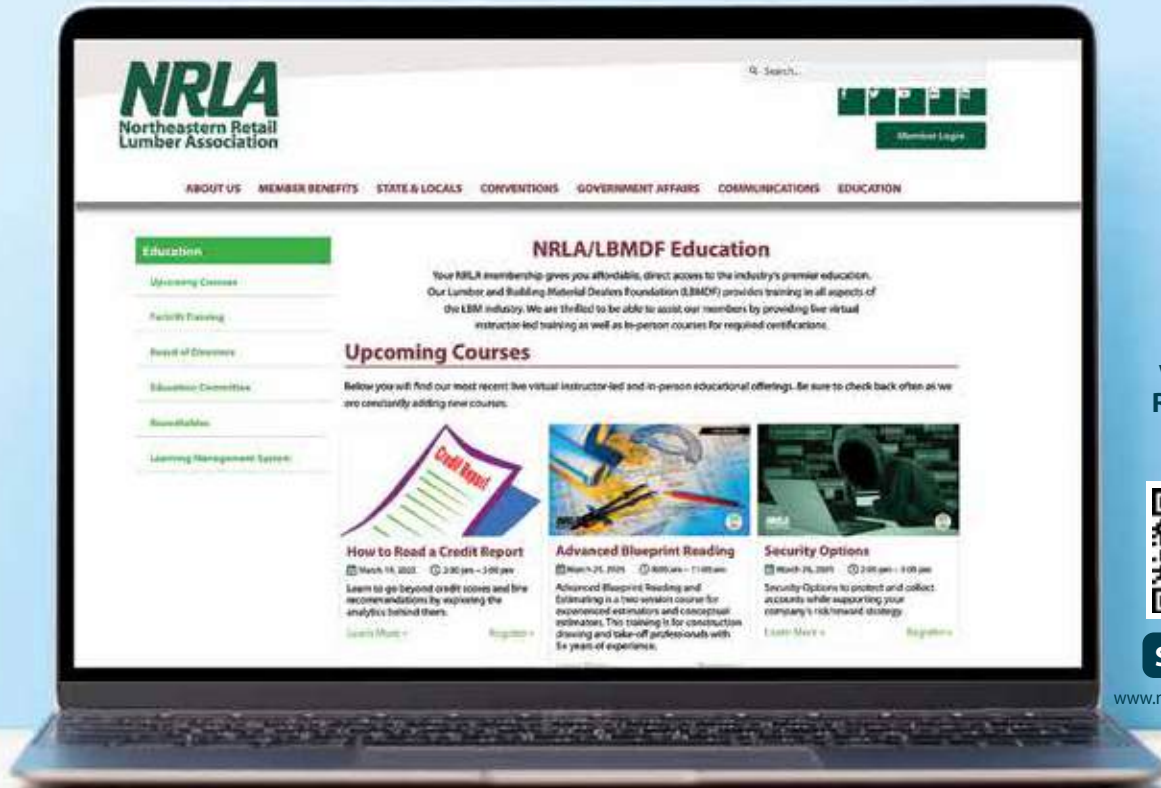
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Andrew Choquette

Location: West Suffield, CT

Position: General Manager • Suffield Lumber



HOW DID YOU BEGIN YOUR CAREER IN THE LBM INDUSTRY?

I got my start in the LBM industry at 18, pushing carts at Lowe's in Ware, just trying to learn as much as possible and work my way up. That led to a sales role and eventually into lumberyard retail sales at Kelly-Fradet Lumber, where I really began to understand the business. From there, I moved into distribution with National Vinyl, LLC to broaden my experience and gain perspective on the other side of the industry. That path ultimately led me into a leadership role in retail lumber sales with Suffield Lumber, where I now draw on everything I've learned along the way.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF YOUR POSITION?

As general manager, I oversee the day-to-day operations of the lumberyard, including inventory control and maintaining vendor relationships to ensure consistent product flow and availability. I'm also focused on growing the retail side of the business while building the Suffield Lumber brand and increasing its presence in the market.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES YOU FACE IN YOUR CAREER?

One of the biggest challenges I've faced is coming up in an industry where most people have decades of experience on me, so I've had to earn trust and prove myself early on. I've also had to push against the typical price-first mindset and show that there's more value in relationships, service, and long-term thinking. I've had to carve out my own path in an industry that doesn't always move quickly or embrace change, which has taught me to be patient, persistent, and willing to do things a little differently.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED SINCE WORKING IN THE INDUSTRY?

I've learned that rejection is just part of the process, and the key is staying consistent and continuing to put yourself in the conversation. I've also learned how important it is to ask the right questions, take accountability, and own my mistakes without making excuses. More than anything I've learned how to turn failures and setbacks into learning opportunities. Every "No" gives me the chance to step back, find where I can improve, adjust, and be stronger on my next opportunity.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ANYONE NEW TO THE INDUSTRY?

Don't be afraid of rejection. I've learned you're not going to hit a home run every time, and that's just part of it. The important thing is to continue to push yourself into the conversation, because that's where the real relationships are built and where long-term success starts. The sale you lost today may turn into a long-term customer next week.

WHAT ARE YOUR PASSIONS OUTSIDE OF THE OFFICE?

I am an avid outdoorsman and enjoy traveling for music festivals and concerts. **LG**

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