

# covering **installation**

*When the going gets tough —*

## **Diversify!**

*By Christopher Capobianco*

**When business gets slow**, do you wring your hands and wonder how you'll get by, or do you look for other avenues within the industry to get into and expand your offerings? If you are a successful retailer or installer, I'll bet the latter is the case. Here are just a few areas worth considering when you think about diversifying your business.

### **BRANCHING INTO COMMERCIAL**

I have spoken to many a retailer or installer who looks to the commercial sector when the residential business gets slow. The first step would be to make more of a push into "Main Street" commercial, which are the small mostly negotiated projects that are happening in your town. Expand the product offerings in your store to include more selection in commercial carpet and resilient products because some of your residential customers will need new floors where they work at some point. You can also do some networking like joining the chamber of commerce or other business groups where you will meet other business people who will need floors at some point. For an entry into larger commercial projects, add someone to your staff who has experience working with general contractors, architects and designers.

### **LEARN NEW PRODUCTS**

The world of "specialty" flooring products is an

other way to expand your business. Patterned carpet, natural linoleum, cork flooring, and stair treads come to mind immediately as products that are growing in popularity for residential and commercial use, but are not yet widely offered by a lot of dealers. More specialized commercial products such as heat welded sheet vinyl, "safety flooring", athletic flooring, raised access floors and other products in the "specialty resilient flooring" category will be in a good place because in many markets there is shortage of companies who understand these products, not to mention skilled installers to do this type of work.

Another category that is worth looking into is stone and ceramic tile. More and more retailers and flooring contractors have added tile to their business successfully and profitably. It may mean adding someone to your staff who knows the product and can help you get started, but as hot as the tile and stone business is today, this is an investment that is bound to pay dividends if you do it right.

### **CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE**

One thing that happens when things slow down is that people may postpone replacing their carpet and floors in favor of cleaning them again, or in the case of wood floors, refinishing them. Adding maintenance to your business is one way to take advantage of this trend. You can make the investment to buy the equipment and hire trained people or partner with cleaning or finishing company in your area and subcontract the work or just refer them, and ask them to refer you when their customers need new floors. This goes for resilient and wood too —



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a lot of floors needs some kind of maintenance right after installation so why not take the work on yourself and make a few dollars!

### INSPECTIONS AND TESTING

Many installers, cleaners and dealers transition into inspections and there continues to be a demand for people who can do accurate inspections and concrete moisture testing. Qualified inspectors to look at floors, come up with answers and have the ability to write it all down in a report that speaks in language that a lay person can understand are hard to come by.

Concrete testing and substrate preparation rep are other potential growth areas for floor covering installers and dealers. This may be for your own work, especially as you branch into more commercial projects. However, the industry is moving more and more towards independent testing so technicians who can do the work accurately according to industry standards are in demand.

### HOW DO I LEARN ALL THIS?

Companies and organizations can help you with training for installers, store owners and salespeople. There are excellent manufacturer-run training programs in linoleum, commercial vinyl flooring, wood floor installation and tile. Many manufacturers are anxious to run some local training programs and just waiting for you to ask them. In addition, there are a number of not for profit organizations that you can turn to for help.

FCICA is the Flooring Contractor's Association, a trade association of commercial flooring dealers, manufacturers and distributors in the US and Canada. Their annual convention and mid-year meeting feature education in all aspects of the commercial business including business-related topics, product knowledge and installation issues and many areas in between. This is a great organization to get involved with whether you are already deep into commercial work or are just starting out in the commercial side. FCICA membership is an opportunity to learn from some experienced and successful people who are generous with what they know.

INSTALL is the International Standards and Training Alliance, and they have a comprehensive training program for residential, commercial, and institutional floor covering installers throughout the United States and Canada. INSTALL standards are certified by the labor departments of the United States and Canadian governments, and are quickly becoming the industry standard for training professional floor coverers.

NWFA is the National Wood Flooring Association, and they offer training in wood flooring through their courses that are offered in the US and Canada.

CTEF is the Ceramic Tile Education Foundation, offering intensive training on tile product and installation knowledge.

IICRC the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification and they have created certification criteria and curriculum for inspectors, cleaners, maintenance technicians, smoke and water damage restoration, mold remediation and a variety of other areas. Training is offered by schools accredited by IICRC.

WFCA is the World Floor Covering Association, the largest dealer-based organization in the industry and tremendous source of knowledge and education in addition to certification programs for business owners and salespeople.

**There are certainly** other training opportunities available and I don't mean to leave anyone out. If you are serious about expanding your business by improving your professionalism, upgrading your skills and making more money, then make the commitment to get trained! ●

*A fourth-generation floor-covering specialist, with experience in retail, architectural sales and technical support, a consultant, writer, educator and activist, **Christopher Capobianco** is owner of Christopher Collaborative Inc. Capobianco volunteers with FCICA, ASTM Committee F.06 on Resilient Flooring and IICRC (Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification).*

**THAT WAS THEN**  
➔ **THIS IS NOW!**

The advertisement shows three rows of illustrations. The first row shows a man on a horse pulling a cart with a roll of carpet, transitioning to a modern van labeled 'JOHN DOE'S CARPETING'. The second row shows two men carrying a roll of carpet, transitioning to a man operating a forklift with a roll of carpet. The third row shows a man unrolling a carpet, transitioning to a large industrial machine that re-rolls, inspects, measures, cuts, and wraps carpet.

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