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— The Editors

## BUSINESS STRATEGIES

### Going Out On My Own

• **Posted by Brian:**

*I am working with a remodeler right now and am looking at going out on my own. What are the pros and cons to doing this — anything that helped you guys out along the way?*

• **Followup posted by Eric:**

It can be great and it can be awful. Talk to your boss — you may be able to start on your own by changing your relationship with him to a subcontractor status and do your own work scheduled in with his. This will allow you to test the waters and...it will also teach you about scheduling, client relations, and the basics of invoicing. I know several small contractors who started their companies this way and who still sub work from their original companies.

Being on your own is not the gravy that most people think it is. You should read everything you can on running your own company, and you should get some basic business practices in place first. Start working with an accounting program like Quickbooks Pro and get all of your forms and contracts ready. Begin by organizing yourself. That is the toughest thing about running your own company. The companies that fail are the ones without a good business plan.

Be a prompt payer when it comes to your subs — that is the biggest plus in finding and keeping good subs. [For instance,] during this time of hard-to-find drywall, I have not had any problems, because [my rocker] has been doing my work since 1986, I always give him two weeks notice, and I pay him promptly.

**Followup posted by Jeff:**

Eric brings up a very good point — business knowledge. The best craftsman won't necessarily run a profitable company. I decided to make the jump based on several years helping Dad with his remodeling side business. A major reason I felt I could struggle through starting a remodeling company myself was my eight-year background in sales, which...gives me the knowledge and skill to sell myself and my services. If I were beginning this without the sales background, I would have quit by now.

**Followup posted by Steve:**

Listen to these guys. I wish I would have listened to that kind of advice, but I didn't. The hardest part...is finding good help and being able to pay them. If you don't bid the jobs for profit (or even realize what profit really should be), you'll never be able to pay out and have some left. Workers always think you

make more money than they do no matter what. But that's not always true for me, after almost five years — even in the boom today.

Remember, no matter how good you are you can only make so much with your one pair of hands, and if you have employees you lose your best worker — yourself. Good luck. Show the world how it's done.

P.S. I figured I'll never know until I try and I didn't want to be 50 and saying "what if" either.

#### **Followup posted by Mike:**

The other guys have said it well. I was a pretty good carpenter and thought I was ready to go it on my own. The business end of this thing we do is another whole education. I really wasn't prepared for it and made lots of mistakes in bidding because I didn't understand overhead (let's not even talk about profit). Read everything you can find about setting up the business. Get (and follow) advice from an accountant. Mind your P's and Q's with Uncle Sam. Keep good records — they'll help you make course corrections. Good luck, bro.

#### **Followup posted by Jeff:**

I just wanted to add — dedication. This last Monday, I pinched a nerve in my shoulder. Went to my chiropractor that afternoon, but it tightened up again overnight. Called my customer to let him know I was taking Tues. off. Went back to the chiro, things looked good, and he suggested I rest Wed. just to be sure, then work my butt off Thurs. and Fri. to catch up. (He knows I'm a carpenter and doesn't have any expectations that I'll stop business for a week to heal.)

So far so good. Sleep in Wed. and awake to wind/rain. At noon the customer calls to tell me a piece of temporary flashing must have blown off because he's getting a little water dripping right over his kitchen sink. Not to worry though, it's not much. Well, I know it's supposed to rain worse and all night. So who do you think drove through the third biggest rainfall on record, pulled out ladders, and got on the roof in pouring down rain with a pinched nerve? Not my helper — it's not his reputation and insurance. I got the leak fixed and it did rain harder.

If I was working for anyone but myself I would have been home resting my shoulder. Something to keep in mind when deciding to put your name on the job. Still, no regrets.

## MATERIALS & TECHNIQUES

### **High-Velocity HVAC**

#### **Posted by James:**

*Has anyone used any of the high-velocity hvac systems? Any balancing problems? Any comments regarding installation or retrofits? House is extremely tight, ventilated, ICF home with 27,500 Btu load for 2,100 sq. ft. ranch. AC not required, but is an option.*

#### **Followup posted by Mike:**

I selected a high-velocity system for my own new home two years ago, and it works well. There are three main manufacturers: Space-Pak [413/564-5530], Unico [314/771-7007], and Energy Saving Products [888/652-2219]. I checked out all three at the RPA [Radiant Panel Association] show a few years back. I liked the Energy Saving Products system best, but I think Unico runs a close second.

Installation is simple. I'm no hvac guy but it took me only 12 hours to install the ductwork and unit in a 2,000 sf home. The system is "self balancing." Each

2-inch flex duct/outlet is taken off a high-pressure trunk. Provided you follow the instructions and keep the flex runs between 15 and 20 feet, the output will be equal at each one.

I was over-cautious sizing the system. My heat loss was 28,000 Btu, but I went with a 50,000 Btu unit. After two heating seasons, I realize I should have gone with the smaller 30,000 Btu unit. The ESP air handler is small (14x14x32 inches), and is primarily a hydro-air fan coil set up for heat, with an add-on DX or chilled-water cooling coil. Controls are on the outside, with two fan speeds: low (constant circulation) and high (heat/cool call). My house isn't as tight as yours will be with ICFs, but the blower registered only 1/4 sq.in./sq.ft. at 50 Pascals.

The high-V systems are great for fitting into tight spaces. Everything in my house runs within the second floor joists. The high velocity is quiet, by the way, and it stirs the air well, although the "cone of influence" as I call it — where the air vents out of the grills — is only about 12 inches around and 6 feet out. It doesn't matter where the outlets pop out — just choose places away from where you may sit or sleep.

The only thing I messed up on was not following the instructions to keep return ducts a minimum of 5 feet. My house is very open with few doors, so I went with short central returns of only 2 feet. The fan noise is noticeable. We're planning an installation for a friend now and won't make the same mistake.

Since you're primarily interested in heating, I'd avoid Space-Pak; it's designed for AC with add-on heat modules.

#### **Followup posted by Ted:**

I have a Space-Pak system, which I chose over Unico. I was not aware that Energy Saving Products also had a unit, and I'm interested why you chose them and what advantages they have over the others. I use my system for cooling only and must say that it makes my old house very comfortable during the summer and is nearly invisible. One of the reasons that I chose Space-Pak is because I thought they had the best balancing options. Two of my supply runs had to be well over 20 feet.

#### **Followup posted by Mike:**

I avoided Space Pak because it has a proprietary ductwork system, and the heat fan-coil seems like an add-on. I wanted an integrated heating and cooling system, and ESP was designed that way. Plus, I can replace almost all internal parts (fan motor to electronic chips) without ordering and paying for a factory component that has parts I don't need.

Flex duct runs on all three systems can go farther than 20 feet — I have two that are 25 feet. I just took the extra length and reduced flow into account when I calculated the number of outlets in those hard-to-reach rooms.

I've never used Space Pak, but one of my AC guys does tons of them and likes them fine. I just like the more fully integrated heat/AC features of the Unico and ESP air handlers. What did you like about the balancing system of Space Pak over Unico when you selected it?

#### **Followup posted by Ted:**

I found comfort in the fact that a variety of balancing orifices were available and can be easily changed to get the proper balance. Because two of the runs were so much longer than the others, I thought the balancing might be difficult and probably not correct on the first try. The Space-Pak fittings allow you to easily disconnect the tubing, change the orifice, and reconnect. As far as the parts and pieces, there aren't many — really just a blower motor that could be easily matched up through Grainger.

