

Remodelers Adjust Material & Channel Choices During Pandemic

“I’ll get around to it.” Five words that every homeowner has uttered at one point or another. And with the pandemic period giving everyone more time at home over the last six months, surveys are indicating that homeowners are finally “getting around to” those upgrade-and-repair to-do lists.

While a recent *Louisville Courier Journal* article noted that many homeowners are taking on more DIY projects during their time at home, other surveys indicate more contractor-based projects could be in the works. For example, a May report by LightStream found that 73% of homeowners surveyed planned to move forward with home improvement projects during 2020, indicating an average cost of \$12,000 – much higher than most DIY projects.

Materials On-Demand

For both do-it-yourself and do-it-for-me markets, the industry is seeing more attention being turned to new supply channels to make materials easier to access.

The Farnsworth Group, a construction-industry market-research group, has followed pandemic-related purchasing in detail since March. Their survey of 500 residential contractors found that 62% have tried a new building materials brand within the past two months (between March and May). The firm says this number is typically in the high teens, so three times more contractors are trying new brands now than under normal market conditions. “This behavior is being driven by some classic product selection factors, the ones often at the top of the list: quality, price, and availability,” the firm says in its analysis. “However, availability was mentioned by nearly half [of respondents] as the reason they tried a new brand.”

With contractors unable to get their usual brands (and willing to try new brands in their place), they’re also showing an openness to trying new supply channels to acquire those materials. Farnsworth data found that 45% of professionals have tried a new supplier in the last two months – a number typically below 20% in a normal year. At one point in the firm’s weekly data collection, in-store purchasing was only done among 53% of professionals, compared with 79% in mid-March. On average, 40% of contractors are purchasing online and having materials delivered, while 30% are purchasing online and picking up in-store.

Sales Rise and Availability Widens

As more home improvement projects get underway, and contractors work the system to find the best avenues

for product selection and availability, manufacturers are working hard to be present when and where their customers need them.

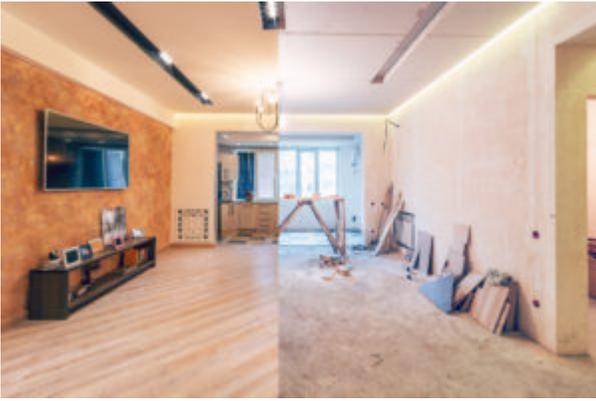
“Sales are up in a big way, especially with big box-retailers right now,” says John Chamberlin, Senior Product Manager, for Georgia-Pacific. “We’re seeing some of our highest volumes in years on the wood side of the business. We know homeowners tend to shop the big-box channel, but it’s obvious to us from the volume of materials being sold that professionals are using this channel more now as well. People are spending more time at home, and they’re trying to make the most of this stay-at-home period to have work done around the house.”

Chamberlin says lumber and panel materials, as well as drywall and some roofing products, are all seeing increases. (The increase in panel material sales, he noted, is also bolstered by hurricane-season storm prep.)

In addition to more business from big-box retailers, GP has also ventured into online sales via Amazon. The company’s DensDefy™ Accessory products, which consist of DensDefy™ Liquid Flashing and DensDefy™ Transition Membrane, have been available on Amazon since the end of July. While the platform is widely used by homeowners for online shopping, Chamberlin says he expects these products to be purchased mainly by professionals. “Where we see value in the Amazon relationship is that we usually sell our DensDefy materials in packages of 20 to distributors,” Chamberlin says. “If you’re talking about something like a window replacement project, which is a big home improvement that people are focusing on right now, 20 packages would cover a lot of rough openings. If you’re a small contractor just doing window replacement on one house, you probably don’t need the quantity or lead time that you’d have with a distributor, so ordering off of Amazon makes a lot of sense.”

The smaller quantities available online are also an attractive option for customers that are new to GP’s DensDefy Accessories product line. Chamberlin says the company includes its 800 number on the Amazon shopping page for any type of technical support.

As home improvements continue to ride the stay-at-home wave during the pandemic, professionals of all sizes have a variety of options for whose products they buy, and from where. With that in mind, GP remains fully supportive of its customers performing essential projects all around the industry and will be accessible in all channels for sales and technical support.



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