

ProSales

Strategies for Today's Construction Supply Leaders / November/December 2013



2013 Excellence Awards

Bob Sanford turned a
daunting challenge into
an opportunity for
Sanford & Hawley

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2013
ProSales
Excellence
Awards

Innovation Shines Forth

As we come out of a multi-year recession, LBM companies are preparing for the coming growth. With new facilities, showrooms, exciting marketing plans, and dynamic websites and technology, the winners of the 2013 ProSales Excellence Awards demonstrate to all that they're ready for the future. This year's winners are: Sanford & Hawley for Facility, Mathew Hall Lumber for Marketing; Drexel Building Supply for Website; and Main Street Lumber for Technology. Congratulations to all.

Tech Leaders:
From left, Steve
Linn, Chuck
Pool, and Robert
Pool of Main
Street Lumber.



Main Street Mobile

Product graphics displayed on smartphones simplify the bid and order process



When the housing recession finally slammed into Texas, Main Street Lumber faced a quandary that many other small pro dealers were also struggling with at that time: How could they make themselves look bigger to lure more business?

Main Street was already sending trucks into the Dallas-Fort Worth market, a 45-minute drive from its headquarters in Denison near the Texas-Oklahoma border. But Main Street needed a selling edge to compete on a larger, more crowded stage for customers that were suddenly in scarce supply.

In January 2006, brothers Chuck

and Robert Pool, who co-own Main Street Lumber, hired Steve Linn as a partner to get their fledgling Main Street Millwork business off the ground. In Linn's experience—which included management stints at Hope Lumber and Lone Star Plywood & Door—he found that customers were often befuddled by quotes for millwork, especially for doors. So he came up with the idea to create estimates and takeoffs for bidding jobs using graphical depictions of millwork products.

Those graphic bid sheets were instant hits, recalls Linn, not only with contractors and builders, but also with homeowners who during the recession were becoming more

involved in the ordering process. "It made us look more sophisticated and capable," Linn says.

As a result, Main Street's closing rate spiked upward. The graphic sheet gave the dealer a better chance at winning bids for really high-end homes in Dallas-Fort Worth, too. "It leveled the playing field," Linn says.

Digital Communication

The process still lacked efficiency, however, because it didn't tie into Main Street's point-of-sale system. The partners, with some help from their company's buying group, Do it Best, began looking for a software package that could

PHOTO: MICHAELS PHOTOGRAPHY

provide a solution. That search eventually came upon Canadian company Luxwood Corp., which already had a product for millwork ordering that linked input from tablets to office PCs.

Initially, the plan was simply to digitize Main Street's graphical bid sheet, says Terry Davies, Luxwood's owner and CEO. But Linn had other ideas. He had just purchased his first iPhone and was mesmerized by its functionality. He thought that Davies and Main Street should focus on developing an application that would allow the dealer's salespeople to bid jobs and place orders from the field using smartphones. At first, Chuck Pool and Davies thought it would be better to develop an app primarily for iPads, but they ultimately yielded to Linn's suggestion.

What the team came up with is Mobile Visual Pro, or MVP, which creates a graphic bid that can be emailed to the customer from the jobsite or uploaded to the store's computer system. This innovation earned the company the 2013 ProSales Excellence Award for technology.

The Challenge

Davies recalls that the biggest challenge in developing any process of this kind was keeping the data available to the salespeople up to date with the inventory in the store or warehouse. So what Luxwood developed is a PC that communicates with a Web portal that's automatically in sync with MVP devices. A Quote Generator, which resides on the user company's POS desktop system, is the software that creates the connection with the mobile device. And an On-Site Estimator, also on the POS desktop system, receives and manages incoming estimates and orders.

"The big deal for us was that our people in the field were able to communicate with the home office without having to talk to a person," says Robert Pool, "and for the home office to be able to move that information into the POS however the salesperson wanted it."

While MVP initially was set up to handle millwork orders, Robert insisted that it also have the capability to handle fill-in orders for other products such as lumber. Users can customize the software to

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—Robert Pool, co-owner,
Main Street Lumber

include as many categories as they need, as long as an item has a SKU number. And because this system is cloud-enabled, it can be customized to allow categorization in whatever way the salesperson wants to look at it on his mobile device.

"The software was developed from the bottom up because our first concern was to make it as easy to use in the field as possible," says Chuck Pool. "It's been our experience in all of our businesses that the guy in the field is who makes the sale. But he won't try anything new unless it's simple."

MVP has all but eliminated the need to re-key orders, thereby reducing data-entry errors to a minimum and condensing quote





Smart Idea: Main Street Lumber's app improves the ordering process for customers.

PHOTOS COURTESY MAIN-STREET LUMBER



Technology: Main Street Lumber

Ease of Use: Product selections are delivered to customers' smartphones.

BETA BUILDERS		510 LLANO LANE		SUNNYVALE, TEXAS		 Your Name Lumber and Millwork INTERIOR DOOR UNITS		ESTIMATE ONLY		GOOD FOR 90 DAYS		FROM - 5-13-13			
Quote # 22013				Terms - Net 10th				Salesperson - John Smith				Page - 1 of 1			
TYPE	HAAD	SIZE	STYLE	BORE	JAMB	H. CASING	G. CASING	HINGES	PRICE	QTY	TOTAL	LOCATION & NOTES			
SINGLE	RH	2480 1-3/4	SC CHEYENNE	SGL	4-5/8 FJ	C522 FJ	C522 FJ	OIL RUBBED BRONZE	\$0.00	1	\$0.00	#2			
SINGLE	LH	2880 1-3/4	SC CHEYENNE	SGL	4-5/8 FJ	C522 FJ	C522 FJ	OIL RUBBED BRONZE	\$0.00	2	\$0.00	#3,10			
SINGLE	RH	2880 1-3/8	#1593 LAUNDRY	SGL	4-5/8 FJ	C522 FJ	C522 FJ	OIL RUBBED BRONZE	\$0.00	1	\$0.00	#4			
SINGLE	LH	2080 1-3/8	#1590 PANTRY	SGL	4-5/8 FJ	C522 FJ	C522 FJ	OIL RUBBED BRONZE	\$0.00	1	\$0.00	#5			
2 DOOR STACK	SR	2880 1-3/4	SC CHEYENNE	SGL	4-5/8 FJ	C522 FJ	C522 FJ	OIL RUBBED BRONZE	\$0.00	1	\$0.00	#6			
SINGLE	RH	2080 1-3/4	SC CHEYENNE	SGL	4-5/8 FJ	C522 FJ	C522 FJ	OIL RUBBED BRONZE	\$0.00	3	\$0.00	#7,12,13			
SINGLE	LH	2480 1-3/4	SC CHEYENNE	SGL	4-5/8 FJ	C522 FJ	C522 FJ	OIL RUBBED BRONZE	\$0.00	2	\$0.00	#8,14			
SINGLE	RH	2880 1-3/8	12 LIFE KNOTTY ALDER	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE	OIL RUBBED BRONZE	\$0.00	1	\$0.00	#9 STUDY			
TWIN	NONE	4080 1-3/8	2 PANEL VG KNOTTY ALDER	NONE	4-5/8 AWP	C522 ALDER	C522 FJ	OIL RUBBED BRONZE	\$0.00	1	\$0.00	#11			
SINGLE	RH	2880 1-3/4	SC CHEYENNE	SGL	4-5/8 FJ	C522 FJ	C522 FJ	OIL RUBBED BRONZE	\$0.00	1	\$0.00	#15 CUT DR. DOWN TO 78" BORE SFB			
SINGLE	RH	3080 1-3/4	SC CHEYENNE	SGL	4-5/8 FJ	C522 FJ	C522 FJ	OIL RUBBED BRONZE	\$0.00	1	\$0.00	#16			
TWIN	LH	3080 1-3/4	SC CHEYENNE	SGL	4-5/8 FJ	C522 FJ	C522 FJ	OIL RUBBED BRONZE	\$0.00	1	\$0.00	#17 MEDIA HEAD BOLT ONLY			
GENERAL NOTES: Note for Delivery: Stack all doors on east wall in living room.									SUB TOTAL	\$0.00					
									TAX 8.25%	\$0.00					
									TOTAL	\$0.00					
									Door Handing   						

tumaround time to a few hours instead of a few days. And an order of any product with a SKU number goes directly to Main Street's dispatcher, who can then start building his loads, Chuck says.

Robert adds that a salesperson can store all of the products he needs to see on his iPhone or iPad, so he

"This app should be able to save any yard at least \$100 per salesperson per month."
—Chuck Pool, co-owner, Main Street Lumber

doesn't require Internet access to show items to customers or to place orders, which automatically upload to the company's computers once an online connection is established.

Staying Ahead of the Pack
 Main Street and Luxwood began programming MVP in 2011, and introduced the product last May. The two companies formed a partnership to develop and market MVP to other dealers, and as of mid October had more than 30 devices in the field with dealers in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Texas.

The partnership charges dealers \$99 per device per month, "and we're so confident about it that we aren't requiring long-term contracts," says Chuck, who is convinced that MVP is going to set new standards for accuracy and speed in estimates and orders, and eventually could become as revolutionary

to pro dealers' operations as the forklift or QuickBooks. "This app should be able to save any yard at least \$100 per salesperson per month," he says.

Hyperbole aside, this fall Main Street Lumber and Luxwood were preparing a national launch for MVP, which the partners plan to market primarily through leading regional distributors across the country. (In Dallas-Fort Worth, for example, they are working with Dallas Wholesale.)

The partners say that these arrangements should be win-win

because it's more likely that a dealer will order merchandise from the preferred distributor, and that the distributor will be able to turn around price quotes faster for dealers using MVP.

By the end of this year, Main Street should also have ready an MVP app for Android-operated mobile devices, Davies says.

When asked why Main Street Lumber would want to sell to other dealers what appears to be a proprietary and competitively unique process, Chuck Pool responds that, the pace of technological advancement being what it is these days, his company might as well try to monetize MVP while it can, before someone else comes along and duplicates it.

Until that happens, Main Street is looking for new ways to keep a leg up on the market. Davies says that the partnership is currently working on expanding MVP's suite to include software specifically for siding, gutters, soffit, and fascia board.

"We have a lot of ideas percolating in our heads" about possible spin-offs, Linn says. —*John Caulfield*

PHOTO: COURTESY MAIN STREET LUMBER