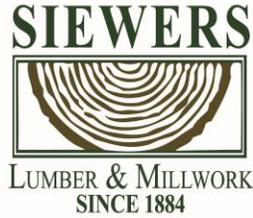


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*“Preserving the Past while Building the Future.”*



*Celebrating 131 Years of Service*

*A note from the Siewers Family...*

It is hard to believe that another year has passed and that 2015 is upon us with the many opportunities and challenges that come with each New Year. Thank you for ALL you did for Siewers Lumber Company in 2014 and for partnering with us in 2015 and into the future!

As we look at the calendar for 2015, we've just completed our first Wolf Pro Certification Session on Tuesday, January 13<sup>th</sup>; our Founders Day Celebration and Deck Expo is scheduled for May and our Architectural Products show will be held on October 1<sup>st</sup>. We are looking at other opportunities as well to help keep you up-to-date in regards to new and existing product lines.

On a sad note, Mrs. Mary Ann Breslin Siewers passed away peacefully on January 6<sup>th</sup> surrounded by her family. Mrs. Siewers was the wife of “Big” Fred Siewers and the mother of Freddy, Richie, Michael, Ann (Siewers) Meacham, Lynne Siewers and their families. The Siewers family would like to say “Thank you” for your thoughts and prayers and for the many cards and expressions of sympathy as you have remembered us during this time. We are indeed “Blessed”!

As we all strive to be more successful in 2015, please let us know how we can better serve you throughout the coming year. We want to hear from you.

*Happy New Year!*

Charlie Ball on behalf of The Siewers Family

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## Contractor News

### 5 Ways to Have Great Conversations by Harvey Deutschenforf

Have you ever wished that you had an ability to talk to strangers and have them instantly warm up to you? Having meaningful conversations is something that can be learned, and with focus and practice, we can all become better at it.

Get out of yourself and market it about the other person. The best conversations begin with showing an interest in the other person. Ask them an open ended question about something you noticed about them. Great conversationalist have a sincere interest in others.

- Practice active listening. When you find your mind wondering as someone is speaking, stop and try to force yourself to listen. Practice this by getting a friend to talk to you and then repeat what they are saying.
- Move the conversation to a deeper level. Think about the people that you are willing to open up to and share things with. What is it about them that make you so comfortable? Eye contact and making you feel like they are hearing you is key.
- Ask good questions. We can get others to share more by showing an interest and asking open-ended questions to help them get deeper into the conversation. Ask yourself what other areas that are related to their interest that they would love to talk about.
- Consider time and space. Never start a conversation beyond exchanging quick pleasantries unless you have the time to hear the other person out. Places that are noisy with a lot of people around are not the best places to engage in great conversation. Good conversation requires a slow, relaxed pace and a pressure-free atmosphere free of distractions.

### As Construction Recovers, Look at Business Operation Tools

The construction industry that drives so much of the contracting business is steadily gaining throughout the nation. **U.S. News & World Report** reports that new home construction grew almost 22 percent in 2014. Moreover, builders themselves are optimistic, according to the National Association of Home Builders, which reports its members have seen an increase in "**serious buyers.**"

**This is great news for the contracting business.** But with the recovery still a bit fragile and lenders reluctant to release loans, smart contractors need to be able to respond to work requests quickly. This means working smarter, including the work that runs the business. Luckily, there are tools that can let them focus on their craft and leave the business end in responsible hands, too.

### *Outsource Complex Financial Tasks*

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Lots of small businesses, including many contractors, outsource accounting services like payroll and tax preparation. This is a smart move; tools like QuickBooks and NetSuite are constantly improving their services and lowering their costs. Even better, they are hosted online—in the cloud—so they can be accessed from any secure Internet site, reports Forbes. Online accounting services are very good choices for new firms and small ones that do not have a large enough accounting infrastructure to handle all functions and future growth. They're also heavily focused on security and maintaining backups of their own clients' data.

**What about revenue management?** This is not part of standard accounting services like QuickBooks. But managing your revenue is how your company stays afloat and can perform tasks like payroll and paying your own suppliers.

Customer management firms like Chargify have filled this important gap, providing clients from businesses of all sizes with online, cloud-based services that include:

- Accepting payments from several sources, including ACE, eChecks, PayPal, and credit cards.
- Issuing refunds.
- Emails to customers that handle electronic invoices and receipts, payment reminders, and upcoming credit card expiration dates.
- Coupons and discount redemption.

**Best of all, these online services guarantee their accuracy and post solid customer ratings.**

Go Online for Business and Legal Filings

**Most contractors are small businesses but still have to file the same paperwork as the big guys.** Unlike the big guys, they don't have in house attorneys and generally don't have time to run downtown to talk to a lawyer about filing for a business license or how to get a federal EIN.

**Online legal services can help with the routine legal issues that don't involve the courts.** Services like Legal Zoom and RocketLawyer provide small business owners with information and assistance that can help them understand how to address common legal topics that often arise in the course of business, such as:

- Whether to file as an LLC, partnership, or S-corporation.
- Steps to take to ensure corporate compliance.
- Debt collection advice.

Subscribers also get access to common legal forms like employment contracts, cease-and-desist templates, and nondisclosure agreements. On call lawyers are available to answer general questions around the clock.

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### *Go Online for Office Software*

Perhaps the biggest online industry is office products like word processing and spreadsheets.

**Small businesses used to shell out a lot of money for office software** and then spend more on antivirus software, backup systems, and of course upgrades. They don't have to do this anymore with online services from well-known companies like Google and Microsoft.

To get Google's free online office products, just open a free Google account which includes the famous Gmail email service and more free services:

- Online drive that stores virtually any kind of document uploaded to it.
- Word processing.
- Spreadsheet.
- Presentation slide.
- Forms.
- Drawing tool.

If you or your office staff can't live without Microsoft Office, the online Office 365 delivers the full suite of Microsoft products, including online meeting services, upgrades, and security. Prices start at \$12.50/month.

### *Software Expert Offers Advice For Owners Seeking Contractor Business* *Software* By Shawn McCadden

I recently did an interview with Forrest Burnson, the research expert at Software Advice, a company that reviews remodeling software and connects to buyers with software vendors. Here are my questions and Forest's answers. I hope you find them helpful.

#### **Question #1:**

Lots of contractors I work with and others I speak to **are** looking for an all-in-one solution for their residential remodeling businesses. So far they and I have not found one that is really "**All-in-one**". Are there any true "All-in-one" systems out there for the \$2M and less remodeling contractor?

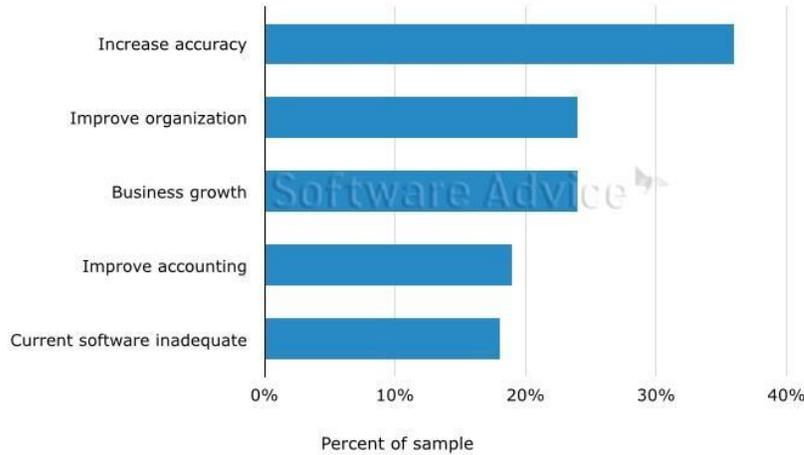
#### **Answer:**

It's true that traditionally, there haven't been many "all-in-one" systems targeted toward small home building/remodeling firms. However in recent years, we have seen a number of offerings pop up for this industry segment, and the older legacy vendors are also starting to target smaller firms. **Now**, the issue is whether these newer, cheaper offerings will have longevity in the market. There's always the chance of acquisition or the vendor going under, which might be a good argument to stick with systems that offer subscription pricing as opposed to a significant upfront investment.

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**Question #2:**

Can you offer some advice and guidance to business owners who want to look into and qualify the appropriateness of software for their business needs? Maybe offer a best way to get started?

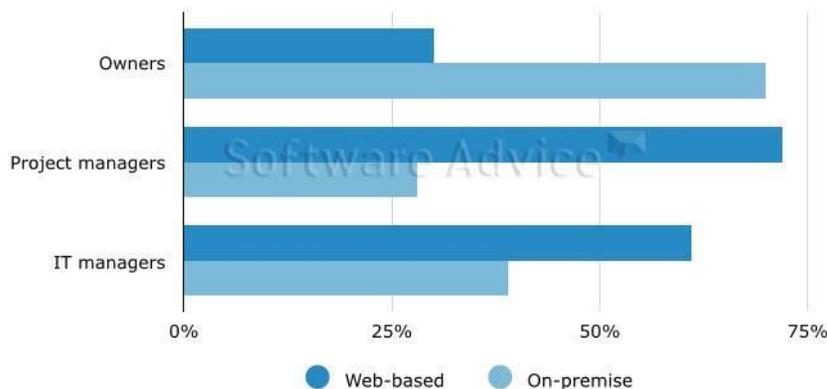


**Answer:**

Well, I do have to plug our service here at Software Advice—we offer free phone consultations to prospective software buyers to help them find the best system for their needs. Always, always, always demo a system before making the commitment—and get people on your team to demo it too, if they're going to be working with it.

**Question #3:**

Many old school business owners are hesitant to consider cloud based programs, citing their concerns for access and security. Can you offer some pro/con advice for business owners trying to decide between using desktop and cloud applications?



**Answer:**

While both offer their advantages and disadvantages, the trend is definitely toward the cloud. In the construction industry especially, there are so many benefits to the cloud—

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mobile access, more streamlined collaborative processes, typically better document control, etc. I do think there is a misconception that the cloud is not as secure—if the proper procedures are being followed, it's no more risky than a traditional on-premise system. That said, it can take more diligence to ensure that a cloud system is as close to 100 percent secure as possible (no system will ever be 100 percent secure). Lastly, in terms of cost, cloud systems will generally be cheaper in the long-run as you will have to invest less in hardware.

### **Choosing the Right Tools and Technology for Your Construction Company**

#### **Question #4:**

My experience shows that almost every remodeling business owner reinvents the wheel of doing business; therefore every one of them has a different business model to support. This can make it difficult to find a software to support how they already do business. Plus, setting up the software to support the business can be challenging because most owners of smaller businesses couldn't explain in a logical order how they do business, it just happens. Can you offer your thoughts on this reality as it relates to choosing software and getting help setting it up so it is actually ready to use?

#### **Answer:**

The way you describe how small businesses operate is pretty spot-on—there's going to be a certain 'method to their madness' as they grow, with ad-hoc solutions becoming their modus operandi. So there is a little give-and-take; no matter what, you will have to conform some of your business processes to jive with the software system you've deployed. That said, some of the more complex systems can be quite flexible, and the vendor will typically work with the client to customize the system to fit their needs. Those systems tend to be costlier, so again, it's a give-and-take situation.

### **Wage Watch: What Carpenters Earned in 2014**

Every year, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports wage totals for hundreds of contractors in every metropolitan area in the U.S. Here are a few that might interest you.

Virginia Beach	\$18.84 per Hour	Miami	\$19.01 per Hour
Philadelphia	\$25.03	Dallas	\$14.55
Los Angeles	\$25.42	New York	\$31.17

**Invest In Your Remodeling Business Now, Or Pay Forever** [Click to see a new article by Shawn McCadden](#)

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**2015 IRS Mileage Rates**

- \* 57.5 cents per mile for business miles driven
- \* 23 cents per mile for medical or moving purposes
- \* 14 cents per mile in the service of charitable organizations

**Quick Contractor Tip**

**Simplify ceiling strapping installation.** *David Epstein, West Hartford, CT*

When hanging a drywall ceiling, the chalk lines for the strapping were illegible. Our alternative method for laying out strapping worked so well that we now use it for any ceiling joists. Make a pair of T-shaped supports with notches to position the 1 x 4 strapping. Mark the supports for the starter course on the wall. After a few boards go up, flip the supports and go to the opposite wall. Check the lines at 4' and 8' on center to ensure good backing at the drywall seams.

**How would you like to be published in a future issue of Siewers Newsletter?**

Be sure it is a quick tip that can help another contractor and one that is simple to understand (“Even I need to understand it!”) It also must be economical to create. Submit your tips to us at [laurenf@siewers.com](mailto:laurenf@siewers.com).

**Feel Lucky!**

*Be sure and bring your business card next time you visit Siewers. Just drop it into the glass fish bowl on the counter to enter a monthly drawing.  
Good Luck!!!*

**Congratulations to *Howard Smith* our  
January winner!**

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Economy Snap Shot.....

	<u>Unemployment Rate – Entire U.S.</u>	<u>Consumer Confidence (Indexed to value of 100 in 1985)</u>	<u>Total Housing Starts/Seasonally Adjusted Annual Rate</u>
December 2014	5.6%	92.6	1,089,000
Prior Month – November 2014	5.8%	91.0	1,043,000
Prior Year – December 2013	6.7%	77.5	1,034,000

	<u>Gallon (\$) Of Gas</u>	<u>Existing Home Sales</u>
December 31, 2014	\$2.29	N/A
Prior Month – Nov. 2014	\$2.77	4,930,000
Prior Year – December 2013	\$3.31	4,870,000

**Market Summary**

	<u>January 21, 2014</u>	<u>1/01/15</u>	<u>12/31/13</u>
DOW	17,515	17,823	16,576
NASDAQ	4,654	4,736	4,176
S&P 500	2,022	2,058	1,848

**Long & Foster Market Minute / December 2014**

<b>New Listings</b>	<b>Current Contracts</b>	<b>Sold Vs. List Price</b>	<b>Months of Supply</b>
<b>1,274</b>	<b>1,021</b>	<b>98.5%</b>	<b>5.1</b>
	<b>Median Sales Price</b>	<b>Days on Market</b>	
	<b>\$211,000</b>	<b>72</b>	

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Company Mission

To serve the needs of contractors and do-it-yourselfers.



**“In motivating people, you’ve got to engage their minds and their hearts. It is good business to have an employee feel part of the entire effort...; I motivate people, I hope, by example - - and perhaps by excitement, by having provocative ideas to make others feel involved.” Rupert Murdoch**

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[www.siewers.com](http://www.siewers.com)**

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7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.**

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“Siewers Newsletter”, have them email us at  
[laurenf@siewers.com](mailto:laurenf@siewers.com) and we will add them to our  
distribution list.***

**....Next issue February 19th**