

10 Ideas to Change Your Remodeling Business

Business [1]

The old saying is true: All of us are smarter than any of us. So take advantage of your peers' innovation and problem solving to help improve your business.

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There's nothing as powerful as tapping the wisdom of peers. With that in mind, we asked 10 remodelers to describe one pressing challenge and what they're doing to tackle it. The challenges run the gamut from human resources to production to marketing, and the insightful solutions range from high-tech to introspective.



1. Jim Kabel

President

Case Design/Remodeling of San Jose ^[2], San Jose, Calif.

Challenge: Obtain and manage honest feedback from employees about the company

Solution: TinyPulse

We're using a Web-based service called TinyPulse ^[3] to obtain and manage feedback from our employees about their "happiness at work." The platform enables them to give compliments and suggestions for improvements. We love the system!

For years I was struggling with how to collect and manage anonymous feedback from our team of 20-plus employees. Not everyone reports to me as the owner, so I needed something that would be direct, proactive, timely, and easy to use. I wanted to avoid the cumbersome annual employee survey that was a part of my past corporate life. I was considering using SurveyMonkey on a quarterly basis, until I found TinyPulse.

The company sends one question per week to all employees via email. Questions can be quantitative or qualitative and are generated from either TinyPulse's standard library or from me. The system gives employees one week to respond, reminds them if they haven't, and collects and tabulates the answers anonymously. It also enables employees to provide a "Cheer for Peers" where they can compliment a co-worker and/or make a suggestion for improvement. For qualitative questions, graphical results are provided. In addition,

benchmarks are available so we can compare our results to other companies that use the service.

The bottom line is that I now have an additional tool for my employees to share feedback in a safe, consistent, and reliable way.



2. Michael Hayes

Owner/Operations Manager

CQC Home ^[4], Durham, N.C.

Challenge: Be less fast and loose with office operations

Solution: A series of clear, codified procedures and policies

As part of prepping for our next phase of growth, our company really needed to enter HR adulthood—an area where neither my partner nor I have much expertise.

We brought in a specialist and followed her recommendations. Part of that process involved revamping many policies and procedures. Here are the high-points of what we changed:

1. We added sections to our employee handbook regarding salaried employees, and we clarified exempt vs. nonexempt status. We also made it clear how that affects overtime and holiday pay policy.

2. Background checks and drug screenings are now mandatory for all new hires.
3. We created a new PTO structure to include a flex-time option for personal leave, added a bereavement clause, and solidified our major holidays.
4. There is now a clear, written policy for turning in receipts, personal use of company vehicles/equipment, and employee reviews.
5. Every position has a detailed job description and metrics for advancement. We also created a continuing education budget for each employee and codified expectations for each level of leadership accordingly.
6. We now have a disciplinary policy for each sector of the business where we have seen either HR difficulty or protocol difficulty that leads to slippage.



3. Kate Ewing

Marketing Manager

Mosby Building Arts ^[5], St. Louis

Challenge: Tracking the performance of marketing materials

Solution: Quarterly review of key media outlets

At Mosby, all associates receive trimester reviews. This helps them track goals and objectives, celebrate successes, and make adjustments as needed to stay on course.

To make my job easier in marketing, I've expanded this practice to our media partners. Each quarter, I review our key media outlets—radio, print, and television—by vendor. I look at internal metrics including leads vs. won jobs.

I also track which marketing materials were running and when they appeared. I share this information with our sales representatives from each outlet during our review time. By combining internal metrics with their ratings, program, or audience information, we are able to quickly spot patterns. This allows us to capitalize on what's working and to change what's not working in a more proactive way than being stuck reviewing a failed media plan at year's end. This practice of constant assessment also makes media planning and buying much easier (and more effective) for upcoming media cycles.



4. Michael P. DiFabion

Director of Sales & Marketing

DiFabion Remodeling ^[6], Indian Trail, N.C.

Challenge: Relying on too few marketing outlets, leaving the company vulnerable

Solution: Diversifying the mix

We try to make sure our leads come from multiple places, so that if one lead source dries up, there are several other reliable sources.

Print ads make up about 45 percent of our marketing budget. This includes *TheHomeMag*, our local NARI (National Association of the Remodeling Industry) directory, and a couple of small local publications.

Digital media is about 10 to 15 percent of our marketing budget. This includes [Houzz](#) [7], [GuildQuality](#) [8], [Angie's List](#) [9], and our website.

Referrals are rewarded with a personalized thank-you card and small gift certificate. If that referral becomes a sale, we typically send a larger gift certificate, maybe for dinner at a nice restaurant.

Social media and six email campaigns a year are also part of the mix.

Our two largest lead sources are *TheHomeMag* and Angie's List, with Houzz and direct referrals close behind. The strongest evidence of the effectiveness of a diverse marketing mix is the fact that most of our leads will mention learning about our company from multiple sources.

We've increased our involvement with Houzz over the past year and have seen a steady uptick in leads. I've gradually been adding portfolio pictures and metatagging them on Houzz, as well as asking clients for reviews. This has helped our organic presence, which has definitely made an impact.

We also have a strong presence in the community through several trade associations. Because of that, we tend to get a lot of direct referrals from industry partners. This, along with maintaining a strong relationship with past clients, is probably the most important component of our marketing mix.



5. Chris Deitz

Owner

Dietz Development, Washington, D.C.

Challenge: Constant work-related calls and texts during personal time

Solution: Stronger internal boundaries

For too long I answered emails, texts, and phone calls when a client reached out to me, even during off-hours. I set an expectation that I was always available. While that's absolutely what I want clients to feel, personal time is also important. If you open the door to communications after hours, then more will come, and if you don't respond right away, the client will be disappointed. With today's technology, it's truly hard to set limits for our clients, but we must or we will never rest.

I've gradually implemented this protection of personal time and it has helped me tremendously. In addition, once your clients see it, they actually respect you and your personal time, just as they want their time to be respected.



6. Brian Mazur

Production Manager

Get Dwell ^[10], Winnetka, Ill.

Challenge: Rush jobs causing problems for the production side of the business

Solution: A series of checklists for each department to ensure that projects move forward more smoothly

Having the production side of our business run squeaky clean is imperative to the health of our company. It's a key component in ending up with a satisfied customer and it's the metric that the production team is graded on for rewards and bonuses. At times our clients need a project done ASAP. If these rush jobs aren't handled correctly, they can affect both the company's margins and, ultimately, the client's satisfaction with the project.

In an effort to prevent these rush jobs from pulling us off course, I instituted a process involving the entire company. While it does create some extra paperwork, it also helps ensure that we don't overlook any details.

I now have check lists for rush jobs that the salesperson can take to the appointment. This form spells out everything that's needed for a project, so the salesperson just enters the customer's product selections in the box for that line item. Then, after the sale, our account executive reviews the forms and sales contract with another form designed to make sure that

everything is complete. Once the project is handed to production, there's another form to double check that everything is ready to move forward.



7. Dawn Dewey

Marketing Director

Dreamstyle Remodeling, Albuquerque, N.M. ^[11]

Challenge: Find ways to improve SEO

Solution: Run multiple pay-per-click campaigns

As the Internet continues to dominate lead generation above other media sources, consider running multiple PPC campaigns with different landing pages. Google and other search engines only allow one PPC campaign per website, but if you have microsites or landing pages, you can run several simultaneously. This strategy allows you to dominate branded and non-branded search terms, thereby driving more leads to your business. Just be sure that your PPC campaigns complement each other in keyword bidding.



8. Katie Kim

CEO

The Kim Group ^[12], Peoria, Ill.

Challenge: Daily sheets not getting filled out

Solution: Brainstorming with staff to help solve the problem; implementing Raken

Recently I brought my team in to brainstorm about pain points in their daily tasks. “What would make your job easier?” I asked. “What would make you more productive?” One great solution we found comes to mind.

The guys hated to fill out daily sheets and used to complete them at the end of the week. They would try to remember who was on site this day or what they did that day. Then we had a project where the homeowner didn’t want to pay for changes that he had already approved. We ended up in court over it and had to heavily rely on our daily sheets to recreate the timeline.

At that point, our field staff realized how important this documentation is, and we all saw the need for an easier way to submit the information. So this year we implemented Raken ^[13]. It has been revolutionary! Field guys are able to enter their daily sheets via voice and it translates their information into the daily sheet within the Raken app. Our office staff now receives the daily sheets DAILY! This allows us to immediately contact the field staff if there is missing information.

Digging into the pain points enabled us to view the problem at the lowest level instead of looking at it with layers of complexity. In the case of the daily sheets, the issue wasn't the guys driving it to the office, the problem was that the field guys didn't want to take the time to sit down and write the material.



9. Jim Kowalski

Owner

Kowalski Construction ^[14], **Phoenix**

Challenge: Ensure that the right people are in the right jobs

Solution: Entrepreneurial Operating System

Most of us are familiar with the quote from Jim Collins' book, *Good to Great* about the need to get "the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats." (*Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't* ^[15], HarperBusiness, 2001.)

This past year we began working with a business coach from *Achieve Traction* ^[16], a firm that helps companies implement EOS (Entrepreneurial Operating System). She helped us to incorporate Collins' concept into our review and hiring processes.

Learning from the coach, we began by identifying our Core Values and our Core Focus. With

this framework in place, we now use a People Analyzer to help us score employees and potential hires in three categories. We seek to determine if they:

1. Get it: Do they really connect with the position? Do they get all of the ins and outs of the job? Are all of the neurons in their brain connecting when we explain material or when they do the job?

2. Want it: Is their desire genuine? Do they get up every morning wanting to do the job? They have to want to do this on their own because we can't pay, motivate, force, or beg them to "want" it.

3. Have the capacity: By "capacity" we mean mental, physical, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional. Capacity in this context doesn't mean time, but instead we're looking for aptitude, skill, ability, talent, or knack to do the job.

We've always been pretty good at understanding our company's culture and looking for the right fit from both our employee's perspective as well as the company's. Our further understanding of this has helped us to improve our teamwork and embrace the concept that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts."



10. Chris Hogan

Business Development

F.H. Perry Builder [17], Hopkinton, Mass.

Challenge: Problem clients

Solution: Closely evaluate prospects before a contract is signed

Even though we work in the service industry, it doesn't make sense to take on any client simply because they need a service. The question should be: Do they need my service? Recently, I've shifted to evaluating potential clients as much as they are evaluating me. This can be scary because sometimes it means turning away projects, even when I need the work. The payoff for doing this, however, is that I don't lose time and money servicing clients who aren't a good fit. Problem clients pull energy from my company and keep us from operating optimally.

When meeting a client and assessing a job, I keep these four questions close at hand:

1. What are the client's priorities? Budget? Schedule? Quality? Experience? Do these align with my business priorities?
2. What examples of recent projects do I have to offer that are similar to the project at hand? Why were these projects successful?
3. What is the budget and where is the money coming from? Is the budget in the range of what I expect the project will cost?
4. What is the client's desired schedule? Is this realistic? Does my schedule allow for the manpower needed on the job during this time? **PR**



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