

M.212 – Marketing for Success

Business success is determined by many factors; proper training, having a high quality, affordable & easy to use product, innovation & desire, drive & effort, but first and foremost... having an effective marketing & advertising plan.

Unfortunately choosing an effective marketing and advertising plan is not as easy as it sounds. The first decision a serious contractor needs to make is “what is their market niche.” Obviously the focus is “concrete overlays”, but what specifically will the initial and primary focus be? It is never our recommendation to start off applying every application our products are capable of because the choices and options are just too many.

Variations of architectural concrete overlays have been around for over two decades, yet virtually every contractor in any geographical region with the exception of a few areas will soon realize that the public simply has little or no knowledge of any architectural concrete overlay process. Some inexperienced contractors will initially view this as a disadvantage since they will be responsible for creating the market and demand for architectural concrete overlays in their area. But the fact is, once a contractor creates that market they own the market. Not to mention, they will have little or no competition to compete with.

Take a look at the various “primary” applications and finishes listed below to get a better idea as to the advantages as well as the disadvantages of each.

1. Skim Coat & Broom Finish – Although this application is not decorative, it is still a finish in high demand as well as profitable for the contractor.

Designed For:

- Restoring structurally sound yet surface deteriorated concrete.
- Creating a smooth or broom finish to virtually any stable concrete surface; Driveways, patios, pool decks, sidewalks, garage floors, parking decks and more.
- Interior or exterior applications.

Advantages:

- Easy to install for even the most inexperienced installers.
- Typical material cost is under \$0.35 per square foot.
- Installation time is very quick compared to some other applications.
- Can be installed as a slip resistant surface.

2. Splatter Texture – This application is one of the oldest and time-tested decorative finishes dating back over two decades. Most decorative oriented contractors begin with the splatter textures due to the fact that it is an easy and profitable application process that requires little experience and just the basic tools and equipment.

From the consumer’s perspective, the splatter texture is as innovative as any other decorative application. The broad range of colors and patterns allows the contractor to customize the finish to match any surrounding landscape or building design colors & features. Because the splatter texture can be installed quickly and with a low material cost, contractors can afford to sell applications for less than thin stamped overlays.

Designed For:

- Restoring structurally sound yet surface deteriorated concrete.
- Creating an elegant architectural finish to virtually any stable concrete surface; Driveways, patios, pool decks, sidewalks, garage floors, parking decks and more.
- Interior or exterior applications.

Advantages:

- Easy to install for even the most inexperienced installers.
- Typical material cost is under \$0.65 per square foot.
- Unlimited patterns with the use of design tape or QUICK-PRINT™ Stencils.
- Unlimited colors with the use of PORTION CONTROL COLORANT™.

- Installation time is very quick compared to some other applications.
 - Can be installed as a slip resistant surface.
 - Can be “knocked down” to create yet another look and finish.
3. ¼” Thin Stamped Overlays - This application is most popular decorative finish available, primarily due to the authentic look of various stone, brick, slate and tile finishes this application creates compared to splatter textures and other forms of application.

Thin stamped overlay raises the bar as it pertains to architectural concrete overlays. The level of elegance is second only real stone or slate but at a lesser price. That level of elegance comes at a slightly higher material cost but it is more than made up for in the sales price.

Designed For:

- Restoring structurally sound yet surface deteriorated concrete.
- Creating an elegant architectural finish to virtually any stable concrete surface; Driveways, patios, pool decks, sidewalks, interior floors, garage floors and more.
- Interior or exterior applications.

Advantages:

- More authentic look as compared to any other application.
- Many patterns and textures to choose from with the use of THIN-PRINT™ Stamp Tools & Texture Skins.
- Unlimited colors with the use of ULTRA-STONE™ Antiquing Stain, CHEM-STONE™ Reactive Stain, HYDRA-STONE™ Dye Stain and/or PORTION CONTROL COLORANT™.
- Installation is much easier and quicker than conventional stamped concrete.

4. Custom Seamless Flooring – Interior flooring using these products and systems has never been more popular. Architects, designers, commercial property owners and homeowners are always looking for something better, stronger and more aesthetically appealing than conventional tile, wood and other floor covering and these products offer all of them a literally limitless array of options. Of course in addition to extreme versatility and customizability, durability is perhaps the greatest selling point. Imaging a flooring system that you can drive a semi truck on...

As an architectural concrete overlay contractor, it is a must to promote yourself as a specialty flooring contractor as well and a decorative concrete overlay contractor. Most people new to the business come up with company names such as “Decorative Concrete Specialists”, “Concrete Designs” or something like that. But who really knows what “decorative concrete” really is? Sure, some people have an idea but now imagine trying to convince people that you do flooring too. We like to relate it to a company called “The Roof Doctor”. Yes, the name implies they do roofing. Now imagine if a roofing contractor offered to bid on installing your hardwood floors... You would certainly think not. Instead, think of a name that encapsulates interior flooring too. Some names we have heard of and liked might be, “Floor Seasons Finishes”, “Custom Surfaces” or “Indoor/Outdoor Floor Designers”. You get the picture. The intent is to let your future customers know that you specialize in applying these finishes indoors as well as outdoors.

Designed For:

- Restoring structurally sound yet surface deteriorated concrete floors. Whether it is plain concrete or concrete where and existing floor covering was previously installed..
- Creating a completely custom and unique floor unlike that of any tile, wood or terrazzo floor.

Advantages:

- More authentic look as compared to any other application.
- Many patterns and textures to choose from.
- Unlimited colors with the use of ULTRA-STONE™ Antiquing Stain, CHEM-STONE™ Reactive Stain, HYDRA-STONE™ Dye Stain and/or PORTION CONTROL COLORANT™.
- Completely custom flooring.
- Durability second to none.

Market, Advertise & Network...

As with any business, you have to get your name and services known to your prospective customers and keep it known. Listed below are some of the most effective and widely used marketing techniques used by architectural overlay contractors.

- **Trade Shows:**

Exhibit at as many trade shows per year as possible. Home and garden shows, county fairs, exhibits at parade of homes, open exhibits in shopping malls, interior design shows, exhibits held by local builders associations, business spot-lights with your local Chamber of Commerce, State ready mix associations and more. The objective is to get your company name and service out to as many people as possible. Understand that these types of exhibits tend to fill up quickly and many times months in advance. Do your homework and ask other construction trades where they exhibit their products and services.

When exhibiting at a trade show, put your best foot forward and represent yourself as a professional. Too many contractors exhibit at various shows only to sit in a chair and look all together unapproachable. Be open, enthusiastic and courteous but don't be a bump on a log or a high-pressure salesman either. Be sure to exhibit your services with brochures, sample boards to touch and feel, flooring made of your favorite overlay for them to walk on, a photo book for people to browse through and a computer to run your video presentation through.

Dress for success but not for a wedding. Remember, you are selling architectural concrete overlay finishes and custom seamless flooring. You still want to look like a professional, trust worthy, knowledgeable representative. As it pertains to leads, you want quality not quantity. The "free drawing" ploy is ages old and will have you running ragged trying to bid and sell leads that many of which cannot use your services if they wanted to. Talk with the people coming by your booth, take the time to answer their questions before they ask. You have to remember that in most of the markets and regions around the United States and Canada, people have no idea of what architectural concrete overlays and surface restoration even is. People are sure to walk past your booth only to assume and think that you are a tile, brick or stone installer. It is your job to get them thinking otherwise. All of these things add up and are certain to yield results, just don't cut corners.

- **Yellow Page Ads:**

This is often an advertising method people view as a waste of time and money because of the lack of knowledge people have about architectural concrete overlays and surface restoration.

Your task is the same. Educate the community about products and services they know little or nothing about. Don't expect to place an ad in an "Architectural Concrete" section, because that section probably doesn't exist. However, sections such as "Concrete", "Decks" and "Flooring" are very good places to get response from.

- **Local Publications:**

Not newspapers, but smaller publications such as neighborhood newsletters can yield a tremendous amount of leads and based on the home value in the area you can be assured that you are targeting a specific income range. These publications generally print their newsletters monthly to keep residents informed as to what is going on in their area. Finding these newsletters may be the hard part but certainly worth the effort.

Another local publication you want to take advantage of is the newsletter published by your local builders association. These are typically a low budget print but you know that builders, other contractors and business owners will see your ad.

Yet another local publication is "higher income home & design magazines." These type of magazines are most prevalent in medium to large metropolitan areas, but quiet often these publications are glad to print articles about new or innovation building materials and services for free with the cost of an ad. A good example of this type of publication can be seen at www.keyaccess.com.

- **Local Clubs and Associations:**

Nearly every county in the country has a state backed local builders association. Monthly meetings are held for builders as well as other contractor members to discuss local, state and federal building news and policies. These meetings are the perfect opportunity to meet and mingle with others in your area. Another group to join would be the Chamber of Commerce since business leaders are common members and doing business with other Chamber members is very much a part of member expectations.

- **Target Mailings:**

With the new software available today, direct and targeted mailings are easier than ever. Once you target your customer base you can draft a letter pertaining to their specific needs and by mail merging a database, you can easily print multiple

letters to different persons at once and in a short period of time. Websites such as www.salesgenie.com can assist in locating the exact target group you wish to market to.

These lists are also very effective when used in conjunction with a specific job location. As an example, lets assume you are getting ready to begin an installation at 101 Jones Street. Use the program to locate all residents on Jones Street. Then draft a letter explaining your services and detail the fact that you will be installing your products and services at the specific address. Be sure to invite the recipients of the letter to stop by and watch the installation process.

- **Pool Companies:**

Pools are where decorative resurfacing and splatter textures initially began. Contact your area pool installers and explain the benefits your products and systems can offer to the beauty, skid resistance and life to a pool deck. Some contractors provide the pool companies with "private label" brochures so the pool companies can sell the work rather than simply refer. Then the pool companies sub-contracts your company to install the finish.

- **Newspaper Press Release:**

This is certainly one of the most effective forms of FREE advertising. Newspapers look for local stories to print about new businesses. Draft a short press release letter explaining what services and products you provide. Try to keep the sales pitch out of the letter and detail more the owners background, years in business, etc. Then fax this letter to all of your local newspapers with a cover sheet explaining the purpose of the letter. Be sure to refer to the letter as a "press release" and be very up front about what your intentions are, "you would like to have the newspaper print a story about your new local business." You will want to follow up each fax with a telephone call the same day the fax is sent. Be persistent with newspapers that seem not to be interested. Fax them monthly if needed.

- **Newspaper Inserts:**

Again, contact your local newspaper and inquire about have them print you an inexpensive flyer and then insert it into the paper for Wednesday or Sunday deliveries. Most Newspapers will allow you to pick and choose specific areas so you can control where the leads will be coming from. You will be surprised at how affordable this is.

- **Auto & Trailer Lettering:**

Yes this is common sense, but you need to take full advantage. We have even seen durable, weather proof brochure holders mounted to vans and trailers so people can obtain information even when you are not around.

- **Yard Signs:**

Aside from the normal yard sign, be creative. Have two types of yard signs printed. One that says something like, "Coming soon, watch us transform this pitted, stained and deteriorated driveway into a beautiful finish for a fraction of the cost of tear out and replace." Then once you begin application, leave the first sign and place the second sign that has your company's pertinent information; business name, telephone, brief description, etc. Even once the job is complete, leave the sign in place for a week or two.

- **Door Handouts:**

This is especially effective if done to residences in the surrounding areas of a job currently being worked on. A task for times when you have waiting periods. Similar to target letters, you can include the address of the job you are currently working on and invite people to come view the application process.

- **Radio & Television Advertising:**

Depending on the market you are in, this can be a surprisingly affordable way to get the most exposure for your newly formed company and services.

- **Company Website:**

In this day and age, everyone has a website. For less than \$20.00 a month you can have a professional looking, informative website designed that will let your potential customers learn about you, your company and your services. Be sure to advertise the website on your business cards, vehicle lettering and more. But keep it simple so they can remember it.

- Pre-Printed Brochures and Postcards:

Elite Crete Systems has a number of different pieces of print advertising materials already available and ready to have your business card stapled to it. We do you have our telephone number or our address on it at all. Pass them out everywhere you go. The postcards are designed to be ran through a printer so you can add your own contact information to it and use as an inexpensive mailer even.

Follow-Up & Follow Through...

Now that your telephone is ringing and you have the leads. Unfortunately, your job has only just begun. Too many people start off with a bang and quickly see their business failing. The constant juggling act of “advertising & estimating & installing & networking” is a routine that will test your drive, desire and determination and ultimately be what decides your success or failure in business.

Nothing will happen overnight and therefore you must always be in “business mode”. The days of working for someone else for 40 hours a week are over. Sure the benefits associated with owning your own successful business are many and the profit margins in the architectural concrete overlay industry are some of the highest in all of the construction trades, but if anyone told you it would be an easy road... They lied...

Here are a few additional tid bits that we recommend you take full advantage of.

1. Call your distributor daily. Yes we mean daily. Authorized Distributors are not simply guys selling products. They have a wealth of information to share and not just as it pertains to installing jobs and remedying your problems. These guys are there to assist you with business development questions and suggestions the same as they are there to help you with technical support. We encourage you to share your ideas with them. Tell them if you are struggling with any aspect of your new business. You will find them life savers as it pertains to your business success.
2. Concretelocator.com. If you haven't been there yet, you must join in. With nearly 1500 member and over 3 million posts, it is the industries largest and most use discussion forum pertaining to this business. You can share ideas, get advice and view jobs from contractors just like you from all over the world.