

Contractor BUSINESS

Rake In Profits With Outdoor Products

Outdoor products provide home improvement retailers with the perfect opportunity to upsell to contractors. Many renovation jobs require outdoor cleaning, some minor landscaping, or the indoor use of what is normally considered an outdoor product.

For example, wheelbarrows, rakes, shovels, and blowers are just some of the tools contractors can use to help them do their job better, indoors or out. There's not a jobsite around that doesn't require some measure of cleaning up or movement of materials.

The key is not to assume that every contractor has these basics. And, if they do, do they have the best technology available? As with other tools, research and development into outdoor products is ongoing. Products are becoming more efficient, stronger, more ergonomic, and take up less space than ever before.

THE WHEELBARROW

Take, for instance, the common wheelbarrow. Think if you've seen one you've seen them all? Think again.

There are great advancements taking place in the world of wheelbarrows. Perhaps one of the most important areas of advancement is in ergonomics. Ergonomics is the study and advancement of furniture, machinery, and tool design, as they apply to the work environment, to improve work performance by reducing fatigue and discomfort.

New designs in wheelbarrows offer a lower centre of gravity which makes them

more stable and easier to handle. This reduces stress on back, arms, and legs. Additionally, braces add strength and support to make it easier on the handler when pouring loads. Canvas wheelbarrows even drop to the ground for easy loading and unloading so no stooping or lifting is required.

Some manufacturers are steering away from metal for the tray and using heavy-duty canvas, reinforced

extremely cold weather. The best part about it, and the main reason behind its conception, is that it folds up like a baby carriage and takes up much less space than a standard wheelbarrow. Essentially, a contractor can hang two or three of these in his truck in place of one standard wheelbarrow.

Another option for contractors who have to lift heavy loads or move them along ascending slopes is the self-propelled wheelbarrow. These are available with 24-volt rechargeable batteries and a switch on the handle for full control with little effort.

HAND TOOLS

Ergonomic improvement in outdoor tools is also ongoing. Tools are becoming more lightweight, with handles adjusted on an angle to allow for a neutral, stress-free position while using the tool.

When using tools such as rakes, shovels, or brooms, it is important that the length of the handle is the appropriate length to reduce bending, reaching, and stooping. Some of these tools come with a telescopic handle, so they can be adjusted to the height of the person using them.

Handles are also angled with cushion grips and dual edges for more comfort and ease of use.

Smaller outdoor tools such as hand trowels are available with cushioned arm pads and grips, designed to keep the arm straight while digging, reducing strain on the joints and wrist. The strength of the forearm is employed to assist the hand and wrist.

polyurethane, or plastics that provide relatively the same amount of strength but offer less weight, less corrosion, and more flexibility.

The reinforced polyester wheelbarrow is made to contractor grade, so it is strong enough to hold materials and scrap, won't tear if punctured, and will hold up in



STRONG, DURABLE TOOLS

These ergonomic developments are great in preventing injury and work well for people with chronic conditions but, as most retailers know, contractors prefer strong, durable tools. They know the value of quality and will pay extra for it. Ergonomic features are a terrific added benefit, but only as long as the tools can withstand the sometimes grueling demands of the worksite.

With contractors' need for strength and durability in mind, sales associates can recommend contractor-grade products and describe how their features will be of benefit. As the contractor is gathering his order, associates can ask if they have the newest in contractor-grade shovels (or wheelbarrows or rakes).

A heavier gauge shovel with the step turned forward will make the job a little easier with better foot placement. Extra lacquer around the handle, as opposed to just a wooden handle, makes it easier on the hands. Some handles come with a shape to them for better grip. At the top of the line are shovels with a power collar. This gives extra strength at the joint where the wood meets the metal. Some product lines offer different grades of shovels made from fiberglass. These come as hollow back or solid shank — the difference being the solid shank weighs almost twice as much.

The associate will need to find out what the contractor will need the tool for and then match up the features accordingly.

DISPLAYS HELP SELL

Another way to increase sales in outdoor products is to display them in the departments contractors frequent most. If they are in your store buying lumber or roofing tiles, have the outdoor products nearby to remind them of the quality tools available. Most manufacturers will offer header boards in various sizes that will attract the attention of pro customers. All that is needed is a small presentation of a shovel, spade, hoe, and leaf rake of contractor grade describing the features and benefits. Strategically placed signs will also remind pro customers of outdoor products available.

Another idea is using a pegboard behind the pro desk with a couple of high-grade shovels and a sign that encourages customers to ask about garden tools. It is important, as usual, that sales associates are well informed on the products and features available and how they will benefit the contractor.

The hardest sale is the first one. Once you have the commitment to the initial sale, it is easier to continue the positive pattern with add-on sales. Every contractor needs outdoor products of some kind, so this category provides the perfect opportunity for retailers to rake in more profits. **○**