Editor’s Note: The article that follows is the result of years of anguish and many tense, pensive moments. In the magazine world, the journalism sages are always telling us to remain unbiased at the same time. And, if you give 750 words to one company, how can you not give equal time to other companies that also want their products featured in an international magazine that reaches the industry’s leaders.

Whenever a company approached us about a new product, we were torn. We wrestled with every argument in the book but finally came to the conclusion that if a “new” product is really “brand-spankin’ new,” and if this new product would truly save the contractor time, money and labor (or all three), then it was our duty to report the information to our readers.

Another issue we grappled with was how we starchy-white-collar folks would judge what’s new and what would work on the jobsite. In other words, how do you separate the legitimate contenders from the gimmicks? We quickly came to the conclusion that we were not the people for this job; it’s up to the contractors to be the judges—and the jury. That’s why we went out to our own Panel of Experts and asked them what they think about this new product. We asked them if they really, really thought they could benefit by using this new product. We also asked them if they knew of any other products like this one. Finally, we asked them if they’d buy it.

And they said yes. (This time ….)

So, with that said, here is our first “Product Review.” You won’t see it every month; in fact, it may appear only once or twice a year. Just know that when the people in Research & Development invent something that will help our readers operate more successful businesses, AWCI’s Construction Dimensions will be the first to tell you about it.
With so much work, and so few employees, contractors are eager to complete each job as quickly as possible, and with the least possible amount of labor, so they can move on to the next one. Representatives of United States Gypsum Co., Chicago, say their company has a new product that will help contractors finish jobs in a snap.

After years of research in ways to enhance the dimensional strength and stability of the company’s SHEETROCK® Brand Gypsum Panels, USG announced last month that it had found a way to produce stronger panels that snap more crisply and cleanly, producing a flatter, cleaner board with edges that need less rasping.

Contractors will need less time to prepare drywall to fit around openings, there will be less material waste from bending or warping, and panels will lay flatter, producing walls that are easier to finish, said Mike McGovern, the product manager for USG’s SHEETROCK brand wallboard.

“We’ve literally reinvented drywall,” he said, while declining to discuss how it is different, because the company’s patent applications still are pending.

The key benefit is the snapping, he said. Since rasping is so very time consuming, curtailing the need for rasping will enable work crews “to put up more panels per day and get on and off the job site faster.”

The company will begin shipping the new 1/2-inch and 5/8-inch panels this month, and add specialty panels by the end of the quarter, said Rob Waterhouse, USG’s vice president for marketing. This next generation of SHEETROCK Brand Gypsum Panels will feature redesigned end tapes that identify the new product.

**What Contractors Want**

USG focused its research on bettering wallboard snap qualities after its market research revealed that this is a quality that’s important to contractors. Company researchers came up with adjustments to the product formula and manufacturing process in 1997 and spent the next two years testing it. They even hued an independent agency to enroll contractors in blind field tests comparing the new product with USG’s standard wallboard and with competitors’ products.

“We focused on contractor productivity . . . and the benefits of this were just so clear,” Waterhouse said.
verted to produce wallboard using the new technologies, but this will not affect the production capacity of USG’s 22 current wallboard manufacturing plants, nor of the three that are under construction, thus it will not affect the available supply of drywall.

It also will not affect the current water-resist properties of standard drywall panels, nor will it adversely affect the paper facing. In fact, the new board includes better bonding of the face paper, which means fewer blisters, easier finishing and better adaptability to varied climatic conditions. And it will not affect the weight of a standard panel.

Apparently, USG’s plants don’t currently produce 1/2-inch panels with a standard weight. The new process “will allow some plants to get a slightly lower weight on half-inch products, but other plants won’t,” McGovern said. It will not allow any lower weight on 5/8-inch panels.

So, if you are currently losing drywall hangers to shoulder injuries when they get into their mid-30s, this product won’t help. But it could help your rockers maximize their productivity and your bottom line.

About the Author
Peter Downs is a free-lance journalist covering the construction industry.