When we asked 30 contractors around the country which laser they prefer to use, the answers came back pretty much the same as the year before. Overall, contractors are very satisfied with the features and abilities of their lasers. “Some of these remote control ones, the dial-in cordless remotes, are incredible,” said one West Coast contractor. “We used to get really frustrated in the past, trying to shoot a straight line and needing two guys to do it. These remotes have taken care of that, and now they make it almost too easy. One guy can do what used to take two guys and a radio.” Being able to cut labor costs in half has made remote control lasers an essential piece of equipment for many contractors.

A Look at the Numbers

The three most common reasons cited for why one brand of laser is preferred over another are durability, better performance and better features. Other reasons include long-term satisfaction with a company’s products, a good service record and—believe it or not—price. A contractor from Pennsylvania notes that local servicing of lasers is a plus, because he receives them back repaired within 10 days. A Washington contractor also values service above everything else. “I lean toward my brand because their repair place is two blocks from me.”

As with last year, Spectra-Physics (known today as Spectra Precision) remains a popular brand. “We’ve used nothing but Spectra-Physics since they first came out,” states one Oregonian. “They stand up well, and the company takes good care of the products if there’s anything wrong with them.” His comments are echoed by others around the country. “From my experience, I’ve had better luck with Spectra-Physics,” agrees a contractor in Washington. “They are very good quality and don’t seem to go out of calibration so quickly.”

A Michigan contractor mentions that, while his company uses a variety of lasers, they like...
Spectra-Physics because “it’s strong and durable enough to survive the way the guys handle the equipment—it holds up here.”

Hilti lasers receive strong praise for both their durability and the service that the company provides. “I bought about 10 of them at one time, and they gave me a pretty good warranty,” said a contractor from Indiana. Hilti’s warranty covers the cost of service, whereas every time I take some of these other lasers in, they want $800 to $900 to recalibrate them and do everything else. Lasers are pretty much all the same when you get into that kind of price range. It’s just whichever one holds up better and what kind of warranty you get with them.”

That “holding up better” seems to be Hilti’s most appreciated quality. “They’re a great tool and well worth the money,” claims a Missouri contractor. “They do everything that we need of them,” agrees a South Dakotan.

LeveLite is the laser of choice for two California contractors. “Our supplier keeps them readily in stock and helps us with the service on them,” says one. “They come with all the accessories that costs just marginally more than buying them without the accessories.” The other Californian fan notes that LeveLite was the first company to come out with pocket lasers in his area, and they’re still dominating the shelves there.

Topcon is touted by a Texan who likes the new technology the company is introducing, including “all the different scan modes and the things you can do with them.” He notes that they also seem to hold up better than other lasers that he’s used in the past.

The CLS (known today as LCI) “green beams” were touted by a couple of contractors who note that the greens seemed to shoot farther and more clearly than the standard red-beam lasers. But the CLS’s reds still have at least one fan out there. “We’ve been with CLS for a long time,” a contractor in Mississippi insists. “We haven’t done a major changeover into the different colors and all that. They’ve done us a good job, and they’re still doing a pretty good job for us.”

A contractor in Nebraska cast the lone vote for Laser Beacon. “We can purchase it locally, and it seems to work the best out of the four that we have,” he claims. “It’s easier to use, and it’s more of a complete unit. You don’t have to put on as many attachments as with the other ones.”

**Shoot First, Ask Questions Later**

Many of the contractors surveyed said the overall quality of lasers today was so good that it’s sometimes hard to tell them apart. “To tell you the truth, they’re all basically the same right now,” voices one Pennsylvanian. “They’re all uniform as long as you set them up level and they shoot level; you just take your benchmark from that and go.”

A contractor in California states that he’s learned to avoid noticing the brands and focuses instead on the particular features and...
the reports he receives on the effectiveness of certain brands from others in the business. “It’s just a basic, little self-leveling beam. It isn’t a real high-tech piece of equipment.” Other contractors note that the service contract and warranty that comes with their several thousand-dollar investment often play a bigger role in their choice than the laser itself.

Some contractors surveyed even went so far with their brand blindness as to admit that they had no idea which company had manufactured their laser. “I don’t even know what brands we’ve got,” says one contractor in Tennessee. “We’ve just got a couple of old ones around here.” A Pennsylvania contractor mirrors that sentiment. “We’ve had [our lasers] more than 15 years. They come in a box, we set them up, shoot them, and put them back in the box.”

As long as the laser keeps doing the job, that’s often all that matters. “They’re construction workers,” a supervisor in Washington points out. “Come on, they’re not real picky”

Checking Out the Old Bottom Line

When asked for their biggest concern regarding lasers, everyone has pretty much the same response: the cost. “We wish they’d get cheaper,” says one Kansas man. “Free would be nice.” [sure!]

A contractor from New Jersey had more to say on the subject: “The only thing that we’d like to see is a lower cost unit, because the ones we have were in the $5,000 to $6,000 range when we purchased them. So we’ll be looking for something that’s half the price and see if it can be adequately phased into what we do. We have a top-end model with a self-leveling device that can do angles and slopes, and that’s what we’ll be looking for in a new laser.”

But for all the complaints about prices, contractors agree that lasers pull their
weight. When asked if lasers are worth the expense, one contractor from South Dakota simply replies: “Absolutely!”

A contractor from Kentucky took more of a long-range approach. “With the way the pricing has dropped, you can get one with all the bells and whistles now for about $2,000 as opposed to a couple of years ago when it was $5,000. So you can’t bitch about the pricing with what you’re getting now.”

**Honing in on a Couple of Issues**

When asked what else he wants to see in a laser, a contractor in North Carolina says that he is looking for a small laser with a self-leveling, rotating head. A Michigan contractor, along with a few others, says that he’d like to see lasers that can stand up to a bit more abuse. “We just bought this laser measuring tool that’s pretty dandy, but it’s not made for the field. ‘It’s made for the suit-and-tie guy who says; ‘I wonder how far away that picture is from me?’ The first guy that drops it [in the field] is going to get kicked in the shins because it’s ‘going to break.”

Another problem concerning lasers in general is that they are often run on temporary power in a building still under construction, according to a contractor from New Jersey “Surges on that power source tend to burn out the laser’s main module. We now equip the boxes with surge protectors and demand that everyone use them every time the laser is turned on. Since then, we’ve had a lot better luck with them,” he adds.

As it stands, contractors today have pretty much everything they want in a laser. If they could only get them for less, there’d be a lot more contractors beaming from ear to ear.

**About the Author**

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