NEED SOME HELP?

Here’s the Latest in Tools and Technology to Help You Better Do Your Job

By Michael J. Major
used to be that a wall and ceiling contractor’s tools of his trade were a few basic tools used by virtually everyone, simple extensions of elbow grease. Then came along technology, as well as increased competition among the vendors selling those tools. The more they compete to win your business, the more varied and innovative their offerings. They figure that the more their tools help you, the more likely you are to buy from them. In other words, the more they help you out, the more you help them out. A win-win situation.

Here’s a brief overview of some of the newest and most interesting offerings in the marketplace, all designed to make your work easier, more efficient and more productive.

**Drywall Products**

**The Flat Coater Finishing Tool.** From Apla-Tech, Inc., Kaukauna, Wis., comes a new, user-friendly addition to its pneumatic line of finishing tools. Easily attached to the “Cannon,” this tool does not hold compounds, as does a box. Rather, this device allows compounds to move through it, spreading evenly over flat seams. It comes 7-, 10- and 12-inch widths, with optional bead tabs for coating corner beads.

Gail Denkins, marketing director, explains that the air pressure, rather than the person, moves the compounds; this means there is no need to “push” the tool, thus drastically reducing body strain. The air pressure injects the compounds through the coater’s adjustable blade. The air regulator on the Cannon allows control of the compound flow. “Excellent seams and joints are produced in less time,” Denkins says.

Denkins also explains that whereas corner beads usually require a lot of mud and a lot of knife-and-pan handling to get all the mud onto the corner beads, the flat coater pneumatically coats the outside corner beads in a fraction of the time it takes to do it by hand.

**Bullnose Corner Blocks.** “As far as I know, we’re the only manufacturer making wooden bullnose corner blocks,” says Mark Budzik project engineer, Trim-Tex, Inc., Lincolnwood, Ill., as he explains this new complement to the company’s complete line of rigid drywall beads and accessories.

These pre-finished wood corner blocks are designed to finish all bullnose and can be used with almost any baseboard. The blocks allow for a wooden continuity in lieu of the gap usually resulting from caulking or use of a vinyl base. Budzik says these attractive corner blocks “are the perfect finishing accent for those new bullnose designer applications which are in great demand today.” These blocks are available in seven Victorian and two Colonial styles. The Victorian style accommodates baseboards up to 5 1/4 inches tall and thirteen-sixteenths of an inch thick, and the Colonial style up to 3 1/2 inches tall and nine-sixteenths of an inch thick.

Continued on page 28
New Product Roundup, continued from page 27

Ceiling Systems

Perimeter Trim System. From Armstrong World Industries, Inc., Lancaster, Pa., comes what Sales and Marketing Vice President Bob Hatfield terms “the first perimeter trim system designed for both acoustical and drywall ceiling systems.” Called Axiom, this new custom-manufactured edge system can be used with suspended lay-in ceilings as an exposed decorative trim or as a drywall trim offering, unique detailing opportunities.

Unlike its cold roll-steel designed competitors, Axiom comes made with extruded aluminum, which, Hatfield says, “provides specifiers with crisper edge detailing, greater design versatility and more precise registry of trim components.” He adds that aluminum is lighter, corrosion free, is not affected by the temperature and is therefore more dimensionally stable. Continued on page 30
Also, Hatfield says, this new system “offers solutions to design detailing problems such as stepped soffits, drapery pockets and ceiling transitions. It also provides more design flexibility for spaces like open corridors, floating ceilings and entry accents.” As a result, the system is especially well suited for use in applications ranging from malls, stores, casinos and museums to restaurants, offices, schools and banks.

The system comes with trim, clips and splice plates for easy attachment to drywall. The minimum radius for curving Axiom drywall systems is 36 inches.

Axiom trim systems for acoustical ceiling applications feature four profile heights: 2, 4, 6 and 8 inches. This choice of heights makes it easier for specifiers to create transitions for multi-level and floating ceilings. The minimum radius for curving Axiom acoustical systems is 24 inches. The trim comes in a range of colors.

Linear Metal Ceiling System. According to Karol Scott, marketing manager for the Chicago-based Interfinish, the new Planar® linear metal ceiling system is one of the few offered in both steel and aluminum. “The steel is ideal for interior projects; it is less expensive, stronger and better looking than aluminum,” Scott says. “But aluminum works well in canopy areas outside, for it’s corrosion resistant and is also lighter in weight.”

Planar is available in various lengths and metal thicknesses and is perforated for sound control, which is helpful since it
NEW PRODUCT ROUNDUP

is designed for areas such as airports, lobbies and shopping malls. Scott describes the system as “versatile, efficient and easy to install.”

The ceiling panels comes in the standard 4-inch width, but also in widths of 2, 6 and 8 inches. It comes in both round and square edge profiles, and comes with options such as special lighting fixtures, air handling components and access doors. “Planar is ideal for renovation,” Scott says. “These panels can snap right over the old ceiling without the need of taking it out.”

Tools

laser level. “Small in size, large in power,” is the way Steve Spears, president, Laseraim Tools Inc., Little Rock, Ark., describes his new miniature Laseraim® Magiclevel II™. The device only 6 inches long and about an inch in diameter that can project a straight laser beam over 300 feet
away (visible on surfaces as a laser dot image).

This product is used for leveling and straight-line alignment applications. Features include straight-line accuracy to one-sixty-fourth of an inch, level calibration to less than one quarter of an inch at 100 feet and more than 20 hours of continuous battery life. It can be mounted on a camera tripod to allow for hands-free use. And it has machined brass and aluminum construction with a powder-coat blue finish for durability.

Spears says the unit, retailing at a suggested price of $159, is inexpensive, so more than one crew member can have one.

**Soft-face Hammer.** The Stanley® Compo-Cast Soft Face Hammer from Lab Safety Supply Inc., Janesville, Wis., is not a hammer designed for pounding in nails, but rather is like a rubber mallet intended to put things into position. The problem with the typical rubber mallet is that it can bounce back at you, creating unhealthy vibrations in your wrists and forearms.

This hollow hammer, however, has hundreds of steel pellets sealed in its head; the pellets shift away from the user when the hammer is struck.

This, explains Technical Representative Paul Ederer, “means you get a stronger blow but with reduced rebound and vibration.” This hammer has a soft polyurethane-encapsulated head and face that won’t mar surfaces, and a steel-reinforced handle that won’t break when overstruck. This tool is also chemical-resistant and non-sparking. The hammer comes in three sizes: 21, 42 or 52 ounces, with overall lengths of, respectively, 12 3/4, 14 and 16 inches.

**Hammer Drill.** From the Metabo Corporation, West Chester, Pa., comes a new half-inch hammer drill called the Model Sb E 600 R&L. This variable speed reversing standard-duty hammer drill features a drill/hammer selector collar for a quick changeover from drilling to

Continued on page 38
hammer drilling. It has an electronic variable speed control with a speed selector dial mounted on the trigger.

This model’s 5.2 amp motor generates a no-load RPM of 0-2,700 with 0-50,000 blows per minute. It has a drilling capacity of one-half an inch in concrete, three-quarters of an inch in steel and one inch in wood. Additional features include a half-inch chuck and a conveniently located lock-on switch. The 600 weighs 5.4 pounds and comes standard with a side handle, depth gauge and steel carrying case.

Software

Plan Scaler. Many software packages can take dimensions off a plan, but, says John Musselman, president, Scalex Corporation, Carlsbad, Calif, the new upgraded release of his plan scaler, Scale-Link 3.0™, is unique in transferring this data automatically to any one of a number of estimating packages.
This hand-held device, Musselman says, “enables contractors, remodelers and builders to quickly and accurately take measurements and counts from plans and enter them into programs that run under Windows.” This package, he explains, was especially designed to be used with construction estimating programs with spreadsheets such as Excel, Quattro Pro and Lotus 1-2-3, and with databases such as Access, dBase and Paradox. “This device will significantly reduce the amount of time spent estimating as well as eliminate the possibility of transposing numbers,” Musselman says.

Scale-Link has hundreds of programmable scale factors, including architectural, engineering, mapping and metric. Presented in an easy-to-use menu format are 52 of the most common scale factors. Additionally, a scale may be created by rolling a known distance along the plan. This is especially helpful for plans that might have been reduced or enlarged. Scale-Link also calculates square and cubic dimensions for regular areas and volumes.

**Form Generator.** New England Business Service, Inc., Groton, Mass., has introduced Form Magic software for Windows, which Product Manager Tammy Mack describes as “an easy-to-use, inexpensive way for contractors to automate the routine task of generating proposals, invoices, estimates, change order forms and purchase orders. According to our 1996 survey of more than 300 small-business owners, organization and bookkeeping are two of the most time consuming activities business owners face each day.”

Mack explains that Form Magic helps simplify many of the daily organizational and bookkeeping tasks by streamlining some of the more time-consuming processes, through use of toolbars, menus, graphical interfaces and database organizers.
some of the more time-consuming processes, through the use of toolbars, menus, graphical interfaces and database organizers. The software supports more than 50 different NEBS forms most often used by contractors, including proposals, job invoices, estimates, change of order forms, letters of transmittal and agreements. The information from each of these forms is automatically incorporated into a database of customer, vendor, product and transaction information. This information can be used to generate a variety of useful reports, such as customer lists or detailed transaction reports.

**Data Management.** From the Identification Solutions Division of Brady USA, Inc., Milwaukee, comes Brady-TRAXX™, described by Marketing Communications Specialist Anita Fisher as “a cost-effective database system designed to help users track, store and manage information about inventory, assets, tools and supplies.” A number of different modules can be utilized alone or in network versions.

![Data Management](image)

StockRoom Manager is suited for tracking items in stock and supply rooms and central stores, and for monitoring maintenance parts and raw materials. Inventory Manager produces a variety of reports for making physical inventories and cycle-
counting functions effective and easy to manage. Asset Manager is designed to efficiently and accurately track assets such as computers, machinery, equipment, fixtures, furniture and vehicles. ToolCrib Manager can manage a perpetual inventory and track tools checked out to employees.

Safety Products

Wrist Supports. Damage to the hands and wrists is the fastest growing category of workers’ compensation claims, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Recent reports from the U. S. Department of Labor indicate carpal tunnel syndrome accounts for nearly half of all recordable workplace illnesses, and that figure will continue its ascent unless preventive action is taken.

“Many traditional stay configurations can actually put a wear-
er at added risk of carpal tunnel syndrome and other wrist injuries created by the added pressure on the carpal tunnel,” says Kent Wilson, CIE, and training/education manager for Ergodyne, St. Paul, Minn. Wilson is quick to add, however, that what he describes as the “open-center stay of Ergodyne’s wrist supports “keep the median nerve free of harmful contract stress that can cause or aggravate strain.” Additionally, Wilson says, the molded stay is contoured to follow the wrists’ natural shape for a more comfortable wear.

The wrist supports come in three styles. The ProFlex® 4000 wrist support comfortably limits downward wrist movements and encourages neutral wrist posture. The 4101 has an adjustable double closure strap that fastens over the top of the wrist to limit both wrist flexion (downward) and wrist extension (upward) movements, with a slightly longer body for additional support. And the 4020 limits downward wrist movements in a lighter-weight design for greater movement and comfort.

**Anchorage Connectors.** “We believe we’ve covered the full spectrum of possibilities,” says Edward J. Bickrest, marketing communications manager of Miller Equipment, Franklin, Pa., in referring to Miller’s expanded line of 14 anchorage connectors. “These connectors help fall-protection users meet the ever-present challenge of finding secure attachment points.”

These connectors are compatible with I-beams, S-beams, W-beams, scaffolding, permanent ladders, pylons, pillars and other structural components. All meet OSHA 1926.502 and ANSI A10.14 requirements.

**Lifelines.** DBI/SALA, Red Wing, Minn., has introduced its new Iron Wing™ Portable Horizontal Lifeline System. This completely engineered system connects to the top flange of I-beams and provides a fall-protection anchorage to workers erecting or maintaining steel structures.

The system features stanchions with interchangeable heads that allow for easy conversion from end anchor to intermediate bracket. The passable intermediate bracket allows for continuous connection along the entire length of the lifeline. The systems all-metal components, including the stainless steel inline shock absorber, are designed to remain unaffected by harsh environmental or working conditions.

So there you have it: some of the newest products for the wall and ceiling industry. Now get out there and be productive!

**About the Author**
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