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TIMBERLINE

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Privacy and the Bear Creek Lumber Customer

Customer surveys are a great marketing tool for a small company like Bear Creek Lumber. Those of you who recently called in have also found our receptionists spend a few minutes getting information from new customers for our database. Some people find these questions intrusive, others are afraid this information may be sold to a third party.

At Bear Creek Lumber all information taken from our customers is confidential. We have never and will never sell our data information to other companies. We firmly believe in a customer's right to privacy.

We ask questions of those who contact us or send questionnaires out to those interested in our newsletter solely for the purpose of better outreach, better customer service and better in-house analysis of our services. We need to have enough information at the front end to be able to process your order or inquiry after you make your decision to do business with Bear Creek. We have a large database but a small sales staff. The better information we have on file, the faster we can work to get your product to you. We have spent the last few years really refining our paperwork processes so we can give you, fast, reliable and efficient service.

Give us a call and let us show you what we can do for you!



Pictured above: The Pasayten Wilderness just north of Bear Creek Lumber's headquarters. View as seen from Slate Peak, 8,000 ft elevation. Photo by James Witkowski

INDUSTRY NEWS

Remodeling has been a strong segment of the building industry that has profited from the boom times along with new construction. Tracking that activity has been difficult because of less than reliable census figures. However, this year's census takers will be making headroads into getting a better picture of where the industry is going. At the Annual Remodeler's Show in Philadelphia in November, a poll of 520 remodelers showed an upbeat picture: 67% reported that the price of an average remodel was higher in 1999 compared to 1998. Only 3% reported decreases. 82% expected further increases this coming year. Remodelers also remarked unanimously that consumers using the R&R service "expect quicker turnaround and/or budget estimates for their projects." They also said customers are better informed about the building process and about the products they want. They felt the overall image of the industry had improved and except for labor shortages, the entire industry is on an upswing.

What's the highest month for lumber prices? In a *Random Lengths* survey of overall lumber prices, the month of April beat out all others for spikes in lumber prices in the past twenty years. In second place was June, with August a close third.

While housing starts were strong throughout the past year (the highest since 1986), can the good times last? We have asked this question for years now, and every year the analysts predict a "moderate slowdown" for the coming year. This year, as last, its rising interest rates that are the forecaster's bogeymen. The world's economy has been a sleeping giant and if it picks up even part of the steam generated by the American economy, many think a surge of inflation will slow construction back into an uneasy recession. It's assumed that starts will be about 1.5 million this year in the U.S., slightly less than last year's 1.65 million.

Still not shabby. All eyes will be on the Federal Reserve to see where interest rates go.

Are You A Victim of Technophobia?



Technophobia is defined as the fear and skepticism of high technology, sometimes also referred to as technostress. It is widespread in the building industry, even if it is politically incorrect to admit it.

"There's a big difference between spending on technology and personally embracing it," says Larry Rosen, psychology professor and author of *Technostress: Coping with technology at Work, at Home and at Play*.

According to a study by BST Consultants, reported in *Builder Magazine*, a survey of 158 chief executives from major construction firms found that 89% of the firms considered themselves wired and ready to significantly increase their spending on new technology—with no idea of the return on their investment. However, when the staff of these same firms were surveyed, 59% of the managers and 74% of the clerical staff were skeptical that online services would simplify their lives.

Most complain that "I'm too old" or "It's too complicated." One manager described his feelings as "quasi-phobic. I know there's nothing to fear but the operation itself but I am not willing to be the operator. I get frustrated having to follow a bunch of rules to get from this point to that."

Many builders simply prefer the old-fashioned methods of the deal: keeping project particulars in their head, using old-fashioned pen and paper, phone and mail to communicate. That way nothing can breakdown or leave them wondering if they pushed the wrong button.

Said one builder, "We're basically computer illiterate and set in our

ways. Its real comfortable (as is), and we want to minimize the paperwork."

Sixty percent of the 300 builders and consumers who contact the National Association of Home Builders "Homebase Hotline" opt for phone and fax over email, says the head of the NAHB Research Center.

However, builders who have made the switch are almost all in agreement: high tech solutions are often the only way to grow the bottom line. The record keeping, the speed of communications and the efficiency have all lead to a higher quality operation for most who have truly embraced the new tools and better access to information and customers. The higher costs were absorbed by higher profits.

Everything from Palm Pilots to laptops to digital phones to databases have changed how work can be done. Handheld organizers make note taking almost addictive, said one builder. Access to centralized information has cut down on mistakes, speeded up completion times and in a period of labor shortages, allows fewer people to get more done.

Is there hope for technophobes? The blending of multiple generations within a company is probably the only way the pre-Internet generation is going to stay competitive in the future. Embracing technology takes knowledge that younger members of your organization will be better adapted to. Encourage younger staff members to take the lead in teaching technological innovation to those a bit more hesitant. At BCL, we have been gradually changing procedures so that

most changes have been mastered before new ones have to be learned.

The changes won't stop coming. New gadgets, software and systems are taxing for everybody, but the sooner you learn how to use them, the easier it will be to keep pace with the construction industry and the world.



TIMBERLINE

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More Customer Feedback

Dear Merle,

Jan. 30, 2000

Enclosed are photos of my completed solar-heated kiln, woodshed, greenhouse and sugarhouse. Allow me to take this opportunity to thank you for your assistance with this project. Everyone that I had the opportunity to interact with at BCL was very personable and helpful. My local woodworking friends still can't believe that I had my framing shipped clear across the country for a lower price than I could purchase it locally. While you can't see the lumber I purchased from your company (with the exception of the Western Red Cedar Ridge beam) I'm confident that it will significantly extend the life of this building, given the high humidities which will be generated inside while drying lumber and curing maple sugar season.

I'll try to call you within the next few weeks to get a feel for the amount of maple syrup that you and your co-workers would like, as well as how you'd like it packaged. I hope you had a great ski season,; it appears winter has finally arrived in the northeast with a vengeance. My wife and I leave for Royal Gorge in two weeks to try out that "Sierra cement"!

Thanks again! Your company should be applauded for their customer service skills.

Sincerely,
Paul Koval
Ashby, MA



Deck at left :

I obtained this tight knot decking from Bear Creek Lumber and sold it to Jim McLean. Jim had the decking sanded and sealed with Superdeck Clear Finish before screwing it down. He will have one more coat put on.

Roy LaRock
Architectual Specialities
Yakima ,WA

The cedar supplied by you was the finest quality I have seen. This house in Freeport was completed just before Thanksgiving. I can't wait to buy from you soon.

Andrew Sica
Andrew Alteration Co.
Freeport, NY
(Pictured on the right)

