



David Gatfield on tools for floorlaying

Cut the cackle, what's in your toolbox?

ALTHOUGH I never tire of saying 'I'm a floorlayer by trade,' I don't do too much of it these days as much of our time in Altro's technical service department is spent visiting site to help out or offer advice when needed.

However, I still like to keep my hand in and do get involved with some problematic installations or demonstration jobs where an architect or estates manager new to some of our products wants to see what can be done with them before specifying them for future projects.

Anyway, on just such an assignment recently I was lugging my toolbox up the stairs to the eighth floor at a northern hospital – the lifts were temporarily out of order – and at the point where I thought my lungs were going to burst I resolved to empty the box at the first available opportunity and only put back in the tools I really needed.

So when I'd got my breath back I did just that, I took out all the tools one at a time giving them a bit of a clean or scrape to remove old adhesive residue etc and set them to one side to be 'ruthlessly' sorted through later.

Next I emptied the box of years of old blunt blades, bits of chalk, screws, nails and an assortment

of bottle tops, mastic nozzles and general debris.

As I began to fill the box again, I was instantly on a trip down memory lane as I rediscovered tools I hadn't seen for a long time, some of which I've had since I started in the game 40 years ago.

I realised that everything I had laid out before me fell into two categories, the tools I needed and the ones I wanted to keep for old times sake. To cut a long story short, I eventually put all the tools back in the box.

The process did make me wonder how I ended up with so much stuff. I mean, in the 'good old days' when I used to catch the number 17 bus from Cannon Street bus station in Manchester, I would have enough tools in my bag to cope with all eventualities and in total it probably weighed less than 15 pounds in old money, 7 or 8 kilo's in the modern vernacular.

Then I passed my test and got a little van and that was it, overnight I went from a fleet footed floor laying will o' the wisp, carrying everything I needed in a lightweight moth-eaten carpet bag, to a mobile ironmonger with a tool for all eventualities and more.

So what do we really need for a basic installation? I've narrowed it down to these top 10 tools, see what you think.

1. A couple of good knives and plenty of blades, particularly if you're fitting vinyl.
2. A good flexible straight edge.
3. A trowel and a couple of blades with different size notches.
4. A steel tape.
5. A scribing device unless you know how to improvise with a bit of wood (a bit of wood WAS a scribing device in the early days).
6. A pencil for behind your ear and to do the crossword.
7. A welding kit.
8. A hammer.
9. A chalk line.
10. A hand brush.

That's more or less it, funny enough, total weight around 7-8kg. But then you've got the additions, the roller, the sweeping brush, the screeding equipment such as buckets and trowels, which then leads on to the rubbing down machine or at least the spiked roller. Before long you're a travelling ironmonger, that's just the way it is.

Resin contractors also have to have mega mixers, diamond grinders, forced action mixers

and sometimes even shot blasters in their toolkit. Heavy stuff indeed.

But worse, in the early eighties we had a sports division specialising in the installation of indoor and outdoor running tracks and full size football and hockey pitches laid in artificial turf, you can imagine the equipment needed for that.

We had tractors and spray rigs and a couple of fork lift trucks were always on hand. As our system was fully stuck down it had to be drilled at 100mm centres once completed to make it porous. This was done with a remote control converted milk float and took 24 hours to complete the task and of course everything had to be transported in a 38 ton truck.

Come to think about it, my old toolbox heavy though it seemed the other day is but a feather weight by comparison.

I suppose the moral is, whether it's a tractor or a chalk line, you need what you need to get the job done. **CFJ**

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Leo Aspden on marketing in a weak economy

Isn't it time you had a 'cunning plan'?

AT the dawn of the New Year we have two choices in our business outlook. One tendency might be to frenetically try to maintain turnover.

This can lead to the 'headless chicken' syndrome and, as with Blackadder, we might feel like applying the handkerchief on the head and pencils in the nostrils, conveying our feeling of 'get me out of here!'

Blackadder partially got it right when he said: 'I have a cunning plan!' That's the second option – planning so that your business becomes more focused and staff work not just harder, but smarter.

How so? Well now is the time to get those marketing plans out of the archives and update them or

even start anew with an approach which is absolutely relevant to what is happening out there.

As a chartered marketer and chair of the Manchester branch of the Chartered Institute of Marketing I often meet business owners and directors.

At a recent business fair I met the owner of an SME business who had developed an innovative new product and was becoming increasingly frustrated that customers could not see its potential.

His approach is sadly all too common – no clearly defined plan, with target markets identified as well as their needs, key drivers for purchase and a communications strategy of how

to reach them.

The planning toolkit: The Chartered Institute of Marketing offer a series of free 10-minute guides through its website (www.cim.co.uk) and one on How to write a marketing plan.

The key stages are:

1. Objectives: They should be SMART (smart, meaningful, achievable, realistic and time bound). They should be quantitative (i.e. expressed where possible in terms of values, volumes and market shares), and cover the period of the plan, e.g. sell 400 units in the next 12 months.

Your objectives may relate to sales volume or market share. You may wish to generate:

■ More volume from existing customers;

■ New business from new customers;

■ Obtain revenue from a different distribution channel such as the internet.

2(a) Understand your external environment (political, economic, legal, environmental, technological and social, international).

(b) Understand your customers (Who are they? Why do they buy? Why do they buy from us?) (Identify customer groups/segmentation)

(c) Understand your competitors (Who are they? Which markets do they focus on?)

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