

A photograph of three men standing in front of a blue building with a red sign that says "Do it Best" and "Main Street Lumber" in white letters. The men are smiling and dressed in business-casual attire. The man on the left is wearing a dark plaid shirt, the man in the middle is wearing a dark blue sweater over a light blue shirt, and the man on the right is wearing a light blue checkered shirt. The background shows the building's facade and a clear sky.

Do it Best Main Street Lumber

Making Good Impressions

Main Street Lumber & Millwork has taken its emphasis on standing out from the crowd to a new level with a custom millwork app offered to other dealers.

BY CRAIG A. SHUTT

(L-R) Steve Linn, Chuck Pool and Robert Pool
of Main Street Lumber & Millwork.

The Pool brothers and millwork partner Steve Linn know their business succeeds by creating good impressions and personal relationships. They've worked to make Main Street Lumber & Millwork in Denison, Texas, stand out from the crowd. Now, they're taking those skills to the field through a mobile phone and tablet app that allows salespeople to walk a project and order millwork and lumber products quickly, easily and accurately. And they're offering the app to other dealers.

"Our community is small," says co-owner Chuck Pool. "We have to continually reinvent ourselves to increase our market size. It's important for us to stand out, and we think we've hit on some ideas that are unique."

Sawdust flows in the Pool brothers' veins. Their grandfather, C.G. Pool, worked in the business prior to World War II, and their father followed in his footsteps after returning from active duty as a bomber pilot during the war. He worked at a variety of southern lumberyards and ultimately purchased Main Street Lumber in 1971. Both sons worked in the family business but struck out on their own after college. Robert returned to the business in 1978, and Chuck joined his brother in 1987.

Mouldings Drive Sales

The company prides itself on its deep and varied selection of mouldings, which helps attract business in a wide market area from southern Oklahoma to Dallas-Fort Worth. "We believe our moulding selection is a key differentiator," Robert says. "No one in our area has the depth and breadth we offer. And our ability to customize products is a service that our builders value."

They attribute that success to bringing on Linn as a partner in the expanded millwork company, which operates alongside the lumberyard. "We opened a small door shop in 2004, but it really took off when Steve joined a couple years later," Robert says. The Pools had come to know and respect Linn through

his success with a large Dallas shop. "He was a key addition."

Linn extended the company's reach into the Dallas-Fort Worth market. "As I came on, the market began to crash, and I realized we had to expand our market to maintain sales," he says. "We had to think hard about how to set ourselves apart."

Millwork, they found, was not as impacted by the recession as other products. They also benefited from tapping into this larger market's demographics, especially the luxury-home segment. "We were getting requests for very upper-end, crazy-type mouldings we didn't carry and would never sell in Denison," Chuck says. "Steve convinced us we needed to stock them."

Two New Programs

Their efforts were bolstered by two programs that stressed graphics. First, Linn developed takeoffs with an illustration of each moulding. "They ensured the customer understood what the product

was, rather than just seeing the stock number," he explains. He produced them manually for the salespeople, making an immediate impact. "Nobody knew who we were in Dallas, but as soon as they saw our proposals, they remembered us," he says. "We started getting a lot of attention." Soon, competitors were asking their suppliers to provide graphics for their use too.

Their closing rate for millwork sales rose 30%, he says. "We got a reputation for being on the leading edge of technology and service. It allowed us to get a foothold in the Dallas market." This was supported by the addition of two new outside sales people and new trucks, which also aided the cause. ➤

Main Street Lumber & Millwork has built its business—and its reputation—on providing builders quality materials, millwork and service.



Service is a key driver of Main Street Lumber & Millwork's success, Chuck Pool says. Here, Heather Jones, contractor sales coordinator (center), and Karlene Haning, retail sales coordinator, (right) work with customers.

ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR



Rather than purchase standard trucks, Robert worked with a horse-trailer manufacturer to create customized millwork trailers with large store graphics on each side. "An 8-foot door is taller than a horse," Robert explains. "We revamped the trailers so one person could unload the orders and sent them all over Dallas."

They quickly learned they were onto something, Chuck adds. "Our friends in Dallas started complaining that they were seeing our vehicles everywhere they went. But we didn't have that many trailers. They just stood out."

Software App Created

The company also worked on automating its illustrated takeoffs and tying them into the company's order system. Linn began developing the system shortly after he arrived. When they were ready, Chuck contacted Terry Davies, CEO of Luxwood Corp. in Barrie, Ontario. "Steve had the ideas and Terry had the programming knowledge," Chuck says. Salespeople began using the app in 2011, and it was introduced to the market in May 2013.

The app allows salespeople to walk through a project and punch in types, lengths, stock numbers and other details of each millwork or lumber product needed. "Typically, sales people take notes on scratch paper, fill in forms when they get home and file those with the inside salespeople later, who then

input them to the computer," Robert explains. "Our app lets them punch a few buttons and upload it directly to the store's POS system with no rekeying."

The partners released MVP Estimator (www.mvpestimator.com) to the market after other companies began calling to learn where they'd gotten the software. One builder, upon seeing it on a plane flight with Chuck, asked to buy it for his own company's use. "We realized it wasn't just us who liked it," he says.

The company is working with DW Distribution in Dallas to offer the app in a four-state area, and they are looking to expand. "It's mobile and works with almost any POS system," Linn says. "We built it from the ground up, so we understand it and know it's built for our industry's needs."

The trio likes to have salespeople in the field, which led to a reduction in the size of their showroom. "Customers have so much knowledge, showrooms aren't as important today," Chuck says. "Most decisions are made in the field with the salespeople. We realized that if we gave them the right tools and training, they could make the sale at the jobsite."

These ideas, no doubt, aren't the last innovations Main Street Lumber & Millwork will be introducing. "We've got an aggressive marketing plan for MVP, and we're seeing great growth now after many years of slow sales,"



ABOVE LEFT: Family's at the center of this family-owned business, naturally. Wesley Pool (left), millwork operations manager, talks with his father, Robert Pool.

ABOVE: Mobile Visual Pro is described as the millwork and building supply industry's first mobile software solution for on-site estimating and graphic reporting.

Chuck says. "We've cut expenses across our operation, and we're much more efficient at everything today."

Robert agrees. "This was a big year for us with the launch of MVP Estimator. If we can continue to differentiate ourselves through our service and work with custom builders, we feel pretty good about 2014 being a strong year." ■

Main Street Lumber & Millwork

ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR 2014
SALES OF UNDER \$10 MILLION

Year Founded 1971

Locations 1

2012 Sales \$6 million

2013 Sales Projected \$7 million

Employees 18

www.mainstreetcompanies.com