

Supplier Profile:

# Laser Products



In 1995, Dan Louis left his job of 15 years as vice president of a large flooring retailer and founded Laser Products Industries. His goal in doing so was to harness the power of laser light to solve a problem he had encountered in the flooring industry. He had learned that it wasn't always easy for a salesman to accurately depict the "as-built" conditions of spaces that were to receive tile, wood and other flooring products. So he wanted to fill a need and create a device that would allow them to determine if the floors and walls were square, flat and/or level before a job was sold.

Before long the SL-24 Laser Square and the FR-16 Framing Square were developed and patented, and the company began to make waves in the flooring and tile industries. The company bolstered its sales by also distributing Leica Geosystems' line of laser measuring and leveling lasers.

After a quick rise to the top of the market, Louis figured that the countertop industry was also facing similar challenges with templating. He set out to apply laser technology to help countertop fabricators, and began to study the processes that were being used.

"Countertop templating was complex, cumbersome and rampant with quality issues, and the newer templating systems required 3-D CAD knowledge to operate," he said. "I wanted to develop a totally different type of templating system, a system that used the English language to operate as opposed to the memorization of hundreds of CAD icons."

In early 2005, Laser Products delivered the first laser digital templating system, the LT-55 Laser Templator, and stayed true to Laser Products Industries' mission statement: "Design, develop and bring to market products that make your life easier without requiring you to learn a new skill."

The LT-55 was a simple PocketPC driven system that did not require a lot of computer knowledge to operate. A couple of years later Laser Products Industries introduced the LT-55 XL, which had a Microsoft Windows based TabletPC allowing templators to take advantage of time saving duties like e-mailing job files back to the office, estimating the job on site and taking photos of the job for reference.



"It allows even manual fabricators, which represent more than half of the current market, to capitalize on the speed and accuracy of laser templating," said Louis. "By using all of the features of the system manual fabricators can produce precision vinyl templates to fabricate accurate countertops in a third of the time it had taken in the past. And the CNC capable fabricators are obviously able to capitalize on its ability to drive CNC machines with little effort."

**Meeting the Needs**

Over the years, Laser Products templating products have evolved to meet any needs the industry has faced and is now available in nine languages. There have been more than 400 user-driven improvements made to the system, from going completely paperless to allowing customers to sign off on the job site on multiple documents with only one signature on the TabletPC. And there are more than 2,000 users of theLT-55 and LT-55 XL in more than 30 countries.

Even the training to use the equipment has become more user-friendly, in the form of a three-DVD set of specifically-tailored training videos with instructions for operation that users can go over at their leisure or review multiple times. Of course, more personalized training is still available, but Louis said most often the DVDs work great because of the relative simplicity of the system. "Most new technology requires painstaking change," he explained. "So we decided that our system had to remain simple to understand, yet offer cutting edge features and benefits to the users."

Furthering its commitment to the industry, Laser Products Industries belongs to all of the major trade associations relative to the stone and solid surface industries, including ISFA, which it first joined in 2005, the same year the LT-55 came onto the market. Focusing on education, the company participates in more than 20 trade shows, seminars and workshops across the country every year.

Headquartered just outside of Chicago in Romeoville, Ill., Laser Products Industries employs 15 administrative staff managers and sales representatives in the Chicagoland area, Columbus, Ohio, Nashville, Tenn., and Los Angeles. There are also independent offices in Canada, Europe and Australia, which oversee their own sales staff.

Louis is proud of his support and service operations, and over the past year or two the company has begun to more heavily build its Web site.

Loaded with instructional and educational information and videos, the site is an extension of the efforts the company has put into the industry. Louis is proud that all of the company's products are manufactured in the United States and he also touts the fact that his company is embracing the "green" movement in that his product allows for completely paperless operations.



*President Dan Louis demonstrates the company's laser templating equipment.*

fabricators failed, leaving CNC fabricators that were committed to their industry to handle all the sales."

Louis believes we should learn from history not only because the less efficient fabricator will fail, but because he feels the remaining digital/CNC fabricators will be manufacturing finished products for much less per



**Looking Ahead**

While charging ahead and laying a foundation for his business, Louis also tries to keep an eye toward the future. "The growth market that the countertop fabrication industry has been in is reaching the mature stages," he opined. "That means the game is changing. If you look at the metal fabrication industry, eight years ago it started the same process of maturing. Back then, half of the fabricators were manual and half were digital. Now more than 97 percent are using CNC equipment. The volume of work was the same or more back then, but 30 to 40 percent of the industry's manual

square foot than their manual counterparts. "It is kind of hard to believe so many fabricators fail to take advantage of advancing technology," he said. "Many fabricators who are too stubborn or who don't do the math will use the excuse that 'business is slow' when actually the more efficient fabricators can double their volume or more. I get goose bumps when I hear a struggling fabricator say 'I've been doing it this way for 20 years and haven't had a problem yet.' **ISFA**

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