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# CONSTRUCTION DIMENSIONS

PUBLISHED FOR CONTRACTORS BY THE ASSOCIATION OF THE WALL AND CEILING INDUSTRY

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**BOOST  
PRODUCTIVITY  
BY 15%**  
WITH BETTER  
FINISHING  
TOOLS

**IECC 2012**  
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WHO LOSES?

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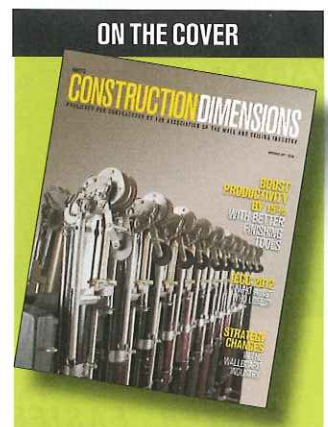
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What kind of shape are your tools in?

# Finishers Boost Productivity by 15 Percent with Better Tools

By James Barlow

The adage, “you’re only as good as your tools,” is more pronounced in high-volume industries such as manufacturing and construction, where worker output directly drives profitability. For professional drywall contractors, an often overlooked means of greater productivity—and profits—is tools.

In fact, based on conversations with hundreds of customers nationwide, job-ready tools help maximize contractor efficiency and can boost productivity by up to 15 percent. Based on an average hourly labor rate of \$47, this added performance can translate into \$282 extra per worker, per week. For a crew of three, top-quality tools



Automatic taping tools increase productivity by as much as 50 percent over hand finishing.

can help generate an additional \$44,000 in billings annually.

Finishing contractors have always enjoyed the option of purchasing or renting their equipment. Each option offers advantages that positively impact worker productivity.

### ENHANCE PRODUCTIVITY

The goal for any production drywall finisher is to maximize his "time-on-wall," that is, the time spent actively finishing. Ordering supplies, performing tool maintenance and other secondary tasks all detract from active finishing—and profitability.

For contractors who properly maintain their personal tools, outright purchase of automatic taping equipment is ideal, as it provides reliable performance with a relatively low investment. Routine cleaning, lubricating and replacement of standard wear parts keep tools operating at peak performance. These individuals are known for maintaining their gear. They are religious about maintaining their investments, keeping their tools serviced, and always having spare parts at the ready.

For that equally conscientious contractor who must share his tools with larger crews, a rental arrangement assures that no matter who last ran a particular tool, it can be changed out, at no cost, for a clean, fully-calibrated tool.

The productivity thief is found in between these two scenarios. The contractor who purchases tools—with the



**There are more than 20 wear-parts in the typical automatic taping tool set that require replacement in the normal course of operation. For the tool renter, these parts are typically replaced at the time of service, but are often included with the tool in case the contractor keeps the tool for an extended period and needs to swap in a replacement.**

best intentions—but, due to work load or compressed schedules, cannot properly maintain them. This contractor is forced to make due and compensate for a poorly performing or broken tool by working additional hours or overstaffing a job.

A defective tool that has been held together with duct tape, wire or rubber bands inevitably results in decreased productivity, substandard quality, time-consuming repetitions or jobsite injuries. Think of an automatic taper that is mis-feeding tape or joint compound. How much time will workers waste compensating for this defective tool? This jobsite staple has more than 350 finely tuned component

parts alone. How much less board feet a day will a worker finish with a tool operating at 75 percent capacity?

"Every finisher has a slightly different technique, but today's automatic taping tools serve as a quality control system so that every joint, every inside corner is identical to the next—even in direct sunlight that shows every defect," says Tony Cruzado, co-owner of Bridgeport, Conn.-based CGMAcoustics, Inc. "We're competing against nonunion shops that have half our labor rate and significantly less overhead, so we have to leverage technology to squeeze additional output from every man-hour."



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## FINISH QUALITY

Another challenge facing contractors is the need to tailor tools to a particular application. The typical tool owner brings about 15 finishing tools to a job site whereas most standard rental kits contain more than twice this selection.

Tools that are rented to perform a specific task—say those used to finish small closets, stairways, high ceilings or jobs that require level five finishes—can vary on a daily basis, enabling contractors to match the proper tool to the application. Customers can rent sets of tools or an individual tool tailored for a particular project, and return them once a job—and its unique need—is met, without the cost to carry, store and maintain those specialized tools.

No doubt, we have all used a tool beyond its intended purpose, but consider how much more efficient it is to use an inside corner roller instead of a standard finish



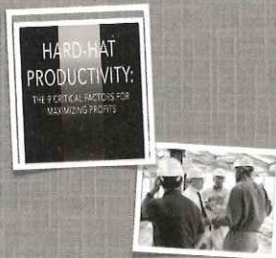
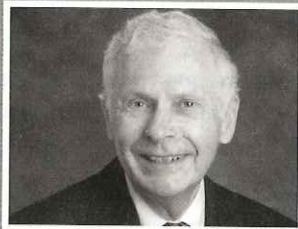
**Routine cleaning, lubricating and replacement of standard wear parts keep tools operating at peak performance.**

knife to embed tape in a corner?

For the tool contractors use day in and day out, it may make sense to purchase these toolbox essentials. However, for the tool used occasionally, renting affords a

contractor access to a comprehensive selection of factory-fresh tools specifically engineered for a particular task. For many, rental arrangements enable workers to heed their grandfather's advice of

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**Job-ready tools help maximize contractor efficiency and can boost productivity by up to 15 percent. Moreover, beyond allowing workers to work more efficiently, factory-maintained and -calibrated tools improve job quality and consistency.**

“using the right tool for the right job,” or “working smarter, not harder.”

Most contractors value the flexibility to add tool capacity to support a large project or returning those tools to lower costs, eliminate storage problems and reduce opportunities for theft. Moreover, beyond allowing workers to work more efficiently, factory-maintained and -calibrated tools improve job quality and consistency.

#### **JOBSITE EFFICIENCY**

There are more than 20 wear-parts in the typical automatic taping tool set that require replacement in the normal course of operation. For the tool owner, these parts are a requirement to maintain the tools’

peak performance. For the tool renter, these parts are typically replaced at the time of service, but are often included with the tool in case the contractor keeps the tool for an extended period and needs to swap in a replacement.

Unlike standard wear parts, there are also jobsite hazards that can compromise tool performance. Think of how common it is to drop a tool off a scaffold or rescue a crushed tool from beneath a pile of construction materials. Proper alignment and calibration is critical on corner finisher blades and automatic taper advance and cutting actions.

Dropped, dirty or mishandled tools can impact both workmanship and jobsite

efficiency. Here, too, the tool owner—who doubles as a service technician—can substitute a spare tool or repair the malfunction on site. A renter would simply exchange the damaged tool for a new job-ready replacement.

Some tool rental companies offer free job-site delivery so that workers can easily and efficiently exchange damaged tools. These programs can save customers time and labor by shortening the downtime associated with non-working or inefficient tools. With no long-term obligation, you have the flexibility to upgrade to a newer tool at any time—so you never have to worry about getting stuck with a product you no longer want.

One final jobsite reality is lost tools. Some tool rental companies offer lost tool protection plans that credit workers for tools that are recovered within 12 months. Lost tool fees can often be reduced based on the length of time a tool was rented, helping to minimize costs to a particular period of inactivity.

Whichever avenue you choose, know that a properly aligned and calibrated tool yields a higher-quality finish and a more productive worker.

#### **COST SAVINGS**

In addition to the production efficiencies offered by tool rental arrangements, many contractors enjoy annual tax write-offs for their leased equipment. Alternatively, tool owners can depreciate the cost of a purchase over the lifespan of a particular tool. While both avenues offer tax savings, deductions for equipment rentals are allowed each year they are incurred, while deductions for purchased tools are based on the lifetime depreciation of a tool (typically one to three years) and cannot be claimed repeatedly.

Some companies also enable contractors to account for specific tool-rental



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costs according to a particular job or individual. Capturing all the costs associated with a particular project results in more accurate project billing and inventory records.

With union positions earning between \$40 and \$70 per hour, the typical three- or four-man crew costs between \$160 and \$280 per hour. Put in this data in context and it's not difficult to calculate the return on investment for increasing

"time on wall" and making workers more productive.

In the end, tool ownership is the responsibility of each individual. Larger operations typically leverage the efficiencies and services associated with rental agreements, while many individual contractors prefer the familiarity of their own tools. Just like choosing the right tool for the job, professional finishers know that enhanced productivity, improved finish

quality and job-site savings can be found right in their own job box. ●

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