

Trade Magazine Publications

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By Kimberly Gavin

Take the high road

All too often this business gets stuck in the commodity mentality. And we know what that does to product quality and margins. Look at base grade carpet, for example. Or low-end laminates. Especially laminates. What started out as a highly profitable and unique product has very quickly become something else.

But it needn't be so. Just last week the media was offered a glimpse of the latest generation of innovations from the Faus Group. Most would have to agree that Faus is the industry leader in embossed-in-register technology.

But the newest technology in Faus' arsenal gives new meaning to the words "realistic looks." Two new wood-looks we saw will have you on your knees for a closer inspection. Faus, of course, sells its product through private-label partnerships, but the company will be at Surfaces to show the retail community what it has to offer.

Real advances give the consumer a better product and help position laminate as an upscale flooring solution. These developments - and others from manufacturers that are also working to improve the product category - mean that retailers, distributors and manufacturers will have more opportunities to sell high-end and highly profitable products. That bodes well for the category. Best of all, everybody wins.

Companies that make a commitment to high-end products aren't catering to the rock-bottom pricing mentality that has become a real cancer for this industry. Of course, we have to have commodity products and a variety of price points. Not every consumer wants the most expensive thing, but I truly believe this: Everyone wants the best they can afford. I wonder sometimes if they get that in our drive to sell lower.

Commodity products are necessary, but they also drive profits out of our business. In some cases, the commodity mentality ends up giving the consumer a bad taste for a particular kind of flooring. Think of base-grade carpet in a \$300,000-plus new home.

All facets of this industry need innovation to help improve products for the consumer and margins for the supply chain. Some categories need more help than others. I salute Faus and others for taking the high road with product innovation, and I encourage all retailers to embrace new developments and reward suppliers that deliver them with business.

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Faus unveils next generation of laminates

(Dalton) If you thought laminate design technology was approaching the limits, think again. Two new enhancements from Faus Group are able to bring more realistic wood looks to laminate flooring as well as offer an ingenious design solution. Both are geared for high-end laminate products, the place Faus chooses to focus, according to Juan Flores, general manager.

Faus abandoned the commodity approach to laminate flooring three years ago, according to Flores. "We have been betting on (the high end)," he said, adding that the company has been boosting capacity in that time and is now up to 100 million square feet. "Five years ago, we were a little lonely; the market wasn't mature." Today, he said, more manufacturers are moving that way. "It confirms our direction."

Faus is already well known for innovation. Its Joint Guard technology, for example, is built-in edge protection that prolongs the life of the joint and allows for simple, glueless installation. Flores said the company's claim rate for its products is less than 1 percent. "Installation claims related to peaking and joints are gone."

Faus' reputation for realistic texture and pattern through its embossed-in-register process is well established. But Flores calls its Interplank Design its first "breakthrough" design innovation. How it works: Faus has developed a way to make wider planks with multiple strips. The wide planks reduce installation time as well as offer a unique design element. In addition, a self-alignment system lets the design match automatically; strips continue from one plank to another with no visible break, giving the illusion of one continuous piece of hardwood. Because the boards are self-matching, installation is fast and easy. Planks feature an embossed beveled edge - not a handscraped one - which, Flores said, also reduces joint problems.

The second innovation from Faus is called Micro Bevel, which is a subtle bevel between each laminate wood strip on both the long and short sides. "This takes the present technology to new levels" and makes joints less visible, he said. The beauty of both innovations, Flores explained, is they can be combined with the company's existing technologies to create even more possibilities.

Two patterns were unveiled: A walnut visual utilizes the Micro Bevel technology, Joint Guard and Faus' embossed-in-register process to create a floor that looks incredibly close to the real thing. The oak pattern features Interplank technology, Joint Guard and embossed-in-registration. The look is a faithful rendition of a beautiful wide-plank oak floor. Flores is planning three to five SKUs for each launch.

"What does it mean to the consumer? A natural look, realistic textures and prolonged product life," he said. "And the technologies can be combined. It's not a single equation." Flores, who said Faus has patents pending on both the Micro Bevel and Interplank processes, believes these innovations only heighten product differentiation in the industry. "This will play a critical role in industry consolidation in the next 12 months," he noted. Furthermore, Faus already has these innovations in production. In fact, the company is now meeting with its five private-label partners, which Flores declines to identify, to determine how they will be brought to market. "We align with important players that can do an excellent job in design and marketing."

As far as pricing is concerned, Flores doesn't know where the products will end up, but he is sure they will be at the high end of the market. "We want to be at the top, but competitive," he said, noting the products will debut to the retail community at Surfaces 2004.