

Surviving Global Warming And Economic Cooling

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As I sit here in my heaviest sweater trying to make my cold fingers work the keyboard on this cold 39-degree Tampa morning I am totally convinced I will never get this global warming figured out.

The one thing I do know for sure is that there are definitely cycles to the weather as well as economic activity. The last couple of years have been a time of high demand and prosperity but this cycle does appear to be slowing and we have seen it all before.

Construction seems to take a huge leap and customers are calling in large numbers, we are getting contracts as fast as we can write them. Our dependable subs are, overnight, transformed into magicians, specializing in doing vanishing acts as we struggle to man our jobs, hold our budgets and meet our schedules, while keeping our customers happy.

Then, just as suddenly, it seems we begin to see an end to our seemingly endless backlog and wonder how we are going to keep this machine rolling down the tracks. What is causing this slowdown? Maybe it's interest rates, the war, the national debt, or my favorite...“it's

China”—always easy to blame someone half a globe away. Most of us don't know why the economy changes (or we probably wouldn't have to be working) we just know we need to adjust to the new climate. Just as I put some shorts on in the warm days and my sweater on this cold morning, change is a fact of life. Those of us that have been in contracting long enough can see the slowdown coming and hopefully before it hits us “full on” we can make some adjustments to keep things rolling.

The absolute truth about roofs is that sooner or later they all fail. One lesson we have learned is that, regardless of economic conditions, when your roof is leaking you are going to fix it or your wife, kids or employees are going to make your life very unhappy. The simple fact that roofs will always need “retrofitting” at some point opens a large new market to you that can help keep your business steaming down the tracks.

I can't count the number of metal buildings I have constructed over my 34 years in the business, but it's a bunch. Many are now well past the 20-year warranties provided. Perhaps it's ego but we all feel our buildings should last forever—but, in fact, the roofs we put up in the '70s are ready, if not overdue, for replacement. Remember, back then Galvalume was just



Reroofing offers tremendous market potential, whether building slope over a flat roof (as shown above) or retrofitting an old thru-fastener metal roof with the Roof Hugger system (demonstrated below).



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starting to be offered, we had cadmium-plated fasteners and a typical roof was the old fluoro-paint painted white, 26 gauge, screwdown roofing. I was on one of my '70s vintage buildings last year and the paint was gone except in the shadows of the ridge vents—only the galvanized base metal remained. It was in surprisingly good shape, but it was certainly time to retrofit this building.

The retrofit business is certainly an exciting way to pick up some slack in any slowdown in new construction. Many of us have a wealth of old customers to draw upon. How about calling your old customer and saying, “Hey Tom, how is that roof of yours doing?” Uncomfortable with that? You shouldn't be—these older buildings have served their owners well with many years of good service but like anything over time, roofs wear out and need replacing. Another option is to put together a small mailing piece or postcard ad and send them to your past clients or business parks that may be of that vintage.

If your customers were like many of mine, they got into their buildings on a shoestring but if things went well for them they expanded and you put all the additions on as they grew. Believe it or not, you have been a partner in their success and most of them know that. Now that the time has come to reroof they are well established and no longer struggle as they once did. This is a great opportunity to suggest an upgrade from screwdown roofing to the latest and greatest standing seam roofing. Eliminate the thousands of fastener penetrations in the roof and install a truly maintenance-free roof system. If the roof is steep slope, add color and create “curb appeal”.

Metal-over-metal retrofitting is an opportunity for your customers to upgrade their facilities and increase their value, while keeping your business charging along. Remember, unlike many new construction projects, which are bid out, this type of work is usually negotiated with the owner.

These same principles apply to flat-roof buildings that for years and years have been troublesome to their owners. Look into the various stanchion or column and beam retrofit systems that are available. Eliminating that old flat roof is a great service to the owner and typically most retrofit capital expenditures will enjoy favorable tax treatment. As was true when their first building was designed and built, your expertise is again needed to perform this upgrade.

Metal-over-metal and slope built-up systems now represent approximately a \$3 billion annual market and interestingly five times as many buildings were built between the '80s and '90s than were built in the '60s and '70s—talk about growth potential!

Just as we need to adjust to climate change, hot or cold, we need to model our business plan to adapt to the economic environment of our time. Big change is ripe with risk and difficulties but a little “tweak” to what we already do, with the people we have worked with, is not difficult or risky. Retrofit roofing might just provide the added revenue needed to ride out any economic cooling no matter what the temperature is outside.

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