



NAME: Don Lorey

TITLE: CEO

COMPANY: E. B. Bradley Co.



Things are looking up for wholesale distribution, says Don Lorey, CEO of E. B. Bradley Co. The turnaround in the housing market is beginning to show dividends, allowing the firm to keep a steady pace in the past couple of years. While it is nearly equally invested in both commercial and residential work, the home remodel segment has proven to be a boon. Real estate in E. B. Bradley Co.'s service area – which includes

California, Washington, Arizona, and Oregon – is plentiful, Lorey notes, but it also is growing older. “All of the homes and buildings are aging, and they constantly need updating or remodeling,” he continues, “so there’ll continue to be opportunities for us and our customers to go after that business.” With residential prices on the West Coast rather steep, Lorey adds, end users tend to commission new kitchens and other jobs that are in line with the value of the home. He believes fabricators, wholesale distributors, and vendors are well-positioned to benefit from the trend, predicting that as long as they do good work, they can set themselves up for years of growth even if new construction stalls.

The commercial end of the business offers similar opportunities, says Lorey, who points to increasingly optimistic reports coming from the American Institute of Architects (AIA). “Architects seem to be busier right now than they have been in the last couple of years. I think that speaks well of the upcoming commercial market – retail, etc.,” he speculates. However, Lorey warns that E. B. Bradley Co. and others in the same business still have a few challenges to overcome in order to fully get back on track. And much of that noise could come from the institutional side.

“I think for a while we’re all going to be challenged with the state budgetary topics, particularly K-through-12 schools,” says Lorey. While the West Coast is blessed with an abundance of universities, which he says tend to incorporate much more “quality and longevity into their work and design,” elementary and secondary schools are primarily funded by their respective states. The typical pattern has been for people to leave big metropolitan areas in favor of the suburbs and for governments, in response, to build schools to serve those spreading populations. The slump in new construction around 2007-2008 put a lot of that activity on hold, however, and many states have yet to pick it back up – especially as officials try to deal with empty coffers. “They have to be very budget-conscious, so they just don’t engineer the same types of products into their jobs... it’s going to be challenging for a while,” Lorey expects.

Yet another issue going forward, according to Lorey, involves general contracting – again, on the commercial side. Specifically, he points to slower pay, shorter lead times, and low bids from contractors as key concerns – concerns that he says are “not likely to go away.” Part of E. B. Bradley Co.’s response to that is to work with customers to create the most appropriate cost solution for them. “We have a number of lines so we’re able to offer good, better, or best,” Lorey explains. “Depending on the job and what the requirements are, we have a lot of solutions for any of those categories. So, hopefully, they’ll be able to provide their general contractor with a good solution.” That strategy also guides the company when it comes to the perpetual challenge – applicable to the entire wholesale distribution industry – of “being efficient and being profit-minded with a balance toward making sure you’re taking care of the customers and investing enough in your business to ensure you have opportunities for growth.”



E. B. Bradley Co.'s commitment to serving the customer with a "personal touch" is another way that it rises to meet the challenges lying before it and other wholesale distributors – that, and its hunger for innovation and efficiency. Lorey says E. B. Bradley Co. is in "continual process mode," constantly measuring any and everything in terms of customer satisfaction, errors, and more; and then addressing those issues individually or as a group every month. It also cultivates vendor relationships that Lorey alternately characterizes as healthy, strong, and strategic. "We have great open communication with them," he boasts. "We share concepts and ideas, and they with us. Our brand of E. B. Bradley Co. exists because of the vendors that we carry and vice versa for them."

Lorey credits the firm's membership in NBMDA in part for its good vendor ties. He notes that the affiliation with the organization has "given us a lot more face time – not so much with the bigger vendors that we would deal with anyway, although that has happened as well – making sure that we're spending time in front of them." He likens NBMDA-sponsored trade shows to a form of speed dating and says he finds it highly beneficial to be able to spend that time with companies that perhaps E. B. Bradley Co. would not have been able to interact with otherwise. Moreover, "you obviously run into your competitors there, and there's conversation. I don't know if that's beneficial but what it does do is it allows you to ask questions of other distributors that are not within competitive reach of you and share feedback," Lorey adds. He finds NBMDA's programs on economic topics, continuous improvement, and other subject matter to be helpful and the group's speakers to be "very good, very professional, and very informative."

About NBMDA

NBMDA is a multi-segment trade association representing the leading wholesale distributors of specialty building products and woodworking materials. Membership segments represent distributors and manufacturers that serve the independent building material, lumber, and kitchen and bath dealer, regional and national home centers, as well as those that serve production companies involved in cabinetry, architectural woodwork, stock woodwork, store fixtures, solid surface fabricating, plastics fabricating, general and specialty woodworking industries. For more information, visit www.nbmda.org.

