



Specialize, Specialize, Specialize **by Aaron Crowley**

The pressure to try and become all things to all people in business is great when there is a giant competitor down the street who seems to be capable of serving every segment of the market.

Unfortunately, that is how many small fabricators choose to compete. They pursue new homes; big and small, remodels, condos, and Mrs. Jones' counter top replacement. The problem with this approach is that all of these customers have very different needs, making it difficult for a small company with limited resources to cater to them all equally well.

In real estate, they say the three most important things are location, location, location. When running a small stone shop, especially with a giant competitor down the street, the motto must be *specialize, specialize, specialize*.

And that is the key to surviving and thriving in the shadow of a giant competitor; identify a niche and then focusing on it with single minded attention and become the regional expert.

To illustrate this point, consider how Wal-mart Superstores have reshaped the retail landscape. They have it all; everything from bike tires to Barbie dolls. They have the lowest prices on these items and modest selections. How can a small company survive when Wal-Mart moves to town?

They specialize.

For the bike shop owner down the street who **really knows** cycling, it is extremely important to offer the cyclist something Wal-Mart can't; expertise, advice, and an experience. The wannabe Lance Armstrongs of the world want products that fit their unique needs and they want to talk with people who share their passion and can speak the language.

And as such, the avid cyclist will ignore the bicycle isle at Wal-mart when he's there to buy a Barbie doll for his daughter, regardless of how inexpensive their bike tires happen to be. He values the relationship with his bike shop and he wants more than Walmart can give him.

Therein lies the lesson for the fabricator. It is extremely important to identify a specific type of customer and **really know** them. In addition he must learn and

speaking their language, and provide them with a certain value that a giant competitor simply cannot provide.

The McMansion builders need granite work just like the condo developer, remodel contractor, and Mrs. Jones. And for each of these customers, cost, quality, and timing are all important factors, but to varying degrees.

Having the counters set within two weeks of the cabinet install is the top priority for the McMansion builder, followed by his customers picking out their slabs and laying-out the templates. *Competitive* pricing is third on the list of priorities.

Unfortunately the builder has only found fabricators who impose their universal approach to fabricating on his projects, causing him to experience a certain level of discomfort.

It's like jogging in a pair of running shoes that happen to be a ½ size too small, no matter that they are inexpensive, it still hurts to wear them.

For the fabricator who tailors his operation to meet the builder's top three priorities, he becomes the hero of the day. And for the builder who hires him, it will be like trading in those running shoes for a pair that really fit...sweet, sweet, comfort.

The pressure to be all things to every customer diminishes when one doesn't have to be. The fabricator who doesn't have to try and cater to everyone is the fabricator who has specialized and become the regional expert in his chosen specialty.

For him, the future is very bright, no matter how big his competitor might be.