

Contractor BUSINESS

Polyurethane Moulding Has Many Benefits

Retailers have a new competitive advantage to offer pro customers – polyurethane mouldings with finer detail, faster installation, and lower total cost than traditional materials.

In today's market, keeping up with the competition is no easy task. Home improvement retailers know they need the most up-to-date products capable of producing immediate advantages for their pro customers. Contractors need every ounce of help they can get while battling others to win a bid. One persistent challenge has been the limitations of traditional moulding materials in terms of detail, labour cost, and total cost. In the design contracting arena, if you lack the visual appeal – there's no interest; take too long and there's no profit; botch a job and there's no payment and no reputation.

Fortunately for retailers dedicated to serving the needs of their customers and keeping up with competition, new polyurethane mouldings with finer detail, faster installation, and lower total cost are providing a competitive advantage, including fewer fix-ups and more referrals.

THE RIGHT LOOK

Though wood or MDF (medium density fibreboard) are traditional material choices for moulding, they can lack the necessary detail or aesthetic flexibility to achieve the desired look for a home or commercial building.

"Some moulding profiles you just can't duplicate in wood," says Brian Leuthel, owner of Built Beyond Design, a construction design and remodeling business. "Especially for detailed designs or a layered look, the hand carving or CNC-milled woodwork required simply becomes unaffordable."

However, retailers and design contractors are finding that in place of traditional materials like wood, recently introduced

polyurethane moulding offers more aesthetic detail and flexibility due to its rigorous manufacturing process. Because polyurethane products are moulded, manufacturers are able to accurately control the tolerances and profile mating from one piece to another. This yields intricately detailed, yet sharp, features, permitting a wide variety of attractive patterns – many of them so uniquely artistic they are copyrighted.



"The detail you find in polyurethane moulding, you really can't find in any other medium," says Leuthel.

Leuthel points to the Victorian crown, Greek, Renaissance, and old world European-style profiles he's been able to achieve with polyurethane mouldings by manufacturers such as Architectural Ornament. Other manufacturers such as Profile Mouldings, Spectis Moulders Inc., GPL Tradition, Decor Mould-

ings, and Balmer Architectural Mouldings Inc. & Vitek Inc. also offer a wide selection of polyurethane mouldings, and some offer tools to help with installation.

FLEXIBLE MouldING

On one historic house built in the 1830s, Leuthel says he couldn't have made the look right with anything other than polyurethane moulding. "Because the ceiling was bowed and the house sank in the centre, everyone thought we'd have to jack the whole house up," he says. "Instead, since the polyurethane mouldings have some give, I was able to flatten it out in corners and toward the ceiling. This corrected the sight lines so you couldn't tell the original corners were crooked or the centre of the room sagged. Wood or plaster mouldings would have been too rigid to achieve such aesthetics."

For a consistent look throughout every aspect of a room, the polyurethane moulding process also lets design contractors offer a complete complement of mating products. In addition to crown moulding, extra accents include baseboards, rosettes, ceiling medallions, chair rails, exterior trim, entranceway systems, panel mouldings, wall niches, domes, capitals, pilasters, and corner decorations.

FASTER INSTALLATION

Unlike wood or MDF, which can require time-consuming joining of multiple pieces and handwork, polyurethane products can be moulded to the right size and shape from the start. This streamlines installation and lowers total cost, particularly when layering complex profiles or attempting difficult crown mouldings.

"Layering several smaller wood profiles together to get a larger layered moulding is costly and time-consuming. You've got to measure, chalk line, lay out, glue, level, and wait for it to dry. Instead, why not mould to the correct size and shape to begin with?"

Polyurethane mouldings can also simplify crown mouldings, often considered to be one of the hardest tasks in carpentry because of the inside-outside, double compound mitre typically required. "Inexperienced contractors can end up throwing out more crown moulding than they put up. Using polyurethane moulding instead of wood can cut installation time in half, or even by three-quarters if using matching corner blocks where appropriate."

Architectural Ornament is the first moulding manufacturer to provide matching corner blocks, which are short pieces of

moulding created for laying moulding in and around corners without the need for compound mitring. Since the 90-degree angle is built into the piece, straight cuts on any mitre saw are all that's necessary to create perfectly matched corners. The closed-cell nature of polyurethane also enables the material to saw easily without splitting and resists splitting when cut, nailed, or screwed. There is no need to pre-drill every nail hole.

Balmer Architectural Mouldings offers designer mitre blocks for use at all 90 degree corners and between lengths of crown moulding. The use of blocks eliminates the need to cut mitres or match the patterns at joints and halves installation time. It also eliminates any concern about take up. Moulding lengths are cut slightly longer than required and sprung into place between the blocks during installation.

LIGHTWEIGHT AND PRE-PRIMED

Of particular appeal to many contractors is how lightweight polyurethane moulding is compared to heavier wood and MDF products, which can require an extra labourer to lift, position, or hold moulding in place. Where wood or MDF products typically require searching for and nailing into studs to support their weight, polyurethane moulding can be simply nailed into drywall to provide temporary support until the caulking glue dries.

The finishing process is even more simplified because many polyurethane moulding products come pre-primed and ready to paint.

This primer accepts a broad range of specialty finishes such as decoupage, cracking, verdigris, metallic, colour wash, wood grain, stenciling, and marblizing. Polyurethane also allows the filling of nail holes with spackling, as opposed to wood or MDF, which calls for wood fillers that can shrink and fall out.

"Because polyurethane moulding is lightweight and easy to install, I can put up eight-foot sections by myself, which saves on labour costs. I'm able to finish jobs in half the time I would otherwise. I recently installed 1,000 feet of crown moulding in four hours."

LOWER TOTAL COST

Perhaps the best feature of polyurethane moulding is the fact that it often costs less than its decorative wood counterparts. Inexpensive for retailers to stock and less expensive for design contractors to buy, prices for a piece of polyurethane crown moulding are typically less expensive than buying a piece of decorative wood moulding. When combined with the lower cost of labour involved, polyurethane moulding represents a bargain.

Moreover, unlike wood or MDF moulding which may split or splinter when nailed or cut, must be sanded and primed, shrinks or swells with humidity change, and is subject to warping, rotting, and insect damage even after installation, polyurethane moulding requires virtually no maintenance. Polyurethane moulding is impervious to moisture, insects, and rot, which makes it equally suitable for outdoor or indoor use. 

