



Checklists (To Do In):

Monthly

- Review last month's sales and production to see if it matched company goals. If it did, great! If it didn't, figure out why and make the adjustments needed.
- Numbers don't lie so if something doesn't seem right, it probably isn't. Look at your business expenses and your sales numbers and compare them to those in our [Markup and Profit Revisited](#) book, pages 36, 37 and 38 (Chapter 2). If your percentages are significantly different, make a plan to get things right.
- Check that all subcontractor licenses, bonds and insurance are up-to-date. Get the insurance paperwork directly from the carrier, not the sub. If an unlicensed or uninsured contractor gets hurt on your job, or causes damage on your job, guess who gets to pay?
- Any new subcontractors? Make sure they've signed and submitted a current W-9 form and it's been added to your books. If they haven't, don't pay their invoices until the it's been received. It's far easier to deal with this when you add a new sub than to hustle in January collecting the forms. Do you have a Subcontractor Manual in place yet? If not, [ours is a great place to start](#).
- Check that all company trucks are kept clean and organized, especially if you do service work. Make sure they aren't dripping oil, which can upset a client or potential client when they find an oil spot on their driveway. You won't be called back if your vehicle leaves a mess.
- Remember to have all new employees sign your employee manual. This should be a condition of employment. If you don't have an employee manual yet, [this is where to start](#).
- Remind your employees they aren't allowed to smoke on any of your projects. This is another thing that will irritate your client, and smoke smells can't be easily fixed once they happen. Don't risk losing potential referrals. By the way, the same goes for loud, obnoxious music or podcasts.
- Check that your employees are wearing the proper clothing on job sites. A good way to get a claim against your company is to allow your employees to work in the elements or around equipment without the proper protective clothing.
- Finally, be sure that you remind employees, and state in your employee manual, that any injuries, no matter how small, must be reported immediately. Some unscrupulous employees who are injured over a weekend will try to file a workman's comp claim on Monday, claiming they got hurt the previous Friday. Protect yourself.
- Are you spending time learning more about how to run your business? Continuing your education is one thing that all successful business owners have in common. If you're looking for recommendations on what to read, we have [a list here to get started](#). Schedule an hour, every day, to learn more and improve your sales, marketing, and business skills.
- If you notice any of your sub or specialty contractors starting to ask for money as soon as they're done with the job, that can be a sign of financial problems. Take them aside and tell them of your concern. Tell them to give us a call or gift them a copy of [Markup & Profit Revisited](#). Cash flow problems, if not dealt with, can eventually cause your sub to go out of business and you'll be looking for a replacement. You might also have to finish any jobs they've started. Help them now and save yourself the time and money later.

At Least Once a Year

- Review your subcontractor contracts and adjust them as needed to cover any weaknesses that showed up over the past year. If you don't have a subcontractor agreement, [look at ours](#) and get started.
- The same holds true for your employee manual. At least once a year, review and clean up any weak spots, then have your employees review and sign an updated copy.
- We explain the need for an employee manual in chapter 6 of [Markup and Profit; A Contractor's Guide Revisited](#). The problems an employee manual can prevent are worth many times the investment; if you don't have an employee manual, [we have one to help you get started](#).
- Periodically, check your job sites to be sure that your crews are not busy using mobile phones or spending their time texting or playing games at your expense. Those activities should be outlawed during working hours.
- Run a check on all equipment assigned to your employees. Be sure they have each item and that it's in working order. When they get busy, it's easy to forget the basics and guess who pays for the extra labor required when tools don't work, or have been lost or broken?
- Check to make sure you're maintaining a balance of sales with the number of employees that you have working. Look in [Markup and Profit Revisited](#), chapter 6 for information on how to keep employees and volume in balance.
- Are you sending handwritten thank you cards? Send them to previous clients, leads that didn't sell, suppliers, subs, etc. They are a marvelous way to keep in touch with others in both your business world and your personal life as well, and a handwritten card gets noticed. Start with one each day and build from there.
- Did you remember your spouse's birthday this year? How about your kids? Don't forget mom and dad. A nice gift certificate on an employee's birthday always helps out. It doesn't have to be big, \$50 to a coffee shop or ice cream parlor. Just be there.

January

- Get your advertising together for spring work (April – May – June). If you want to be busy in the spring you need to start advertising now.
- Start assembling your tax information for the past year. Set a date to have it done and off to your CPA. How about January 31? Be sure and get a commitment date from your CPA when they will have it done and ready for you to send to the IRS.
- Complete your fourth quarter taxes ASAP. Taxes are a distraction you don't need. Get them completed as soon as you can and so you can get back to running your business.
- Have you reviewed last year and completed your [planning for the new year](#)? It's not too late. If you want the quick version, [watch this class](#). Your family depends on your business success. Do everything you can to maximize your business this year.
- January is a good time to hold employee yearly reviews if you didn't get them done last quarter. Talk about the good, the bad, and the just okay. Take a professional, non-combative approach and review the year with each of your employees individually. This is also a good time to discuss their goals, both for themselves and your company. Each employee should have financial goals and part of your job is to help them attain those goals. It might also be time to trim deadwood from your staff if any has accumulated.
- Have your employees reread the employee manual, which you should have modified for the year if needed. A signature on the employee manual should be a requirement of employment with your

company. It says they've read the manual, understand it and agree to abide by those conditions. You might want to have the signature witnessed by a neutral third party. Disenchanted employees are going more and more to state agencies with complaints of late. You don't want to go down that path. If you don't have an Employee Manual, [it's time to get started](#).

- Take your wife/husband on a date. You might not be able to go to a movie or even out to dinner, but maybe a walk through the mall? Or a drive-in restaurant with dinner in the car can be romantic when you're spending time together. An "I love you" (and a sincere "I'm sorry" when appropriate) goes a long way in keeping a relationship healthy.

February

- Continue placing ads for spring work (April, May, June) in whatever medium you've found that works for your company. If potential clients don't know you're available, they'll buy from someone else. Working by referral (word of mouth) doesn't work long term in this industry.
- Start planning ads for summer work (July, August, and September).
- Finish assembling tax information for last year and get it to your CPA. This should be done as soon as you can. Be sure and get a time commitment from your CPA as to when they will have your returns done and ready for you to sign and pay your dues to Uncle Sam. Taxes are the price we pay for the opportunity to do business.
- Production staff should be checking all your equipment for maintenance and proper working order. Equipment can also include hand tools and vehicles. Don't assume that something is running okay. Check it thoroughly and make the necessary repairs while you have the time. Fire it up, goose it, and see if it growls or does funny things. Blue smoke isn't good.
- Now would also be a good time for you to drive each of your vehicles and make sure they are all in good operating condition and that maintenance is being performed on schedule. Check the lighting and all reflectors, including your trailers, and check that all your licenses and paperwork are current.
- While we're thinking about tools and equipment, have you lent anything out to other contractors, or worse to family members? Let's get those things back and from now on if someone wants to borrow something, give them the phone number of the local equipment rental agency. No more Mr. Nice Guy or Gal. You're running a business, and that equipment needs to be available and in top shape at all times.
- Place ads for employees needed for anticipated spring work. Find them and get after the people you may need. Look now before the good ones are hired by other companies.
- Take your wife/husband on a date. How about an extended date to a warm climate?
- Also, be liberal with what we call the Big Hug. One size fits all. No waiting. Grab your spouse and kids and give them a Big Hug. A healthy marriage and family life helps maintain a healthy business.

March

- Your tax preparation for last year should be done and off to your CPA for final prep. Be sure to get a completion date when you drop it off.
- Check the maintenance schedule for your office building. There are still many parts of the country with freezing temperatures at night. Be sure your pipes are covered, hose bib covers still on. If you have to use a hose, disconnect it as soon as you are done with it.
- Take your wife/husband on a date, show them you care. Guys, a single rose for your lady is always nice, especially when it's not from your neighbor's yard. She'll love the surprise.

April

- Consider ads for summer work (July, August and September). It's not too early to advertise for work coming up. By the time you get your ads done and out the door, summer will be here and hopefully potential clients will be looking for someone to help them get jobs built.
- If you're just now getting federal taxes done, did you procrastinate because you were worried about what you'd discover when the numbers were crunched? Taxes are a distraction but they're also a requirement. Stay focused, don't procrastinate, get on them and get them done. If you don't like what you see, start today making the changes needed so you don't experience the same pain next year. Do it right this year. We have many resources on our website to help.
- If you have first quarter taxes due, either federal payments or state filings, let's Get-R-Done.
- It's almost time to schedule the de-winterizing of your buildings and vehicles. Set a date and get after it. These are the chores that can get away from you if they aren't on the schedule.
- May I ask a kindness? If your parents are still around, let them know you love them. Even if you can't visit them in person, you can call. You won't realize until they're gone how special their voices are. The past can't be changed, but you can make the future better. Trust me, I know, once mom and dad are gone, all chances to fix things are gone.
- Take your wife/husband or significant other on a date, maybe even a hot date, even if it's at a drive-through restaurant. Whisper sweet things in their ear and buy them an ice cream cone. Nothing in this world says, "I love you" like an ice cream cone.

May

- If you are selling and producing more than your goals, good for you. If you're short on sales, then griping, complaining or worrying won't fix it. Figure out what is going on; get to work and make the numbers right. Don't sit back and let things happen, make them happen.
- At the same time, check and rework both your sales and production goals for the second half of the year. Get your key people on board with your goals for your company if you want them to happen.
- Continue promoting your business for summer work (July, August & September). You need to plan ahead at least one full job cycle if you want to have enough work to keep you and your company busy and profitable.

- Spring is finally here, or at least it should be here soon. Our clients judge our companies and us by what they see. Spring checks include: 1) Check all stored vehicles and trailers to be sure they are operating correctly. Don't forget to check the wheel bearings on your trailers. 2) Wash all the chemicals off the walk and driveways around your building. While you are at it, get the windows washed inside and out on your office building. 3) Pull all your vent blocks 4) Remove the foam protective covers from hose bibs 5) Schedule planting flowers, mowing the lawn and tidying up the grounds 6) Replace any broken windows, broken screen doors, and tidy up any paint that has cracked or peeled
- Remind employees that you need plenty of notice (at least 30 days) before any vacation time. While we are on the subject of time off, if they want to go hunting this fall, you'll need at least 30 days notice for that time off as well. Hunting season happens right when you're trying to get jobs wrapped up for the year and preparing for pre-holiday work. You don't want or need surprise vacations then.
- Love your honey. Make sure they know you care. While you're at it, remember the beautiful lady who gave birth to you, and if you're a father, remember the mother of your little ones on Mother's Day.

June

- Begin the month of June with a thank you to a veteran. We live in the greatest country in the world where we are free to pursue our goals thanks to those who serve. Have you thought about sending a package of cookies, candy or other "good stuff" to a military person stationed overseas?
- If your sales are below projections, it's time to refocus and get sales in the door. It's not too late to get an advertising program together for the summer if you haven't already. Also, your website is the best advertising tool that you have. Make sure it is fine tuned and producing leads.
- Get ads out for fall work (October, November and December). It's not too early to start thinking about work you will need to carry you through the winter months. When those months get here and the phone isn't ringing, it's too late to fix so start planning now. Christmas will be here before you know it.
- Review and, if necessary, revise your markup for the second half of the year. Keep your overhead and profit percentages intact or you will end up in January of next year looking at a P & L with little or no profit. That's not what you want when you're in business.
- Lastly, dust off your flip-flops, tank tops, cut-offs and/or bikini and take your spouse or significant other on a date. Have some fun.

July

- You should be planning ads for fall work (October, November and December). Are you going to run any specials for the holidays this year? If you are, now is a good time to get that planning done and put dates on when to place the ads.
- It's time to refocus and get sales in the door. It's not too late to put an advertising program together for late summer if you haven't already. Customers won't call if they don't know you exist. Forget about working by referral alone. That is a good way out of this business.

- If you haven't already, review the markup used for the first half of the year and be sure you are making the minimum 8% net profit. If not, adjust your markup to reach your profit goals. Waiting until October or November makes it very difficult to catch up, by then you're eating into your profits for the year. We have a simple software program, our [Markup Calculator](#), that helps you calculate your markup.
- If your estimating is more than 2% below the actual cost of your projects, your estimating skills need to improve. One way to reduce your error factor is to account for it when estimating. We talk about how to calculate your error factor and improve your estimating accuracy in the book [Estimating Construction Profitably](#).
- Also, we have talked here for several years about taking the installation classes offered by the companies that make holiday lighting equipment. If you're considering any of these classes, now would be a good time to find out more. This is a very good way to pick up some extra work during the holiday season when your leads typically go way down. You have former clients you can call on, and they've already purchased your services at least once.
- Have some fun this summer, go fishing. And try this: fall in love again with your wife/husband/significant other. Remember your first date? Go back and start all over again. Keep the sparkle in your relationship.

August

- The holiday season begins in less than four months. Plan your holiday advertising now. Get your printing done, and arrange the advertising for fall work (October – November – December). Any promotions should all be on your website because that's where potential clients will look first.
- One way to gain publicity and do a good deed at the same time is to help some of the elderly folks in your area still living in their own homes. It can create goodwill in the neighborhoods you want to work in. Consider a drawing where folks submit their name, address and phone numbers and you draw 3-5 of those names out of the hat at some point in October. Those you choose get help for no charge (you'll need parameters – over a certain age, income limitations, what you will do, time investment on your part, etc.) Figure out the details and let the local media know about it. You gain publicity, and you get names to add to your mailing list. Now, I'm throwing a rough idea out there, see if you can make it work or improve on it. Give it some thought and see where it goes. You will never know if this approach will work until you give it a try.
- There are things you can do to prevent any slow times during January, February and March next year. Start planning ahead for those months. Don't wait until January when you have nothing to do to start thinking about advertising. You need to be getting in front of potential clients now if you want work on the books during the winter months. Get started now.
- We're more than halfway through the year! If your sales are lower than projected, it's time to either increase sales or reduce expenses to keep the financial balance in your company. If sales are higher than projected, good on you! Make sure your profitability is also in line with your projections.
- Have you checked your vehicles lately? Have you checked the oil, tire pressure, transmission and differential to be sure the oil is where it should be? Have you gotten in the vehicle and driven it a

few miles to be sure it's running right and the crew is taking care of your investment? Are vehicles being kept clean, inside and out?

- Be sure and check the filters on the air-handling units in your office. Many times these plug up and can drastically reduce the AC's ability to keep your space at a reasonable temperature. If you have any signs of dust on the return air grills, it's time to clean your filters.
- Take your wife/husband on a date. Take your shoes off and walk on the beach. Or find the highest spot in the area, hold hands and watch the sun go down. Don't forget the ice cream. Make it your "first date" again.

September

- Continue ads out for fall work (November, December & January).
- It's time to place your ads for Thanksgiving and/or Christmas specials. Properly written and displayed, these specials can generate new business which is always helpful during slow seasons.
- It's getting late to play catch up so stay on target. If your sales are behind, you need to adjust your overhead spending to be sure you don't blow through the money you are projecting as profits. It's easy to blow through profit and end the year with nothing (or worse) so check now and adjust if needed.
- Speaking of holidays, a few years ago we recommended [using pumpkins and Halloween in your marketing](#). There might still be time to get it together?
- Run a spot check on all company blades and bits. Dull ones cost time and money.
- Have you done a random drug test on your employees of late? If not, now would be a good time to do another round.
- Make amends with your family members, forgive and forget. Life is too short to be fussing with old fights and you don't need the distraction.
- Take time for your little ones and your spouse. It's the most precious gift you can give.

October

- If you do a good job of advertising now, you won't have downtime in January-February-March. Make sure that includes any needed updates to your website.
- There is good money in holiday lighting work, don't ignore it. Get a letter out to all your old customers that you install and take down lighting and ornaments, etc. They aren't mind readers – if you don't tell them you can do it, they won't call. With a little research you can find companies that will teach you how to do holiday lighting. Don't ignore this source of end-of-year income.
- How is your website? You should be getting 40-60% of your leads from your website. If not, see what needs to be changed and change it. If potential clients aren't finding you online, the problem is your website. Consider [MyOnlineToolbox's classes](#) to improve your website and start getting some good leads in the door.
- If sales are behind goals, it's too late to catch up. If sales and/or production are down, you need to reduce your overhead accordingly.
- Third quarter taxes are due. Get that distraction off your list of things as soon as possible.

- Send a letter to all your old customers reminding them to winterize their homes. Be sure and emphasize plugging foundation vents and covering hose bibs and maybe give them two or three other hints that will help them. You might also suggest that you can do it for however many dollars. You never know what new business this might turn up.
- Speaking of which, check the maintenance schedule for your office building. Be sure and schedule winterizing your building.
- Start gearing up mentally for the end of year review and planning beginning in November. Having a plan gives you a guideline to start the new year. You can read about how to do this drill here: [Planning Part 1 and Planning Part 2](#).
- Start planning to spend the Thanksgiving four-day weekend with your family and an equal amount of time off at Christmas. The most important thing you have is your family; plan now so you can invest the time.
- Have you taken that special someone in your life out on a date recently? A nice dinner out, maybe a movie would be great. Work on the flame with your flame.

November

- Continue your ads for winter work (January – February – March) you need to be advertising in 5 to 6 different mediums to attract the most leads. The best is a good website, we recommend contacting Brian Javeline at MyOnlineToolbox.com to develop a website that generates leads.
- Start planning ads for spring work (April – May – June)
- It is also time to get your ads out for your “Thanksgiving to Christmas Specials”. Send a postcard to old customers wishing them a Happy Thanksgiving. Let them know you are still interested in them and their homes and ask how you can help make their home a better place for them to live.
- Get out ads announcing that you install and take down Christmas decorations (if you do). This is a one way to help cover your overhead expenses and keep employees busy if things get slow because you didn’t advertise one full job cycle back. There are several companies out there doing training on holiday lighting. Look them up and see what training and materials they have available.
- If your sales and production are off, you must reduce your overhead spending the same amount. If you do not, your profits will vanish by the end of this year.
- Schedule the start date for your yearend review and planning for the coming year. This process should run November 15 to December 31. Do the drill. The growth in profitability you get out of this exercise is based on the amount of effort you put into it. Good stuff in, good stuff out! Read more on how to go about year end planning [in these articles](#) and [watch our class](#) on the topic.
- Schedule a yearly review for all employees. Schedule this individual meeting sometime during the month of December and your review(s) should be completed by the middle of January at the latest. When you’re done, have them read and sign the employee manual again. Every employee should be asked to sign it, every year. That will help reduce many if not most employee related problems for you over the coming year.
- If you haven't already, start or finish writing your Business Plan. It coincides very well with the planning you are already doing for next year. Companies with a business plan always do far better

than those who haven't taken the time to write one. We talk about how to write a business plan in this article on our website.

- Start a review of your company contract. If you have had any problem jobs this year, develop language for your contract to plug any holes that caused problems in last year.
- Check the maintenance schedule for your office building. Make sure you are ready for winter. Get your pipes wrapped and your vents blocked. Install your heat tapes on pipes that are exposed to the wind and cold. Winter is on its way. Get your vehicles ready for winter as well.
- Once again, I want to remind you to be careful with bonuses. Thanksgiving bonus, Christmas bonus, year-end bonus. If you give bonuses, don't label them, or they could be considered part of your pay package whether that's your intent or not. It only takes one employee or former employee to complain to the state about a Christmas bonus that wasn't received, and you could end up having to pay said bonus whether your company made a profit or not. Bonuses should only be paid at the discretion of the company owner. The company owner should decide how much, when and what for. Put the terms of how any bonus can be earned and paid in your employee manual that all employees are required to read and sign.
- Schedule a time now to take your wife/husband out to see the holiday lights, look at store windows, and wander through the shopping malls or whatever. It's a great way to spend time together and chat. Have you ever eaten a roasted chestnut? Give it a try.

December

- You should be planning your advertising now for spring work (April, May, June).
- Now is the time to send a card or letter to previous customers, and even leads you didn't sell this year, wishing them Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays, and thanking them for their business or interest in your company. Remind them that if they know anyone who needs help on a project, you'll be glad to give them a call. Include an extra business card or two for them to hand out.
- It's not too early to start assembling this year's tax info. Set the goal of getting the information together and to your CPA by the end of January. Make sure they understand that you want your taxes filed by Feb. 28. Don't let them put you off to the last minute.
- Hold your yearly corporate meeting. It's a necessary distraction, so just get it done.
- As I mentioned in November, never label a bonus to employees as a Christmas or Year End bonus. Make sure you spell out in your employee manual that any bonuses to be paid to any employee at any time are at the sole discretion of the owner both in regards to the time paid and the amount paid, and there is no promise of any bonus at any time.
- Let your spouse know how important and special they are. Tell them you love them every day. Have you found that something special for them for Christmas?
- One last thing. It's easy to get into scums with family members over time. If you are in one, take the initiative and get it resolved. It doesn't matter who is right or wrong, get it cleaned up. You'll enjoy the holidays much more if you have family business cleaned up and can greet everyone with a smile and a hug.