

round not rectangular

Kent Annis came up with the design for the Radius 360 after trying to solve one of his own surface prep problems

Have you seen the commercial for Breath Right® nasal strips where the inventor of the product says that, after trying repeatedly to find a solution to his snoring problems, it hit him that the device needed to be “outside the nose not inside?” Kent Annis, president of Full Circle International Inc., could do a similar commercial for the Radius 360° sanding tool. A professional drywaller by trade, Kent had continual problems with rectangular pole sanders that made sanding tedious and yielded less than desirable re-

sults. Then one day it hit him that the head needed to be “round not rectangular,” and the Radius 360° has been gaining market share ever since.

Kent and his wife, Natalie, were so convinced that the Radius 360° design was a winner that they cashed in their life savings, sold Natalie’s financial planning business and formed FCI in 2003. While the couple admits that starting the business from scratch was tougher than they thought, they were able to launch the Radius 360° in just one year and quickly proved that their hunch about the product was correct.

● **Nick’s Porterhouse of Paints, a paint store in Champaign, Ill., latched onto the Radius 360° because customers had heard about it and asked for it. As a result, “We sold out of our opening order in the first two days,” says Nick Lyons, owner. “Our employees have seen this item fly off the shelf.”**



● **The design of the Radius 360° is like no other on the market. Due to its uniqueness and resourcefulness, the Radius 360° has generated quite a bit of attention in the time it has been available to retailers.**

“Coming into 2007, our sales were more than 300 percent higher than 2005,” said Kent. “It’s amazing how simple the Radius 360° is, and yet people are just mesmerized by it,” he added, noting that the product is a show-stopper wherever he demonstrates it.

Hitting on the Idea

Like the Breathe Right® creator, Kent himself is an avid user of the product he created. A marketing and business major, Kent was studying at North Dakota State University when a friend one summer convinced him to come to Minneapolis to help install drywall. The business was so lucrative that Kent stayed and ended up opening his own drywall installation firm in 1996. Kent soon learned that the sanding portion of drywalling was the most profitable. As a result, the firm started to specialize in it and, at its busiest, was sanding as many as 1,000 houses a year.



Kent was happy with his success but unhappy with the tools that were on the market. Virtually unchanged since the 1950s, conventional rectangular sanders have small heads that make sanding large areas labor-intensive. The sandpaper is tricky to attach to the rectangular head and typically has too much slack once in place. The slack in turn makes it difficult for the sandpaper to maintain a firm contact with the substrate, traps debris between the sandpaper and the sanding head, and often wears down the sandpaper before the job is finished.

Even more problematic, the heads on rectangular pole sanders are prone to flipping over whenever end users make a directional change (similar to some of the pivoting-head mops currently on the market). Flipping not only breaks the end users' flow of motion but also can harm the underlying substrate.

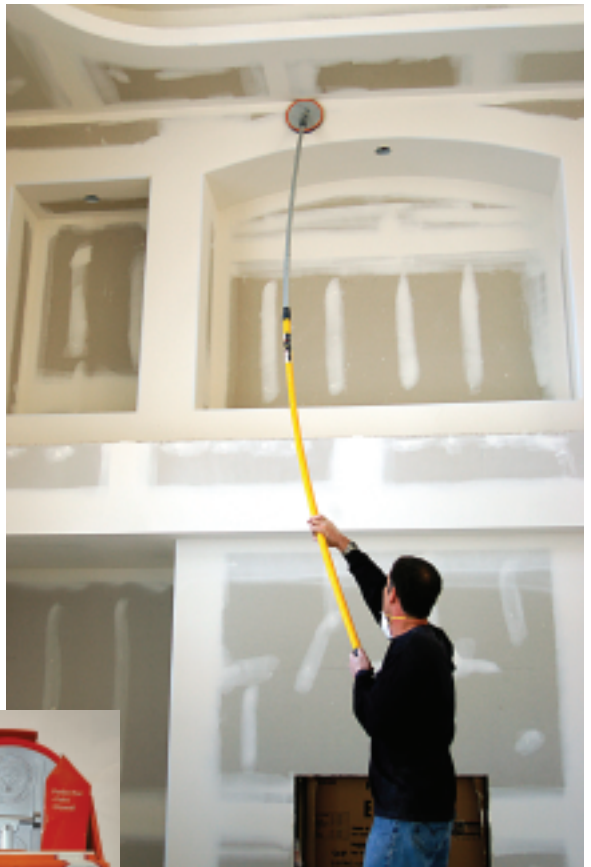
Power sanders, meanwhile, also are challenging in certain applications, such as when sanding heavy knockdown textures. "Because the power sander is orbital and you need to use a fairly coarse paper to remove the hard compound or overspray, the final finish often has swirls and uneven sanding marks," Kent reported.

Kent found the solution to all of these problems after a contractor he knew had been sanding heavy knockdown ceiling texture overspray with a power sander. The contractor had moved on to a rectangular pole sander when he ended up running out of sheet sandpaper. "So, being resourceful, he took a worn-down, round power sander disc and glued it to the conventional pole sander using spray adhesives," said Kent. "He showed me this, and instantly the proverbial light bulb popped on for me. I immediately went home and cut a circle out of an old bread board, fixed it to a pole sander pivot and glued a power sander pad to it."

Kent recalled that there were several flaws in his original concept—for example, the pivot bracket was too narrow—but as Kent perfected the design, he knew he had a sanding tool that was

unlike anything else on the market.

The Radius 360° today features a round head and wide-pivot brackets that virtually eliminate flipping, even when end users have extended the pole to its full length. The foam pad on the head is 1/2-inch thick and 9 inches in diameter to form securely to the wall and give the end user 100-percent sandpaper/substrate contact. Both the foam pad and sanding disc utilize a hook-and-loop backing, making them easy to replace. The hook-and-loop



design keeps the sanding disc firmly attached to the foam pad, preventing debris from collecting behind the disc and eliminating any slack. The head also has a unique rubber bumper that prevents damage to butting walls and other adjacent surfaces.

With its unique design, the Radius 360° has become a favorite tool of contractors as well as do-it-yourselfers who appreciate the smooth glide, full range of motion and professional results they can achieve with it. Part of the fascination the product holds for people is that it doesn't spin, said Kent. "Being a round tool that is not orbital, the concept is somewhat counter-intuitive," he reported.

Product testimonies bear out that customers not only have come to grasp the concept of the Radius 360° but also

● **The Radius 360° is versatile and it covers a large area, which makes it a big hit among contractors.**

prefer it to other sanding tools. Kent and Natalie initially sent out more than 700 free Radius 360° sanders to large contractors, union instructors and industry veterans who praised its performance.

Among those who endorsed the Radius 360° is Myron Ferguson, known as "That Drywall Guy" in the building industry. Ferguson is a veteran drywall contractor who travels all over the country doing hands-on shows at industry events. He also writes regular columns on drywall topics for several industry publications, including "The Journal of Light Construction," and is the author of "Techniques for Great Results" and several other drywall how-to books sold in major book stores. Many large contracting firms likewise have endorsed the Radius 360°, both by word of mouth and on their Internet Web sites.

As gratifying as these testimonials have been, Kent and Natalie wanted quantifying proof that end users were achieving the results they reported. As

as a result, FCI recently commissioned a couple of studies through the Painters Chat Room on the Internet as well as with *Handy Magazine* to put numbers behind the success stories.

In the Painters Chat Room study, the Radius 360° received a 100-percent approval rating, with contractors stating that the tool was more than 51 percent faster than conventional sanding methods. In the *Handy Magazine* study, the Radius 360° received a 96-percent approval rating. The 135 participants in the study, who included both professional remodelers and DIYers, said the tool was 60.4 percent faster than other sanders.

Faster sanding is a benefit for contractors in particular—not only because time is money for professionals but also because they tend to do a lot more sanding than you might think. It's not unusual for contractors to pick up their sanders many times in the course of a job.

"In fact, 60 percent of the contractors we talk to tell us that they always sand after they prime the walls and often sand between subsequent coats," said Kent. "This is for proper adhesion between coats of paint as well as for surface prep for a quality finish." Additionally, contractors as well as DIYers report that they use the Radius 360° for sanding coats of polyurethane on hardwood floors and for sanding decks after using a power washer.

Expanding on the Idea

Since launching the Radius 360°, FCI has expanded its distribution throughout the United States, almost exclusively through drywall supply shops, lumberyards and independent paint and decorating stores. The company currently has 57 sales reps covering all 50 states. FCI also has extended its reach overseas, with sales strong in Western Europe, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia.

To support the product in-store, FCI has developed several merchandising options for dealers, several of which won't be available until next month.



● Pictured (from left) are some of the key personnel with Full Circle International Inc.: Mike Collins, vice president of business development; Jackie Erie, accounts receivable; Stacey Meier, office manager; Jeff Annis, sales representative; Natalie Annis, chief financial officer; and Kent Annis, president.

For smaller stores that don't have much floor space for a free-standing point-of-purchase display, FCI has a pre-packaged shelf pack that can hold four Radius 360° tools, three different grits of Level 360 sanding discs and a hook-and-loop foam replacement pad. The shelf pack also can be customized to hold only sanding discs and replacement pads. According to Kent, larger stores might use the free-standing floor display and install the shelf pack on a nearby wall for maximum exposure.

The company also is introducing a sidekick display for end caps. The display will be modular and comes with a base that gives retailers the option of converting it into a free-standing display.

Merchandisers aside, the mere design of the Radius 360° often draws customers' attention to it in the store. "We have heard success story after success story from proactive (store) managers who put the Radius 360° on or near the front counter. Because of the high-quality powder coat finish, the round shape and the bright orange bumper, customers always ask, 'What is that?'" reported Kent. The opening question inevitably leads to a discussion about the new tool, the importance of sanding to the final paint finish and, ultimately, a sale.

"Our dealers who move the most

tools and sandpaper simply tell the contractor, 'Take the Radius 360° and if you don't love it, bring it back and we will refund your money,'" said Kent.

FCI additionally has launched a companion product to the Radius 360°, called the Flex Edge. The Flex Edge helps end users finish off their sanding projects by getting deep into corner areas.

According to Kent, if the Radius 360° is comparable to a paint roller in that it can cover large surfaces quickly, the Flex Edge is like a corner paint pad or roller. "To achieve a professional paint job, you need a specialty tool for the inside corners," he said. "The Flex Edge corner tool serves this same purpose when sanding."

Kent believes that Flex Edge, like the Radius 360°, will fill a niche in the drywall and painting markets that has been lacking for some time. As a result, like the Breathe Right® inventor, Kent has confidence that his products will produce the same satisfaction for other end users as they have for him.

"Without high-quality sanding, the painter cannot produce a high-quality finish no matter how talented he or she is," Kent said. "Our goal is to make sanding faster and easier with better results. We are confident that we have done our homework and have created the best tools for the job." ■