

The WETTER the better!

After last year's drought, things appear to be turning more fluid for spouting and guttering. Is business flowing or still a little clogged up? **Phil Weafer** reports.

AFTER LAST YEAR'S drought, the market for spouting and guttering was a little clogged up. But people in the category say the market is definitely looking up and hopes for some more wet weather seem to be coming to fruition as we enter into winter.

Marley's **Scott Townsend** says the outlook for the market in general is a positive one, with the building activity evident in Auckland and Christchurch the main factors: "I guess, like everyone else, we've seen an upswing with both Auckland and Christchurch building activity."

But he tempers this by pointing to some other areas that are somewhat stagnant: "There are definitely some regional areas where there is a lack of building activity. I think Hawke's Bay is a good example of that. Obviously Christchurch is a focus but Auckland has been really booming so that's positive for us across all of our markets."

From a cleaning and maintenance perspective, **Murray Brown** of Brown's Brushware looks at the impact that the growth in the housing market has had and will continue to have going forward.

"Growth in the domestic housing market is the obvious aspect of the building industry causing demand. Both trade and DIY activity are on the increase."

Brown sees this affecting the way in which consumers will look at home improvement and maintenance: "We believe consumers are being more selective about how they are going to approach home maintenance activity and are looking for a smart solution as a result."

RE-BUILD RE-SHAPING THE MARKET?

Kirk Oddy at Totara Industries is also looking forward to an upturn in business this year. Having made some adjustments to the firms products and manufacturing processes, the company has made good progress, he says.

"The last year has seen us make some significant changes and purchases within our processing plant, including the purchase of new blending and bottling equipment. These purchases have allowed us to add product lines we have not been able to manufacture in the past and reduce costs."

With the building industry seeing an obvious upturn in recent times, the market for spouting and guttering is also seeing some impressive returns and, casting around the category, this is expected to continue going forward. Has the market seen many changes as a result? And will it see more going forward?

Over at Marley, Scott Townsend says one key change in the market has been not only an increase in competition but also a change in where it's coming from. Townsend says that the opportunities presenting themselves in bustling regions such as Christchurch have seen overseas competition having a look at the New Zealand market.



And there has been an increase in import activity, according to Townsend: "Whether it's people here that are seeing an opportunity and importing from overseas or overseas companies that are looking at NZ as one of the top growth rates in the OECD. They look at New Zealand like 'they've got big building activity happening and it's worth our time'."

As points of origin for this overseas interest, Scott Townsend points to markets like North America where some suppliers and distributors may have surplus after a tough trading period in recent times.

Going forward, there is a positive air around the spouting and guttering category, however, there is a lingering danger of overseas imports meeting New Zealand standards, as Scott Townsend explains: "The key thing for us is a positive outlook on the market but there is definitely increasing competition. I guess the concern that many New Zealand manufacturers are facing is the overseas competition and that it meets New Zealand standards and performance requirements."

COMPETITION COMPLETELY POSITIVE

Of course, competition is not always a negative, and more often than not brings out the best in those involved.

Marley's Scott Townsend is one that takes the positive outlook with regards to competition: "It makes sure we're always coming up with new things. I think you need to take a positive outlook; competition breeds innovation. It keeps you on your toes and makes sure you don't get complacent about things."

The downside of increased competition, particularly at the value end of the market, Townsend says, is that because Marley is a well-known brand, consumers can sometimes associate an under-performing product with the company even when it is not a Marley product.

"A lot of our products are branded but some of them aren't. For example our downpipes don't have branding on them because they're an exterior product so it's very easy for someone to think that they are buying our products because a white downpipe is a white downpipe to the uninitiated so you can often have negative brand impact because of a product not performing that's not actually yours."

The impression from the suppliers I spoke with for this piece is that this competition is driving research and development into exciting areas and moving the market forward with innovative products the end result. Despite some of the negative connotations mentioned above, the general impression is that most in the market are welcoming competition and feel it will only enhance the economy.

Browns Brushware's Murray Brown isn't alone in seeing competition in the market as a positive: "Competition is a fact of life in the supply chain at any level and across channels, heightened



Cleaning at the end of a hose

Totara Industries has a pair of products suited to easily sprucing up a home's exterior. **Move-It Express Applicator** is a hose-end sprayer designed as a "spray & leave" style moss and mould remover that allows you to cover 100m2 in just 5 minutes. You simply attach the bottle to the garden hose, turn on the water and the bottle does all the mixing. A 5 litre refill product is also available.

Move-It Outdoor Glass & House Wash is also designed to attach to the end of a hose and is also self-mixing. This hose-on, rinse-off application leaves glass streak free and cladding and guttering clean. A 5 litre refill product is also available. An explanatory video is viewable at the website below.

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consumer or end user demand fuels competition and innovation. It's clear that there is increased demand in the main centres along with other regions."

Talking of other regions, although the key areas of focus when it



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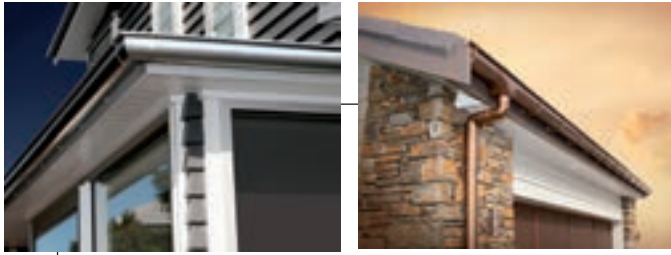
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comes to growth are unquestionably Auckland and Christchurch, much is also planned around the Tauranga area.

Marley's Scott Townsend is amongst those that point to Tauranga as an area that will see an upturn in activity after some quiet years: "Tauranga had previously slowed down a bit but I think there are a couple of sub-divisions down there that are going ahead which will be really positive for them."

CLEANING UP YOUR ACT

One thing that must be acknowledged is the fact that cleaning the gutters has become one of the most vilified household tasks in recent years. It is, however, a task that is widely recognised among consumers as a "must-do" chore.

Driving home the message of just how important upkeep and maintenance of guttering systems is, Murray Brown says the awareness is certainly there among end users and the importance is not lost on them: "It's our opinion that homeowners are increasingly aware of the benefits of a preventative maintenance program season by season for roofing, guttering and spouting."

Brown goes on to emphasise the importance of cleaning particularly for those who rely on roof catchment of water for drinking or irrigation purposes: "Essentially they want the guttering to do what it's designed to do and that is to catch and distribute roof water run-off to best benefit in the cleanest form."

Speaking about the company's Move-It cleaning products, Totara Industries' Kirk Oddy says all this has meant growth for the company and the development of new and innovative product lines, making the important task of cleaning easier for the end user.

Oddy also says that consumers recognise the importance of keeping gutters and spouting clean and clear: "Guttering, spouting and roofing are the key to capturing water and keeping your home dry, keeping it clean lengthens the life of your investment and provides cleaner, healthier drinking water, it is one of the most important maintenance tasks around the house."

RETAINING CUSTOMERS THROUGH RETAILERS

The relationship between suppliers and retailers has become as important as ever, with many suppliers looking to support their retail partners and vice-versa in the market for spouting and guttering. Murray Brown talks about the "domino effect" that is the sales process.

"We believe the retail shopping experience is still key to the consumer and product education is essential and should be a domino effect from supplier to retailer and from retail staff to consumer. A successful consumer experience with a product creates an ongoing trust and good sales advice lasts long after the purchase is made."

Kirk Oddy at Totara Industries is also quick to emphasise that an informed retailer will do best. "Knowledge retail staff are key to our success and it's our job as suppliers to arm them with as much knowledge as possible. Along with point of sale material, we back up our retail staff training with our help-line, our website's information video, the FAQs and email response form. Without informed retail staff we are just one amongst many."

We leave the last word to Murray Brown who sums the category up nicely: "Where there are roofs, rain and leaves there is a demand for effective and well maintained roof water catchment. New Zealand still gets its fair share of precipitation so we expect demand to continue." And long may it do so. **NZHR**



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