

Buyers' Guide: All the products and companies you need

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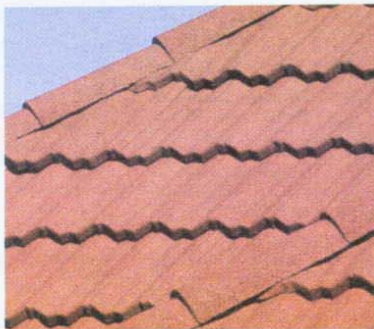
## SHINGLE

### Review 2005

A comprehensive look at metal shingle, shake and tile products – from ASC to Zappone

#### Also Inside:

- | Safety for metal roofers
- | METALCON wins big in Vegas



# GO GUTTER OPPORTUNITIES

Ideas for contractors interested in rain handling systems

## Mind in the gutter

Do not mix metals in a gutter system — water flowing over copper will damage unprotected aluminum.

Source: Berger Bros.

## Professionalism breeds success

Education, networking help startup gutter company grow quickly

**A**sk the owner of a reputable gutter installation company to name the biggest problem in the gutter industry, and there's a good chance he'll tell you there is a glut of gutter companies in his area, too many of them of the fly-by-night variety. If a saturated market could be considered problem 1, then lower margins and a lack of professionalism would be 1a and 1b, both symptoms of an industry where anyone with \$5,000 and a truck can get in the game.

Carlos De Sousa of New England Gutter Kings is proving that by addressing 1b, 1a is less of a problem.

"In the remodeling business, most guys bring no level of professionalism," he says. "To me, that was the easiest part. Having a professional background, understanding how customers want to be treated — using that and a few other principles, we've been able to grow rapidly."

De Sousa's background is in information technology, and he spent much of his 20s working as a computer consultant. He had a solid list of clients, but the demanding tech industry was wearing on him, and he set a personal goal to start a full-time business by the time he was 30. But what type of business?



New England Gutter Kings has doubled its revenue in each of its five years thanks to a high level of professionalism, including training and networking with other gutter professionals. GUTTER KINGS PHOTOS

About eight years ago, De Sousa bought his first home, and when he tried to find a gutter installer, he couldn't find a single soul to perform the task. "All kinds of people promised me they were going to come, and I was calling them on a weekly basis, but they never showed up," he says. "I went through

this with three or four people, before a friend of mine told me he'd hang the gutter for me."

With labor accounted for, all De Sousa had to do was procure materials. When the driver dropped by on a Saturday morning to make his delivery, the seed was planted in De Sousa's mind.

## Gutter Spotlight

### Waterloov

The Waterloov Gutter Protection System is fastened to new or existing gutters to keep out gutter clogging debris. It is made of .024 aluminum and available in four standard colors: white, royal brown, cream, and bronze. The product has a 20-year warranty against cracking or peeling on the painted finish.

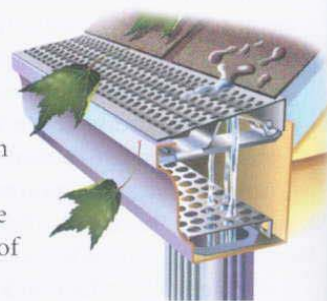
Circle reader service number 30.



### Englert

Gutter Tunnel is a new dual filtration system that protects gutters from debris. It is made of two heavy-gauge aluminum debris filters, one on top of the gutter and one inside. It can be installed on existing conventional gutters without interfering with shingles and without installing clips, and comes in 3-foot sections.

Circle reader service number 31.





The company recently introduced its King Cover, a gutter protection system manufactured with equipment from Gutter Wizards.

“He was there for under 10 minutes, dropped off the materials, and split,” he says. “That sounded like a pretty good deal. I paid \$300 for the material, and based on what I understood about material costs, I knew there was a nice sized markup. I thought that wasn’t a bad gig.”

De Sousa learned more about the gutter and remodeling business from friends in the industry, then found a couple of guys and started Gutter Kings out of his garage. He kept his full-time IT job, and had to get creative to drum up business, but the company made it, and five years later is thriving in the Chelmsford, Mass., area. Revenues have doubled every year, and may exceed that in 2004.

A commitment to professional growth has played a large part in the company’s fortunes, as De Sousa and his company have traveled the country in search of ways to improve their sales, installation, and overall operational procedures.

For instance, the company sent a contingent to Austin, Texas, to take part in the “gutter boot camp” run by Bill Frazier, aka Austin Gutterman. One session dealt with a gutter industry sore spot — safety. De Sousa picked up the idea to hold monthly “truck days,” in which employees would undergo safety training, as well as tool and vehicle inspections, at the shop.

The Gutter Kings also picked up some pointers on an ongoing sore spot for contractors: hiring and retaining dependable labor. De Sousa found that

offering conventional perks like providing vacation and sick time were not effective at retaining promising employees. Education, however, is. “It hit me like a ton of bricks — you grow your own,” he says. “You take someone with potential, provide them with skills, and you can have a great employee.”

In addition to taking part in gutter boot camp, Gutter Kings employees have also traveled to Michigan to take part in product training, and De Sousa has become an active member of the American Association of Rain Carrying System Installation Specialists, often participating in the group’s e-mail group

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## GUTTER OPPORTUNITIES

discussions. It's all part of instilling a feeling of professionalism.

"Being a part of the IT business, I've gone to a thousand conferences in my life, and you actively need two weeks worth of training every year to keep current, so I've always seen the value in training," De Sousa says. "That's one of the reasons I've sought out these oppor-

tunities. Some of the guys in the organization were a little hesitant, didn't see the value in going. They didn't think they'd get much out of it.

"One of our managers, he's been in the business almost 20 years, a sharp guy with an engineering background, he was a bit hesitant. But he came back singing a whole new tune. I told him if you go in there and

10 percent of the information you picked up was new, it was worthwhile."

The Gutter Kings install primarily 5-inch .032 aluminum gutter, as dictated by regional style, and run the gutters on machines from Jobsite and Knudson. The northeast Massachusetts home building market is booming, and even though De Sousa aimed to take a small piece of the pie, the pie was big enough to make it worthwhile. The Gutter Kings land about a quarter of their work by fulfilling one a basic tenet of professionalism: keeping appointments. "We close at least 50 percent, and out of those half go with us just because we show up at the time of the estimate," De Sousa says.

To address the problem of tight margins, the Gutter Kings recently began

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### Berger Brothers joins forces with Gutter World

Berger Bros. and Gutter World have teamed up to offer the largest selection of K-style and half-round gutter guards in the industry. Available in copper, aluminum, PVC, and steel, these gutter guards come in a variety of styles and sizes.

K-style gutter offerings include expanded metal drop-in with reinforced edges, expanded metal hinged, expanded metal lock-on, solid snap-in PVC, diamond shaped snap-in PVC, and the new metal Gutter Shingle.

Half-round gutter offerings include the expanded metal hinged. These styles can accommodate, 5-, 6-, or 7-inch gutters. Most are fabricated in 36-inch lengths with some in 48-inch lengths.



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*The Gutter Kings recently began selling a King Cover system, backing it with a no-clog guarantee. The system has performed well.*

offering a gutter protection product, which they make themselves with equipment from Gutter Wizards. De Sousa has sold the product, which has been dubbed the King Cover, cautiously, and backed it up with a no-clog guarantee. "We didn't want to make a huge push, then find out we have a problem with it," he says. "It rained plenty this summer, and we've gone out and looked at the product in action after it was installed, and it's been successful. The feedback we've gotten has been great, and we're going ahead with it."

The company is also going ahead with plans to add five more full-time employees, including a salesperson and gutter cleaners. De Sousa prefers to hire workers without prior gutter hanging experience — less bad habits to break, and easier to immerse in a professional environment. ■

### Calling all gutter installers

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