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Adjustable Scaffolding

Squeezing Out Every Dollar

By Justin Breithaupt
Owner, Non-Stop Scaffolding



McKinney Masonry uses Non-Stop Junior scaffolding as a way to work faster and double profits.

Photo courtesy of Non-Stop Scaffolding

If you're like most mason contractors, the way you get your work is to carefully estimate a job, submit your bid, hope it holds up to the negotiating, shopping and bargaining, and then finally win the contract. When you do, it's up to you to find ways to turn out a quality job that keeps everyone happy, while also keeping as much of that money for yourself.

It's a fact that you can't reduce the amount of materials to save money; the only number you can reduce is labor. Every dollar you *don't* pay out in labor converts to pure profit. This article focuses on creative, hands-on techniques your fellow mason contractors use for saving time and dollars.

Simply Working Faster

Mark McKinney, owner of McKinney Masonry in Tremont, Miss., is a young, up-and-coming contractor who has been in commercial masonry for about two years. "It's tough to get good, dependable people," he said. "My pay is right in there with my competitors', so to compete we have to get the job done faster."

McKinney employs 10 to 12 men full-time and keeps a watch on all of the jobs himself to be sure the work moves smoothly. "We get our jobs done about 20 percent faster by using our Non-Stop Junior scaffolding. That saves me a lot of money," he said. "We never have to stop working to move to another wall or to hop plank."

When asked about other advantages he gains by using the lightweight adjustable scaffolding, McKinney said, "I am really safety-conscious and this is the safest scaffolding I've seen. The guardrails and everything go up with you, and there's no erection or dismantle. The bricklayers love it, too. Choosing between working for my competitor on frames or working for me on towers, they'd rather be here where they don't strain their back."

High-lift Grouting

Randy Jensen is the vice president of Coastal Masonry Inc., in Pompano Beach, Fla., and inventor of the Smart Masonry Clean-out System (www.masonrystore.com). He has been involved in the masonry contracting business since 1969 and has studied production enhancement



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methods his entire career.



Randy Jensen invented this reusable window to solve the problem of neatly sealing off a clean-out. It allows for easy inspection and lets Coastal Masonry use high-grouting techniques to save thousands in labor.

Photo courtesy of Non-Stop Scaffolding

your labor number is *many times higher* than your profit number — double, triple, or more. Working on continuous climbing scaffolding ... and utilizing high-lift grouting techniques is the absolute peak of efficiency."

Jensen's company built five identical schools, each with 60,000 blocks — two were built the conventional way, while the other three were built using the high-lift grouting method. The labor cost on the last three averaged 27 percent less than the first two. Said Jensen, "That makes your profit come out triple what you estimated."

To employ high-lift grouting every day, some obstacles had to be overcome. "We have to educate the inspectors we work with because most of them don't understand masonry, and even the difference between a lift and a pour," Jensen said. As many of you know, a lift is when grout is poured five feet at a time, vibrated or "rodded" to consolidate it, and then allowed to sit for approximately 30 minutes for the block to begin to absorb some of the water and the grout to begin to set. A pour is when you repeat the process again and again at consecutively higher elevations.

Another obstacle is the use of clean-outs. To overcome this, Jensen invented the Smart Masonry Clean-out System, a clear plastic window that is fastened over the clean-out opening with a special plastic T-bolt and nut that works like a toggle bolt to hold the window in place.

When asked how exactly it saves his company money, Jensen said, "The obvious biggest savings are running the walls up 24 feet instead of four feet. On the grouting end, we set up and make only one pour instead of three of four, we have one inspection instead of many, we only have one mess to clean up, we order less grout overall, and we save on rebar laps. In fact, saving three feet of rebar pays for the system. Being able to see the rebar placement, that it's lapped and tied correctly, and watching the grout go in place properly has put the inspectors' and engineers' minds completely at ease about high-lift grouting."

The new ACI 530.1-05 specification now defines low-lift grouting as 12'8", and it is part of the new 2006 International Building Code by reference. This new code should help engineers and inspectors better understand grout placement.



"Stopping and moving your crew is the single most expensive thing masons do," he said. "The key is to get your men working and keep them in that productive rhythm. If you stop to grout every four feet, you break their rhythm and you lose production. It takes at least 30 minutes to get them back into a productive rhythm on the next wall. But, if you can increase production by 25 percent by eliminating downtime, the profit increase is exponential. Twenty-five percent of

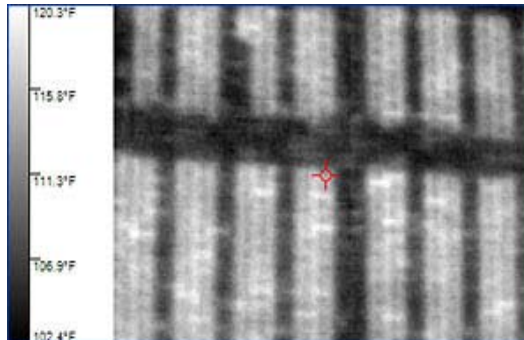
If you have any questions about high- or low-life grouting, contact the Mason Contractors Association of America for more information at (800) 536-2225.

Saving Proactively

Dean Crowell, owner of WordCo, a mason contractor in Wilkesboro, N.C., builds a lot of Wal-Mart stores and other fast-track commercial work. "Moving as fast as we do, we have to head off problems before they occur," he said. "We have a quality control crew who documents how we do all our work. For instance, one of our biggest nightmares would be for a GC to question the grout placement in a completed project. That would hold up our money, and we might have to spend thousands just to prove we actually did it right the first time.

"In order to head that off, our quality control crew makes an infrared image of every wall we build. You can see exactly where the grout is, and if there's a problem we can fix it right then."

Crowell has used his quality control program to gain Wal-Mart's trust. He can build their stores quickly and to their specifications. He gives them a quality product and backs it up with proof. He can also keep up with Wal-Mart's schedule, and credits adjustable scaffolding as one of the key elements.



This thermal image of a section of a block wall shows WordCo exactly how well they poured their grout. If a void or other deficiency is found, it can be repaired immediately.

Photo courtesy of Non-Stop Scaffolding

"We can get a lot of scaffolding to the job easily and our men can set it up in no time," he said. "We move 217 feet at a time from wall to wall in about three hours. It's amazingly fast."

As walls are completed, WordCo cleans up, points up, and has the GC's people sign off immediately. This may seem a bit overboard, but it helps WordCo get paid quickly and eliminates callbacks after the job is finished.

Justin Breithaupt Jr. is the owner of Non-Stop Scaffolding Inc. He has been involved with elevating scaffolding and the masonry business since 1975, when his father invented a tower scaffolding system for their own masonry business.

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