

BUILDING BUSINESS WITH CHIMNEY CAPS — WITHOUT BUILDING LIABILITY

by Derek Lidstrom,
President, Chimney King

Chimney caps known variously in the industry as decorative shrouds, windscreens, coops and crowns, have been around for roughly two decades. Their primary purpose was to take away the industrial look of bare metal pipes coming out of a chimney and replace it with a decorative "crown" that would add a pleasing design element to the architecture of a home.

But as the years have passed, another concern has arisen: that of *safety*. On the

ashes of several devastating home fires in California that called attention to the dangers of untested shrouds, eight major fireplace manufacturers signed a moratorium in 1990 voiding all manufacturers' warranties on prefab fireplaces if homeowners used a chimney cap that was not approved by Underwriters Laboratories. The Catch-22 was that no attractive chimney caps had *ever* been UL-approved.

The effect of the moratorium has been twofold. First, it left a serious void in the marketplace because none of the small companies that produced chimney shrouds had the time and money required to obtain a UL listing. Many of them simply gave up and closed up shop.

Today, to my knowledge, the only company that is pursuing the UL-approved label is Chimney King, which is working with all major fireplace manufacturers to secure UL approval for its Chimney Crowns(TM). Chimney King's Chimney Crowns are currently under study at Underwriters Laboratories in Northbrook, Illinois, to set up testing guidelines for Chimney King's entire line of caps. Because chimney caps must be UL-approved for use with each particular fireplace, Chimney King is also in various stages of discussion with major manufacturers to acquire this important protection.

The second effect of the moratorium has been to make both distributors and installers of chimney caps vulnerable to *lawsuits* in the event of a house fire. By voiding their warranties, fireplace manu-

facturers have eliminated their liability and, in effect, passed the buck to others in the industry. That makes it imperative that fireplace stores, chimney sweeps and others who sell and install prefab fireplaces use only UL-approved chimney caps or face serious consequences in court.

It also means that it is no longer advisable to hire a local sheet metal shop to fabricate a shroud. It's like getting behind the wheel of a car without having insurance. The perils are simply too great.

An Important Business Opportunity

On the other hand, these new developments in the chimney cap arena present an excellent opportunity to build incremental new and repeat business. Substantial numbers of new prefabricated capless chimneys are installed each year. Millions of others sit, bald-headed on roof-lines everywhere. Each one represents a chance to generate extra income for the fireplace distributors and chimney sweeps who sell and service this market.

Consider the retrofit market in particular. For the distributor, chimney crowns offer a handsome effect that can create add-on business with little effort. For the chimney sweep, who is the logical choice for installation, chimney crowns are not only moneymakers themselves but an important foot in the door. When you're installing a cap, you can check fireplace pipes for tar buildup or disconnects, remind homeowners that prefab fireplaces need to be cleaned every three to five years and either do the work then if needed or put that customer

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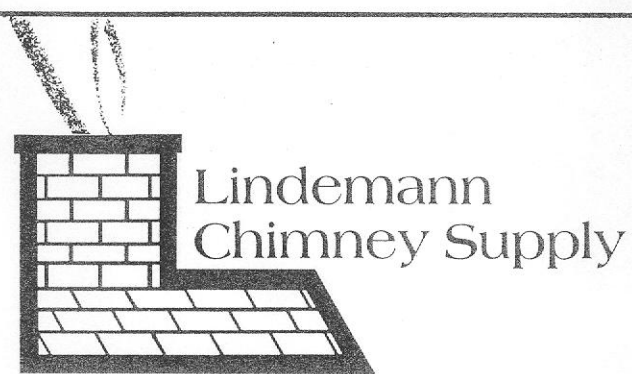
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on your list for followup. Conversely, if you're there to clean a chimney and there is no "crown" on the homeowner's castle, you can educate the customer about chimney caps and create new business that way.

Because of the opportunity, Chimney King is in the process of establishing a *Certified Installer Program* that will benefit everyone in the distribution channel, particularly the chimney sweep who wishes to be certified by Chimney King. The program will work this way:

- When a fireplace distributor gets a request for a chimney cap, he will send a certified chimney sweep to the home for an evaluation.
- The sweep will identify the fireplace make and model, measure the top of the chimney, inspect fireplace pipes to determine if they should be swept and deliver the purchase order to the distributor.
- Chimney King will fulfill the order within two weeks and send it to the distributor for assembly.
- The sweep then will pick the crown up, install it and perform any necessary maintenance and chimney pipe adjustments. On his way out, he will leave the homeowner with a chimney pipe cleaning schedule and any other recommendations.

Because Chimney King Crowns are all custom-sized and delivered with a two-week turnaround, the distributor does not even need to stock product. The choice of three styles and five colors

(bronze, champagne, light gray, white and copper) gives ample options to the pickiest customers. A display with a crown atop a short chimney provides an excellent sales tool. And with 10-year guarantee against fading and rusting, Chimney King Chimney Crowns offer the quality that customers — and distributors — are looking for.

Conclusion

Finally with the eventuality of a UL-listed product from Chimney King that comes with 10-year guarantee, fireplace distributors and chimney sweeps can begin satisfying the demand for an attractive, aesthetically pleasing fireplace termination. CT

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the previous three options.

Once you have chosen the option that best meets your needs, setting it up will take some time. But when you've got it running, you will find it was worth the effort. Now with this information you can do mailings of your newsletters, reminder postcards, proposals, catalogs, and thank you notes quickly and easily. CT

SWEEPING THE MARKET

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The group closed out the day with a barbecue supper at the Astrohurst, a local country club. Sleeves were rolled up and napkins tucked under chins as the group enjoyed a delicious meal of barbecue ribs.



Ohio Chimney Service Association

Sunday was highlighted by the Ohio Chimney Service Association meeting chaired by President Ken Greer. Copperfield's Sooty Bob Daniels gave a "Sweep For Life" presentation before the sweeps in attendance enjoyed a lunch buffet sponsored by Copperfield.

"We had a great time visiting with our friends here in the midwest," concluded Bob Daniels. "We're proud to be a part of such a wonderful group of professionals."

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