

BUSINESS

Selling DIY grout restoration on LI using DIY sales plan

Michael Stracuzzi shows off his grout seal on a sidewalk at his Bay Shore shop. Sales now exceed \$800,000 a year. (Sept. 19, 2011) Credit: Steve Pfost

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Special to Newsday

October 3, 2011

When Michael Stracuzzi got a call from [DIY Network](#) producers to use his grout restoration product on a show, he opted against shipping it and instead offered to fly to California and demonstrate the product himself.

The result was that Stracuzzi, president of Grout Shield Distributors in [Bay Shore](#), got to appear on DIY's "[Hollywood](#) Hi-Tech" in August in a project converting a barn of actor [Patrick Warburton](#) into a home theater, according to the show's producer.

"Rather than completely redo the floor, we brought Michael in to redo the grout," says Shawn McMullen, a producer with Stage 3 Productions in Philadelphia, which produces the show. "It was cheap and quick and easy, and completely changed the look of it."

That appearance and a product spotlight on the Home Shopping Network the same month has led to new opportunities for Stracuzzi, who is working to get his products into more retail stores.

"It gave us a lot of exposure," says Stracuzzi, 48, who developed Grout Shield with a local chemist in 1996.

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His product line includes a Color Seal Kit to seal existing grout -- instead of ripping it out -- and change its color using an applicator brush. He also makes an enhancer to restore shine to worn tile and natural stone and a clear protector seal for new grout and concrete installations.

Stracuzza developed the color-seal product after working as a general contractor and hearing recurring homeowner complaints about dirty grout. Remedying the problem meant removing their grout and regrouting, a messy and costly job, says Stracuzza.

So after doing research and talking to chemical companies, he started developing different formulations -- more than 30 over a three-year period. He began testing his mix in 2000 in the homes of family and friends -- tweaking it along the way -- and in 2006 launched Grout Shield Distributors. He initially sold the product via the Internet to do-it-yourselfers.

"I started selling it in February '06, and within two months I made \$10,000," says Stracuzza, whose company now boasts annual sales of more than \$800,000.

The product's popularity prompted him to pursue retailers, and over the past two years he been selling his product in 14 tile stores on [Long Island](#), including World Tile in [Smithtown](#). Stracuzza says he is in talks with [Ace Hardware](#) and the Midwest home improvement chain Menards.

Locally he has visited several Ace stores, including the one in [East Setauket](#), to interest them in the color seal.

"It looks pretty impressive," says store owner Astrid Caropelo. "I'll give it a try and see how people receive it."

Michael Costello, president of Costello's Ace, which owns 18 Ace stores on [Long Island](#), was also impressed.

"It's an outstanding product," he says, noting the Color Seal Kit will retail for about \$19.95. "Michael did a demonstration at our newest store in [Rocky Point](#), and the consumer response was good."

Stracuzza has hired a national independent sales representative and hopes to be in 7,000 retail stores nationwide within two years. The product is already being sold internationally via licensing agreements with overseas contractors.

Still, he faces competition and earlier this year filed a lawsuit in federal court against a competitor in California. "They never trademarked their name," says [Al Salvo](#), co-owner of Miracle Sealants.

Despite the lawsuit, Stracuzza is only hopeful about the future. "I only see this company expanding," he notes.

FAST FACTS

500 Gallons of Grout Shield Stracuzza produces monthly.

100,000 Equivalent miles of floor and tile grout Stracuzza has restored over the past 10 years.

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