

Money For Some Things, Chips For Free



By Jason Nottestad
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A chip repair on a granite or engineered-stone countertop is one of the more-perplexing issues facing a fabricator, from both a customer-service and business perspective. While I've never found chip repair to be a satisfying activity, it's an essential skill to master.

I'VE YET TO COME ACROSS A CLIENT WHO FELT HE OR SHE SHOULD PAY TO GET A CHIP FIXED.

It's inevitable that a small percentage of homeowners or businesses will end up with impact damage to their countertops. A well-repaired chip can reassure your clients that the material they selected was the best one for their application and worth the expense.

The opposite is true for a poorly planned and executed repair. Your clients can start to question the other properties of their countertop, and all of a sudden you could be stuck trying to convince the Joneses that their stone is indeed stain-, scratch-, and heat-resistant. You're not going to get any product referrals at that point.



Photo courtesy Jason Nottestad

A homeowner called in a "material defect," but when I arrived the owner fessed up to causing the damage; since it's above a dishwasher, I politely suggested the likely culprit was a rambunctious pot or pan. I was halfway through the repair (using CA glue) when the husband showed up with the chip, which would've made the job a lot easier.

The real chip-repair paradox is this: The countertop that was well-fabricated and installed is now damaged, and Ms. Jones, or her designer, wants it fixed. For free.

I've yet to come across a client who felt he or she should pay to get a chip fixed. Never mind that they would gladly pay to have a dinged-up

cabinet door or appliance repaired; the general perception is that I should fix stone damage on my dime, even though the only promise I made in my contract was – you guessed it – a well-fabricated and installed countertop. Even when the contract spells out an hourly rate for repairs, the expectations of a free repair remain, for reasons mysterious to me.

If the residence or business is any distance from your shop, you can easily burn up a half day doing a chip repair. Do it for free, and you just gave away four hours of your billable business time. Charge for it at a rate that covers your costs, and you risk angering the K&B center that got you the job, or the homeowner who might get her neighbor to be your next customer.

Most of us can probably stomach doing a free repair every now and then. But when you extend forward the amount of linear feet your shop produces, and assume that a certain percentage will need a repair, it becomes clear that chip-repair requests can increase exponentially over the long term.

ANY POLICY, BY ITS VERY NATURE, IS NOT GOING TO PLEASE EVERYONE.

And, the longer a countertop is in place, the more likely it is to get a chip. I've had clients from years earlier call me requesting I come out to their place and fix a chip.

That's just for tops that need to be repaired once. I've dealt with several tops that ended up with multiple repairs. One gentleman kept dropping his whiskey bottle on the edge of his Uba Tuba countertop near his wet bar; I made four repair trips before his wife was simply too embarrassed to call me back for any more. My boss at the time, who was a really nice guy, ate the cost of all four trips.

One of my own clients ended up with 14 chips on the edge of her island top. I'm pretty sure her son was hitting the countertop edge with a knife handle for some inexplicable (read: crazy!) reason. When she asked me, in all honesty, if 14 chips was 'normal' for a granite kitchen, I assured her it was not and that it had nothing to do with the quality of the material. I fixed all 14 chips for free, and let her know the next trip would be billable.

Examples like these are the very reason each company needs to have a policy dealing with



Photo courtesy Jason Nottestad

This customer called to report a crack in her Azul Platino countertop, and I assumed I'd be dealing with a completely broken piece. What I found was a chip at the sink (left) that required a repair (above) instead of replacement.

chip repair. Since this policy is going to be like walking a tightrope between losing money and keeping clients happy, there probably needs to be enough leeway that the owners can deal with repairs on a case-by-case basis.

Your sales staff is always going to want to give away a chip repair to keep clients happy, while your production staff is always going to want to bill the repair to keep their numbers strong. I've heard of some companies dealing with chip repair by adopting a "squeaky wheel gets the grease" mentality: Bill all chip repairs, and credit the people who complain.

One company I worked with put a one-year post-installation window on free repairs. Another put on a trip charge for road time, but didn't charge anything for the repair.

Any policy, by its very nature, is not going to please everyone. Chip repair is no exception, and each company is going to need to find a comfortable balance between customer service and the bottom line.

With Midwest Template Service, we averaged about five chip repairs a year. If they were our clients, we didn't charge for our work. We also repaired chips on countertops other companies installed but wouldn't do the follow-up work. These we always billed out for both travel and work time.

While we were at the house fixing the chip, we often were asked to recaulk sinks and backsplash, and sometimes pretty up the seams. As long as the client understood we were billing by the hour, I had no problem doing the work.

On the face of it, a free chip repair on a countertop someone else installed might seem like a good way to get your foot in the door

VT Stone Surfaces Extends Edge Promotion

In an effort to bring distributors the finest granite and quartz surfaces at the most competitive price, VT Stone Surfaces is extending the edge promotional pricing through the end of the year.

This edge promotion offers **FREE** fabrication for the Basic 2 cm and Basic 3 cm edge groups and discounted pricing on all other edge profile groups. The promotional pricing is available for Caesarstone quartz, Silestone quartz, and granite. With the Basic 2 cm edge group you save \$11 per linear foot and \$22 per linear foot with the Basic 3 cm edge group.

Also available from VT Stone Surfaces is a full line of accessory items. VT can furnish Integra color matching seam adhesive for your Caesarstone, Silestone, ECO by Cosentino, and granite surfacing needs as well as other items such as chip repair kits, fasteners, and clips. VT Stone Surfaces is your source for all your stone surface installation needs from start to finish.

California Stone Surfaces Manager Named

VT Industries is proud to announce that Justin Zuschlag will manage the daily operations and oversee production at the new Stone Surfaces facility located in La Mirada, Calif. Zuschlag has been in the stone, granite, and engineered stone business for six years and has a background in production and management.



Justin Zuschlag

“Justin’s experience in production and management as well as his understanding of specialized production equipment is a major asset to VT Industries,” announced Ryan Clausen, vice president – VT Stone Surfaces.



Ryan Clausen, VP of VT Stone Surfaces

Initially, Zuschlag will focus on the installation, training, and set up of fabrication equipment. Once the facility is up and running, he will oversee product quality and process controls.

Money For Some Things, cont.

with a K&B. The reality is that every kitchen is an independent entity, and repairing one kitchen doesn’t mean you’re going to get a better look on the next one. The low bidder still wins. And, if you’ve repaired one of their chipped countertops for free, you’ve just subsidized the poor customer service of one of your competitors. Not a good business move.

BEING PROACTIVE ON A CHIP REPAIR IS THE FIRST STEP IN SUCCESSFUL CUSTOMER SERVICE.

The nightmare scenario for a chip repair, which I’ve dealt with on more than one occasion, is this: A designer at a K&B, eager to upgrade a kitchen countertop, convinces Ms. Jones that granite is nearly indestructible. (Forget all the education you’ve provided about granite being ‘chip-resistant’ and not ‘chip proof’.) That makes the sale, and you fabricate and install the countertops, all the time dealing directly with the designer.

Now, all of a sudden, Ms. Jones has a chip, so the designer calls you up to deal with it. You arrive to find Ms. Jones furious and feeling like she’s been sold an inferior product, because she was under the impression that you couldn’t damage granite. She demands that the chipped piece be replaced, and she’s not going to settle for a repair.

You don’t have any stone left from her project, so replacing the piece would mean buying another slab. A ridiculous thing to even consider,

seeing as you’re the only blameless one in this whole chain of events.

On both occasions where I faced this situation, I did the repair and then approached the designer about paying for the replacement piece if Ms. Jones continued to insist on it. Not the best move when you’re trying to retain a client, but someone selling your product with less-than-honest information is a dangerous thing on the front end of an expensive project. The prospect of paying for an entire slab to get one piece out might make them think twice about misinformation on the next sale.

In both cases, the piece stayed in place with my completed repair. I don’t know, and didn’t ask, what kind of deal had been cut to make that happen.

Lastly, when you get busy, it can be difficult to put a chip repair at the top of your priority list. But the quicker you get the repair done, the less of an issue it tends to be. Schedule a repair as soon as you get the phone call, and follow through to make sure the repair is done to the client’s satisfaction.

Being proactive on a chip repair is the first step in successful customer service.

Jason Nottestad, a 15-year veteran of the stone industry, is National Customer Service Manager for VT Stone Surfaces; he’s now on his third year of “The Installer” columns for Stone Business. He can be reached at JNottestad@vtindustries.com

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New Literature for Stone Surfaces



Trisha Schmitt, VP of Corporate Marketing

“VT Industries is proud to add four new pieces of literature as a direct result of the success of VT’s Stone Surfaces Division,” announced Trisha Schmitt, vice president – Corporate Marketing. “With the

addition of new product lines and a new production facility, we needed literature that reflected VT’s ability to provide a wide breadth of products in this dynamic market segment,” Schmitt acknowledged.

In conjunction with the launch of the new Stone Surfaces production facility, VT is also launching the Caesarstone, Silestone, ECO by Cosentino, and granite flyers. The four pieces were designed to showcase the stocking colors and edge profiles available for the western region. The overall look and feel of the flyers is consistent with that of the existing Stone Surfaces marketing pieces. The flyers will be available upon request from your Territory Sales Managers.

