

# What a website can do

TECHNOLOGY

PINE RIVER E-LOG DISCOVERED ONLINE, LEADS TO ROLE IN EXTREME HOMES



*Pine River Inc. has received national attention twice on Extreme Makeover: Home Edition.*

**W**hen Mike Way started Pine River Inc. in Charlevoix, he knew marketing would be key to the business's success. After all, he survived the downturn in Michigan's automobile industry as international manufacturers have gained market share.

He's determined to do the same with a new type of insulated log siding engineered to make sensible use of natural resources, address the high cost and limited energy fuels and integrate with other green building techniques. The product is known as e-log, an engineered log siding that is comprised of four materials: oriented strand board (OSB), expanded polystyrene (EPS), hard board and thick veneer.

The line was launched after Way left Detroit and returned to his hometown in 2005. He, his father and brother purchased the former Hoskins Manufacturing building in Charlevoix and the product rights from the inventors and began to set up for production.

After attending a number of log home shows, Way decided to cater to today's desire for

immediate response. He invested in a website that has gained him national recognition.

Pine River Inc. was featured on ABC's Extreme Makeover: Home Edition last September and again this May. The producers discovered Pine River through its website, which focuses on the e-log brand.

"We were asked if we would like to get involved to help fulfill a mother's dream to live in a log cabin," Way said. "We were elated that a small Northern Michigan company got tagged by Hollywood."

In that first program, Way and his team provided the supplies and labor needed for the Toledo-based home's master bedroom, complete with a surrounded fireplace. The show aired in November and represented about an \$8,000 donation for the local company.

"Our company mission includes helping people," Way said. "This fit."

In the spring, Way was contacted again by the show's producers. This time, the Cooper family in North Carolina dreamed of living in a log home and the designer planned to use e-logs for the entire exterior and some interior rooms.



***Employees of Pine River Inc. become part of the Extreme Makeover team, constructing this log-style home for the Cooper family in North Carolina.***

“We jumped in again,” Way said. “This was a much bigger commitment.”

Pine River worked with its vendors, many of which donated their products, and prepared for a journey that represented about a \$20,000 contribution. The company was promised a logo shot that grew into more as Paige Hemmis, the designer, showed a cross-section of an e-log and explained how the foam insulation (EPS) is made out of recycled material and that the veneer finish reduces forest consumption.

On the show’s website, [abc.go.com/primetime/xtremehome/index?pn=index](http://abc.go.com/primetime/xtremehome/index?pn=index), the episode is listed as the e-log project and is featured under the “green” tab. The show’s description states: “The majority of the e-log is comprised of a type of foam called Expanded Polystyrene (EPS), which provides great insulation. This will not only keep the home warm, but it also reduces heating and cooling costs. In addition, there is only a thin layer of wood on each e-log, and there is an 80:1 ratio of e-logs per one eight-foot log. This means that if we needed 320 e-logs for a home, we would only need to use four full logs. Overall, e-logs provide the appearance of traditional log siding without harming our environment!”

The website continues to advertise Pine River’s e-log product and the show was viewed by an estimated 20 million viewers. It will rerun in the fall and several more times in syndication.

“It turned out to be a really good opportunity for us,” Way said. “I never could have afforded to pay for that kind of advertising. Before the show was

finished, I had 10 emails on my Blackberry requesting information. I’m working on converting those to orders.”

In addition to Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, the majority of orders for Pine River, Inc. are coming through the website.

“Most of our business is coming from online sales, mostly to individuals and some to companies. People want to Google, to search themselves and to find out immediately,” Way said.

When people express interest in the product online, they are shipped a package sample of e-logs and window trim, showing a cross-section of the product and how it fits with the trim. The next marketing approach adds one prong: high-end lumber companies.

Since opening, the company has automated much of its production and is awaiting arrival of a peeling station, equipment it developed with a Grand Rapids fabricator. With the first machine designed, others can be added for less expense.

Pine River now has 12 full-time employees. About 80 percent of the product is automated, with final assembly of the components being done by hand. Of the current building’s 70,000 square feet, it’s using about half the available space.

“The sky is the limit,” Way said. “My focus now is to get through this phase of the economy and be the last man standing, because there’s going to be an extremely pent-up demand when the economy turns around.” ■