

An Epicor® White Paper

How to Outperform in an Era of LBM Sales Growth

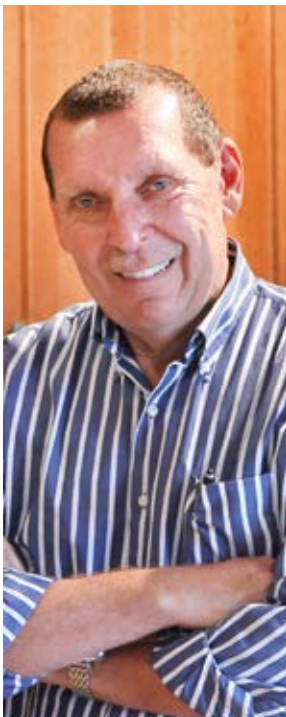
LBM Best Practices Series



EPICOR®

Table of Contents

Introduction—Outpace Market Growth and Do More with Less	1
1. Measure Your KPIs and Track Improvements.....	2
2. Master the Whole House Quote	3
3. Arm Sales People with Information for Better Quote Conversion	4
4. Be Available When Your Customers Want to Buy	5
5. Use Sales Performance Metrics to Empower and Motivate.....	6
6. Use Business Intelligence to Pinpoint Prospects.....	7
7. Support your Contractors' Marketing Programs	8
8. Sell More Value-Added Products and Services	9
9. Embrace the Weekend Warrior.....	10
10. Have an Online Sales Strategy	11
11. Add Another Location for Economies of Scale	12
Get a Competitive Edge with Epicor Business Management Solutions ...	13



“The Epicor dashboards let me see what’s going on. Using data gives us a simple but powerful roadmap to success: budget, direction, accountability, and better customer service in the process.”

Gary Farber, CEO |
Gordon Lumber
Fremont, OH

Introduction—Outpace Market Growth and Do More with Less

With housing starts up across most of North America, we’re cautiously heaving a collective sigh of relief. Business looks like it’s picking up. That’s good! But is it good enough?

If your business isn’t growing faster than your competitors’ business, then you’re losing market share. And it’s relative growth that counts—because relative growth impacts your purchasing power, customer perception, and ultimately competitive positioning.

Further, top line growth can be hard on your bottom line. Depending on how prepared your business systems and employees are, growth can either be an opportunity for higher capital and human resource utilization, or it can cripple your business with higher inventory costs, increased need for working capital, the burdens of new employee training, and declining customer responsiveness.

During this era of recovery and growth, it’s imperative for LBM dealers to keep asking themselves three questions:

1. Is my business’s growth keeping pace with my local market and my competitors?
2. Is my business able to do more with less during this era of growth?
 - o Are we increasing margin percentage strategically?
 - o Have we streamlined processes such that existing staff can handle higher transaction volume?
 - o Do I have the inventory visibility and control needed to keep GMROI and working capital in check?
3. Do I understand why my customers buy from me, and am I outperforming my competitors in those areas?

Read on to discover strategies and tools used by top LBM dealers and distributors to capitalize on periods of growth to become more efficient, more profitable, and better positioned competitively.¹

¹ This document contains our ideas regarding certain best practices that have evolved and developed over time based on our customers’ experiences. Each customer has unique circumstances, and your results will vary. Please see the note at the end of this document for important information.



“Our Epicor solution lets us track live metrics. That alone has helped us grow the business. Having better visibility has definitely helped us increase revenue and profitability.”

Ken Crockett,
Vice President |
Star Building Materials,
Calgary, AB

1. Measure Your KPIs and Track Improvements

Implementing the strategies in the following pages may boost your revenue, increase profitability, and reduce the cost of delivering your products and services. But you’ll never know for sure unless you measure Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and monitor the results.

Ideally, you can put in business systems so that measurement is automated, changes are easily identified, and problems and successes are quickly highlighted. Graphical dashboards, scorecard displays with green-yellow-red color-coding, and instant alerts are effective tools to watch KPIs.

Here are some of the metrics that top LBM dealers are measuring and tracking:

- ▶ **Market Share.** Merkle Supply of Ottawa, ON tracks their share in the region’s brick and masonry supply business. “We’re very proactive in sales and marketing, and now supply 80% of building and renovation projects in the region,” says Gary Milks, IT Manager. “We review local sources to find new construction projects. We’ll send out quotes to multiple contractors and track them all as one “opportunity” in our Epicor CRM system.”
- ▶ **Productivity and Performance.** Many LBM dealers are tracking gross revenue per employee, transactions per employee, sales dollars per sales person, deliveries per driver, dollars delivered per driver, and more. And with a tightly defined dataset, they can easily spot problems with employees, identify and replicate the techniques of top performers, and measure the impact of initiatives to improve productivity.
- ▶ **Financial Impact.** The financial metrics commonly used to look at overall financial performance become truly powerful when used to analyze the performance of various product lines, branches, shifts, employees, or customers. For example, knowing margin percent by product or product group—instead of having that information buried in consolidated numbers— can help you reduce unprofitable items and better promote the most profitable.
- ▶ **Customer Satisfaction.** Is revenue per customer increasing or decreasing? Are they buying a wider selection of products from you? What portion makes use of your contractor support and loyalty programs? Do you survey your customers to ask why they buy from you, what they think of your business, whether they’ll continue doing business with you, and how likely they are to recommend you? Top LBM dealers are asking these questions, tracking the answers, fixing what isn’t working, and enhancing what is working.



“Epicor software helps us do more with fewer people. It also helps us shorten quote lead time, improve quote conversion, and sell more because we’re quoting more products. We’re in a great position to grow without having to add staff.”

Candy Loweke,
Process Analyst |
Raymond Building Supply
North Fort Meyers, FL

2. Master the Whole House Quote

Like many pro dealers, you may have begun selling a couple of product categories, and over the years, expanded your product line with complementary building products.

Of course, you’re hoping your contractors will buy a variety of products from you. But contractors have their favourite suppliers, and breaking habits is hard. Getting pull-through sales may be as easy as offering to quote on your other products. However, sometimes your own procedures and systems get in the way. Read how Raymond Building Supply mastered the art of whole house quoting.

Raymond Building Supply Company (RSBC) is a five-location, family-owned business headquartered in North Fort Meyers, Fla. The scope of the company’s products and services include lumber, trusses, garage doors, windows, residential doors, commercial doors, cabinets, and custom millwork.

“Our Epicor solution has made our quoting and conversion more efficient and effective,” says Candy Loweke, process analyst at RBSC, describing a process that earned RBSC a ProSales Excellence Award for Best Use of Technology. “Having shaved days off our quote lead time, we are more effective at ‘whole house’ quote packages. Department managers have spotted quoting opportunities and increased sales as a result.”

Historically, estimators in each department received architectural drawings in turn or, if the proposal deadline was imminent, blueprints or copies would be made for each department. Routing the drawings created delays, and sometimes quoting opportunities from the various departments were missed.

When RBSC implemented an Epicor solution, they began to use it to route architectural drawings electronically. RBSC saved over \$30,000/year in printing and labor costs, as well as \$1,200 each month in off-site document storage costs.

But more importantly, RBSC improved customer service with faster quote turnaround as well as more comprehensive “whole house” quote packages. They track quote status and conversion rates, produce estimator ‘to do lists,’ and remind sales people to follow up, and provide management oversight of the quoting process—all in their Epicor solution. They respond to quoting opportunities they previously would have missed, resulting in increased sales.



“We’re gaining customer base, and our Epicor solution is instrumental in our customer service. If a customer gets the answers they need within minutes, they won’t call the competition. I love that Epicor can make a bunch of lumberyard guys like us look really good.”

Randy Hass,
General Manager |
Austin Hardwoods,
Denver, CO

3. Arm Sales People with Information for Better Quote Conversion

Whether at the counter or in the field, your sales people are your ambassadors for your business. Their performance can significantly impact your growth and profitability.

Use your business management software to give them the information they need at their fingertips, no matter where they are.

- ▶ **Help the customer make a faster decision.** The better informed your sales people, the higher the likelihood they will close an order faster. Armed with a customer’s sales history, your sales people can tell a customer about previous purchases and returns to help them get the order right the first time, saving transaction time for everyone. They can tell them about other items purchased with previous orders, the rebates they can expect, their available credit—whatever information can help a customer make their decision faster.
- ▶ **Access info on the go.** With today’s mobile technologies integrated into a modern business management system, your sales people can have a customer’s history with them on the job site, in the customer’s office, or in their car preparing for a meeting.
- ▶ **Provide prices and quotes in an instant.** Make sure your business system can generate quotes with the customer’s pre-negotiated pricing on the fly. The faster they have the information they need, the less chance they’ll check the competition. Moreover, having that information available online allows your contractors to generate quotes themselves when your office is closed. Monday morning counter staff simply converts quotes to orders for peak efficiency in customer service.
- ▶ **Prompt sales and customer service follow up.** A good business management system generates reminders and alerts for your sales team. Deal with credit and margin issues up front, so that orders aren’t delayed. Let the sales person know when a special order or millwork project has arrived, or when product is scheduled for delivery, so that they can inform the customer.

Construction Supply, of Farmington, NM, used Epicor software’s builtin messaging system to send reminders to sales people to follow-up on outstanding quotes, and started to analyze reason codes for abandoned quotes. Remarkably, they tripled their quote conversion rate within 18 months.

Proactive touch points let your customer know that their business is important to you and remind them why you should be their preferred supplier.



“We operated our Epicor POS on tablets during a flood. The landscaping season is short, so contractors loved that it got them on the road faster. Now we use them at our gates, and soon we’ll have them in the yard and with sales people at job sites.”

Steven Sample,
Landscape Administration
Supervisor |
BURNCO Landscape Centre
Calgary, AB

4. Be Available When Your Customers Want to Buy

Woody Allen once said, “80% of success is just showing up.” Though that statement is a bit oversimplified, the premise still holds true for LBM dealers. It’s important to be open for business with POS systems at the ready when your customers want to buy.

- ▶ **Be prepared with a business continuity plan.** Does the fear of server and network failure keep you up at night? What about losing key IT personnel? Or do forecasts of bad weather leave you wondering if you’ll be able to open your doors when your customers need you most? Epicor solutions, such as application hosting, tablet POS and offline POS, can be part of your business continuity plan and mitigate the risk of downtime. The Standard Group of Tinton Falls, NJ was up and running the day after Hurricane Sandy struck, thanks to generators and Epicor application hosting.
- ▶ **Don’t lose sales to abandonment.** Phone calls that don’t get answered. Requests not followed up on. Long lineups. These often result in a customer abandoning their purchase attempt—an unnecessary loss of business. A good business management system that incorporates sales process automation and mobile POS technologies can dramatically improve customer service levels, responsiveness, and sales conversion rates.
- ▶ **Be available 24x7x365 with an online presence.** While it’s not practical for your bricks and mortar facilities to be open 24 hours a day, your business can still maintain an online presence and satisfy numerous customer inquiries. Integrated business management systems with Web services can provide customers with product information and stock availability pricing, order and delivery status, and copies of invoices and other related documents. Not only does a Web presence provide better customer service, it offloads your counter sales and customer service personnel so that they can provide other value-added services.



5. Use Sales Performance Metrics to Empower and Motivate

A modern business software system with built-in, easy-to-use business intelligence tools makes it easy for managers and salespeople to know how they're doing in real time without waiting for month-end reports.

Let sales people know in real time how they're tracking against it. Use dashboards to display quote conversion rates, percent of quota achieved, or average margin by salesperson. Mark Reau, the CRO of Gordon Lumber in Fremont, OH, refers to the "magic" that happens when you put information in front of people. Salespeople are competitive by nature, and they like to win. You are finally showing them the scoreboard.

Hawaii's HPM Building Supply is now able to show their sales people complete status and costing information on their transactions, including work orders, with pleasantly surprising impacts on employee morale. "There's a new level of understanding and appreciation of how we're all connected," says Leah Borsting, Director of Development at HPM. "The sales people feel empowered to manage the whole life cycle of their transaction, thinking outside the box and coming up with ideas on how we can improve the business. Morale and overall satisfaction is higher because of this visibility."

Ed Winkless, CFO, Alexander Lumber Company, Aurora, WI weighed in on using the Epicor dashboard: "Our gross margin has bumped up 2 points because of the real time data we get from our Epicor solution. The Epicor dashboard used by our 50 outside salespeople displays their customers' accounts receivable, as well as sales and margin data for each product group. Their compensation is tied to margin targets, so it really drives them to improve what they're selling, with higher margin add-ons."

"Morale and overall satisfaction is higher because of the sales and margin activity visible to sales people on their dashboards. We're seeing significant growth. The sales people say that, without the Epicor solution, they would have been buried."

Leah Borsting,
Director of Development |
HPM Building Supply,
Keaau, HI



“Epicor Business Intelligence takes you to a whole different place. You can see anything you want if you think it will give you insight and help you make a better decision.”

Spike Cissel,
President |
Manning Building Supply,
Jacksonville, FL

6. Use Business Intelligence to Pinpoint Prospects

Stretch your marketing dollars by targeting your efforts on those prospects most likely to buy. Here are some examples of how to unlock the insightful treasures hidden within your own sales and customer data.

- ▶ **Target loyal customers with more products.** Sort the data you have in your business management system to see which products your good customers aren't buying. Then develop targeted CRM campaigns to promote those product lines to your loyal customer base.
Gordon Lumber, of Fremont, OH, used their Epicor solution to do just that and increased overall sales by 20% and sales at its Design Gallery by 57%.
- ▶ **Conduct selective product line promotions.** Merkley Supply, of Ottawa, ON, used their Epicor solution to sort revenue by product, and discovered that a new product was outselling the traditional top sellers, but that only three of its top 10 pro-builder customers were buying it. They put together a campaign to the remaining seven pro-builders that now generates in an incremental \$0.5 million annually.
- ▶ **Retrieve at-risk customers.** Sanford & Hawley, of Unionville, CT, tracks “forgotten customers” using an Epicor report that shows customers whose sales have declined. They reach out to these customers to try to regain their business before it's too late.
- ▶ **Tailor promotions to your customers' buying habits.** Break down daily, weekly or monthly sales by product group and customer type to better understand your clientele's buying habits. Kelseyville Lumber, of Kelseyville, CA, traditionally a pro dealer, recently opened a large retail store. Mother's Day is now their busiest day, and by sorting the day's sales by product group, Kelseyville was able to determine the spike in sales was attributable to their new garden center. This insight helps them plan their seasonal promotions.

If your business management system is not up to the task of easily giving you the information you need to target your sales and marketing expenditures with pinpoint accuracy, consider upgrading your system. Modern business management systems have easily accessible data that can be queried by just about any user for quick answers to what-if questions. No waiting for the IT department or vendor to create a report. No waiting until the end of the month. Be sure you can have answers, not questions, in your planning session.

ProSales Excellence Award

Mathew Hall Lumber, an Epicor customer, was honored in 2013 with ProSales Excellence Award for Marketing. The St. Cloud, MN dealer decided to divert much of its advertising budget to support their primary customers—the builders who represent about 90% of the pro yard's business. They dispense "Builder Bucks" as rewards for loyalty that the builder can use to purchase select items, or they offer direct aid towards the builder's marketing efforts. Mathew Hall spent one third of its previous advertising budget, and yet brought in incremental business through its builders. Another great example of doing more with less.

7. Support your Contractors' Marketing Programs

Another great way to stretch your marketing dollars is to help your contractors grow their businesses. Chances are good they will return the favor by bringing their business to you. Here are some ideas:

- ▶ **Help your contractors identify sales opportunities.** Use the information in your business management system to tell your contractors about trends in product selection, opportunities to sell higher margin products, and even trends in their customers' buying habits. "We give our contractors Epicor analytics, because we believe we can help them attract new business," says Leah Borsting, Director of Development at HPM Building Supply in Hawaii.
- ▶ **Create a contractor referral program.** Send business their way with contractor directories on your Web site and at your sales counters. Make sure the referral can be attributed to you.
- ▶ **Let them advertise on your premises.** Have a bulletin board for business cards, a flyer display rack, or video terminal to display their advertising. Gordon Lumber, of Fremont, OH, encourages their builders and remodelers to use the Gordon Design Gallery as an extension of their own businesses to enhance the product selection process for homeowners. They also hold seminars and meetings for local building organizations in the showroom to maximize its use for the benefit of their target clientele.
- ▶ **Pay for a portion of their advertising.** Recognize their loyalty by offering dollars to put towards their newspaper ads, flyers, or however they gain business.

Help your customers expand their business, and see your business grow as well.



“Our Epicor solution is flexible enough to adapt to each area of our business. There’s better communication between our production areas and our purchasing group. We’re able to accomplish more because it’s so much easier to get the information you need.”

Jennifer Leonard, CFO |
Annandale Millwork and
Allied Systems,
Winchester, VA

8. Sell More Value-Added Products and Services

Pro dealers recognize that they can increase the dollar value of a sale by offering special orders and value-added services. With minimal capital investment, a dealer can add cut-to-length, delivery, and installation services. Partnerships with suppliers and contractor customers can quickly expand the range of installation services and custom or special order offerings.

Specialized manufacturing facilities for wood treating, millwork, doors and windows, and other manufactured products present opportunities for product lines and inventory planning optimized for higher margins.

Annandale Millwork and Allied Systems of Winchester, VA manufactures and distributes doors, windows, trim and custom architectural millwork, as well as framing components including wall panels, floor systems, lumber, and roof trusses. They also offering engineering installation services, frequently selling whole home packages using installed sales contracts. “We were looking for software that could handle everything,” says Rob Frogale, co-owner of Annandale. “It proved difficult until a colleague suggested Epicor software.”

A good business management system will be able to track special orders and work orders from start to finish, at multiple inventory locations. It should be easy to add a charge for labor and value-added services, show anticipated margins for each item individually as the job is quoted and progresses, track actual labor and materials costs separately, as well as account for all labor and materials within the same job.

An Epicor solution goes one step further by linking the labor work order directly into the Microsoft® Outlook® schedules of your labor crew for added efficiency.



“With the increase in our DIY business, Mother’s Day is now our busiest day. We can quickly see by department what’s selling, when it’s selling and determine where we might be able to increase our margin a bit or advertise to try to increase those sales even more.”

Lisa Ridgeway |
Kelseyville Lumber
Kelseyville, CA

9. Embrace the Weekend Warrior

As mentioned previously, many pro dealers are looking to retail clientele—the do-it-yourselfer, the weekend warrior, the walk-in handyman homeowner—as a way to increase sales revenue. Chances are you have mixed clientele now, and the mix may vary from branch to branch. Retail clientele has its appeal:

- ▶ Retail tends to be **higher margin**, although the order size tends to be smaller. Your business systems need to be able to handle the increase in volume. Austin Hardwoods, of Denver, CO, saw the number of tickets they process jump from 75/day with mainly pro business to over 200/day with an increase in retail clientele. “We make a higher margin on retail than we do on our industrial customer, so our margins are up. But there’s no way we would have been able to handle the volume of tickets we write today without our Epicor solution,” says Randy Hass, General Manager of Austin Hardwoods. Austin Hardwoods would have had to double personnel if they hadn’t implemented an Epicor solution.
- ▶ A mix of clientele tends to **reduce idle resources**. Instead of being closed for much of the weekend, your inventory and trucks are moving. Additional costs are mostly variable and can scale as your weekend traffic grows. And it offers added service hours for your busy contractors.
- ▶ Selling to homeowners allows you to **send new business to your best contractors**. You know your contractors better than anyone. You can offer Installation Services to your retail customers, while throwing a little business to your best contractors by creating a referral program to help retail clientele find a contractor.

Again, make sure that your business systems can support the rapid point-of-sale expected in the retail sector, including credit card and loyalty card support. Most importantly, make sure that your pricing structure continues to reward your pro customers for buying higher volumes.



“We believe many customers check availability before coming to our stores. And we also know our contractors check prices online to bid out a job at night. Our Epicor solution has made a dramatic difference in our online sales and online visibility.”

Tyler Banken, IT Director |
Dunn Lumber, Seattle, WA

10. Have an Online Sales Strategy

As pro dealers, creating an online presence might not have been top priority before. But now, as the era of growth is underway, preparing an online strategy is key—even if you don’t expect a significant amount of revenue to come directly from online sales. Millennial contractors, your retail customers, even your employees are going to expect to be able to find more and more information online. Here are some trends to plan for:

- ▶ **Online Research.** Pre-shopping—researching online before buying in the store—is a fact of life. Reports suggest that, even though a small percentage of sales actually take place online, anywhere from 50% to 89% of consumers pre-shop and conduct research online.² In the retail world, the immediacy of information is even more prevalent, as consumers stand in the aisles and compare prices at a competitor’s store using their smartphone. Soon your customers won’t even consider coming to your store if they can’t find product information and pricing online.
- ▶ **Conversion.** The trick is to convert an online visitor doing research into a sale for YOU. It’s more important than ever to make sure that price-sensitive items are priced competitively online, so that potential customers are enticed to come into your store. Further, you need ways to hook an online visitor and convince them to complete the sale with you. Knowing a product is in stock, being able to reserve items online, and services such as order-for-pickup to avoid lines are conveniences that may secure an order with you rather than your competitor.

In planning your online catalog, here are some features you’ll want to have:

- ▶ Sign-in capabilities so that you can tailor the catalog for different customer types
- ▶ Support for different pricing levels
- ▶ Ability to select which product attributes to expose to different viewers
- ▶ Ability to link to manufacturer’s spec sheets
- ▶ Ability to brand as your own

² Various sources including BIGResearch, Yahoo-comScore, and TMP Directional Marketing.



“We added a sixth branch, and we didn’t add any head office support. Our Epicor solution helps us work so efficiently that we simply absorbed that work. We probably still have some capacity here to do another branch.”

D'Arcy Quinn,
Vice President |
Moffatt & Powell|RONA,
London, ON

11. Add Another Location for Economies of Scale

With mergers and acquisitions still commonplace in the industry, and market activity starting to rebound, now is a great time to add undervalued locations and scale your operations economically by putting in place the business practices and business systems to support centralized, efficient operations. Here are some examples of how business management software has helped multi-branch pro dealers:

- 1. Efficiencies in accounting due to integrated business system.** Alexander Lumber, of Aurora, WI, operates two truss plants, a countertop division and 25 branches in Illinois and Wisconsin. When they implemented an Epicor solution, they were able to trim accounting staff from nine people to just three people, as well as generate their monthly P&L reports for each branch five days earlier. Further, the bookkeeping staff at each branch is now available to help at the counter or to work on other more productive tasks for much of the day.
- 2. Centralized purchasing and pricing management.** Alexander Lumber also reports that their buying group is more effective now, since they can see realtime quantities on-hand at all locations, what’s selling and what’s not, making it easier to do their program buys. The buying group also keeps an eye on pricing to help optimize pricing changes.
- 3. Centralized Dispatch and Delivery.** Sanford & Hawley of Unionville, CT reports significant improvement in the metric they use to measure dispatch and delivery efficiency—dollars delivered per driver. Before implementing the Epicor centralized dispatch system for their four locations, it wasn’t uncommon to see their trucks criss-crossing on delivery routes. Now, they have better route planning and less idle time. Fuel costs are also down, and asset utilization is higher.

Full-featured, industry-specific business management software can offer a solid foundation for growth.

Get a Competitive Edge with Epicor Business Management Solutions

Business management software and other technical solutions can provide you with the insight to target opportunities for sales growth, as well as the efficiencies to optimize operations and grow profitably.

When looking for business management software, make sure that it has the following capabilities to help drive your company's growth:

- ▶ Handles mixed pro and retail sales
- ▶ Easy-find, search and data access tools to help close sales faster
- ▶ Reminders, alerts and task lists that boost customer service levels
- ▶ Quote conversion and other sales KPI tracking
- ▶ Support for installation, delivery and other value-added services
- ▶ Support for installed sales or contract-driven sales
- ▶ Millwork and other manufacturing integration
- ▶ Multi-branch inventory management
- ▶ Branch transfers
- ▶ Centralized purchasing and pricing management
- ▶ Centralized dispatch and delivery
- ▶ Integrated AR, AP and branch P&L consolidation
- ▶ Mobile and Web access

Epicor business management solutions do all that and more. Our solutions help drive real results and allow you to serve your customers better and stay ahead of the competition. But Epicor is more than a technology provider—Epicor is an LBM industry expert with the knowledge and services to help you become an even better business partner to your customers.

About Epicor

Epicor Software Corporation drives business growth. We provide flexible, industry-specific software that is designed around the needs of our manufacturing, distribution, retail, and service industry customers. More than 40 years of experience with our customers' unique business processes and operational requirements is built into every solution—in the cloud, hosted, or on premises. With a deep understanding of your industry, Epicor solutions spur growth while managing complexity. The result is powerful solutions that free your resources so you can grow your business. For more information, [connect with Epicor](#) or visit www.epicor.com.



Contact us for more information on Epicor Products and Services

+1.888.463.4700 lumber@epicor.com www.epicor.com

Corporate Office

804 Las Cimas Parkway
Austin, TX 78746
USA

Toll Free: +1.888.448.2636
Direct: +1.512.328.2300
Fax: +1.512.278.5590

Latin America and Caribbean

Bldv. Antonio L. Rodriguez #1882 Int. 104
Plaza Central, Col. Santa Maria
Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, CP 64650
Mexico

Phone: +52.81.1551.7100
Fax: +52.81.1551.7117

Europe, Middle East and Africa

No. 1 The Arena
Downshire Way
Bracknell, Berkshire RG12 1PU
United Kingdom

Phone: +44.1344.468468
Fax: +44.1344.468010

Asia

238A Thomson Road #23-06
Novena Square Tower A
Singapore 307684
Singapore

Phone: +65.6333.8121
Fax: +65.6333.8131

Australia and New Zealand

Suite 2 Level 8,
100 Pacific Highway
North Sydney, NSW 2060
Australia

Phone: +61.2.9927.6200
Fax: +61.2.9927.6298

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