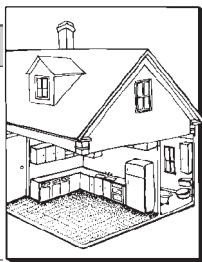


# Showrooms Sell Kitchens & Baths

By Patrick J. Galvin



Remodeling is a great business today. But the builder who wants to get into the most profitable segments, kitchen and bath remodeling, will be spinning his wheels and wasting time without the one thing he has never before needed: a showroom.

Houses do not need showrooms. Nor does roofing, siding or room additions in remodeling. But kitchen and bath remodeling depends on design ideas and solutions to problems, on the power of suggestion and on products and materials that must be seen to be appreciated.

And all of that means a showroom is needed.

A good kitchen/bath showroom uses up a lot of money. Here are some of the most important things that that money must buy.

- Location
- Parking
- Lighting
- Cleanliness and Orderliness
- Displays
- Signage
- Hours
- Personnel

### Locate in Trade Area

Choosing the right location has many ramifications. A known firm with established clientele can be off the beaten track. But a new name not known to residential customers will do much better in a high-traffic location.

The best traffic locations these days are in malls. But malls have rules you might not like and their leases aim right for your profits. A site across the street from a mall, or in a strip mall, might be much better.

Customer base is also important to location. It is best to locate in the area where you expect to sell the most bath and kitchen remodeling jobs. You will become part of the community in which you locate so most of the traffic will be potential

customers. Also, being close to your customers can cut costs in selling, delivering, servicing, and installing.

The neighborhood should be well-to-do to affluent, with many homes more than 10 years old. Such homes are prime remodeling prospects. If a builder finds his once-prime neighborhood to be decaying, he should move on to greener pastures, and set up headquarters elsewhere.

**It is not enough for drivers to see your store. They must see a way to get in despite whatever traffic there might be. A small sign that reads "Parking in rear" won't do.**

### Ample Parking Needed

The need for parking should be obvious, but many ignore it or try to get by with too little. But the space has to be there. It should be easy to see and should be readily accessible.

Problems of parking access are compounded by heavy traffic and lots of bright commercial lighting. It is not enough for drivers to see your store. They must see a way to get in despite whatever traffic there might be. A small sign that reads "Parking in Rear" won't do.

Remember also that many people in many areas are mugger-conscious. If this is true in your area, it calls for good lighting in the parking area,

cleanliness, and a total absence of loiterers. A parking area is part of the store so, like the store itself, it should implicitly say "Welcome."

Parking at the side is generally better than parking in front, because parked cars tend to obscure the displays. If the display room floor is raised a few feet above the street for visibility, however, parking in front can be excellent.

**The most common showroom criminal is dirt. Contractors everywhere tolerate dirt in showrooms that would shock them at home. A showroom should be so clean that any prospect can come in with white gloves and leave spotless.**

### Attract With Light

Good interior lighting is essential for both day and night traffic.

Lighting can attract by sheer volume, or it can attract by drama. Dramatic lighting can include spots and floods in structural applications such as soffits, tracks, valances, wall brackets, and the like.

The questions to ask when planning lighting should be:

- Will it make them look twice?
- Will it make them want to stop and come in to look more closely?

This applies to both inside and outside lighting, although inside the lighting will be part of the displays.

### Keep It Clean

The most common showroom criminal is dirt. Contractors everywhere tolerate dirt in showrooms that would shock them at home.

A showroom should be so clean that any prospect can come in with white gloves, handle everything and leave spotless. Also, there should never be a burned-out light bulb in a showroom.

Hire a person to come in at least once a week, preferably twice, to clean and maintain every part of the showroom.

### Low Displays in Front

A lot of engineering can go into the showroom. One good rule is to keep displays low in front so most of the showroom will be visible to passing traffic.

Both kitchen and bath displays should include floors, walls, and ceilings to show different perspectives and different materials. They also should be fully accessorized so they have a lived-in look.

To retain visibility, the most complete displays will have to go along the showroom walls. It is always a good idea to show the newest or most dramatic products in the front window in a semi-full room setting, without the walls or only partial walls. These should be attention-grabbers to get passers-by into the showroom.

Two of the worst—and most common—showroom practices are storing literature in the drawers and robbing displays of products because they are needed to complete a job. The drawers and cabinets should be filled with the things that belong there—dummy canned goods, for example, and flatware and dishes. And many a fine display has been ruined because of a hole where the sink or faucet belongs.

When the displays are well set up and well maintained they can do an excellent sales job.

### Make the Signs Fit

Signs also can be silent salespeople in a showroom. They should be in character with the kind of business you want to do.

If the business aims at affluent or upper to middle income customers, signs should maintain some dignity and be attractive. If the business will be based on perpetual 40 percent-off sales and appeal to bargain hunters, loud and gaudy signs can fit in. Remember, however, that in the latter case the goals of a good remodeling business are defeated. Remodeling is profitable only with customers who have money and are willing to spend it.

Price signs on bathrooms and kitchens must be handled carefully because each job must be fitted to a particular customer and home. For kitchens, if price signs are desired, use a sign that reads something like "12 feet of cabinets in this style, about \$1,400." This way, the customer can make meaningful comparisons, but



Showrooms should look "lived-in," but spotless. This kitchen display has been stocked with a casually displayed cookbook, cookware, glasses and other items. All would pass the "white glove test."



Lighting can make or break a showroom. In this display, lights wash the tile backsplash, and create a dramatic effect.

the price will not mean *this display* specifically.

One other thing: Put your own name on the business, not the name of any brand. You might lose that line and have to start promoting a new name.

#### **Fit Hours To Location**

Kitchen/bath showrooms have to be open when working people can come in. In most areas that calls for evening hours at least twice a week and possibly Saturday hours.

If you locate in a mall you will have to observe the mall hours. If you are near a mall you will want to take advantage of mall traffic.

Much bath and kitchen remodeling is sold at night. This doesn't mean the showroom has to be open, because this work is done by the designer in the home. But evening hours should be available by appointment and this should be specified on the door and in all advertising.

**A set answer might be, "Take as much time as you like. If you have any questions, I'll be right over there." If they keep looking interminably, have a policy of reapproaching them in a set time, such as five minutes.**

#### **Personalities Count**

The people manning the showroom must have personalities that enable them to make prospects feel welcome. But they also have to let visitors feel comfortable when they want to look around and be left alone.

Establish a set policy of how to approach the prospects and what to say to them. Provide your sales staff with training. Prospects might want to be left alone for a while, but this does not mean they want to be ignored.

For example, the policy might specify that either the receptionist or designer always approaches any prospect within the first minute and says: "Hi. I'm Ellen White. Can I help you with something, or would you like to look around first?"

When the prospects want to look around, a set answer might be: "Fine. Take as much time as you like. If you have any questions I'll be right over there where you can see me. Just call."

An alert designer will watch the customers and note what they seem to be most interested in. If they keep looking interminably, have a policy of reapproaching them in a set time, such as five minutes.

Your policy might vary, but be attentive without bugging them. The important thing is to have a policy that everyone follows, so no prospect feels offended or ignored.

A good showroom represents a big investment, but it is essential for kitchen and bath remodeling sales, and it can pay big dividends if all the elements are thought out carefully and followed up religiously. ■

*Pat Galvin is the former editor and publisher of Kitchen & Bath Business.*