

Showroom design sets new standard

By Danny Hanlon

How many times have you walked into a showroom which was far from impressive? You don't say anything, instead you give your partner the 'let's get out of here stare' whilst bolting for the nearest exit.

The sad thing about this all too common scenario is that the showroom owner is never actually told the truth and is instead left pondering why business just isn't as good as it should or could be.

I've visited countless numbers of showrooms over the years, many of which have given me that feeling. I call it the 'vacant' feeling because I'm always left wanting more. More inspiration, more ideas, more professionalism, more for the franchisee, more for the product and ultimately more for the customer.



When we embarked on European growth we decided to take a fresh new approach. Long gone are the days of franchisees designing their own showrooms, however we do recognise the need for franchisees to be involved in the conceptual stages of the design so they feel some level of ownership. Franchisees can put their own mark on the finished article, as Asta and Dirk Ruhfus have done in Dusseldorf.

As Mr Di Giuseppe mentioned in his address to the Australian conference, know your strengths and weaknesses. I'm certainly no designer and I doubt that many of us in the organisation can truly say that we are. True designers think on a different plane and can transform the look of a room, thus changing our mood. Customers want to walk into GT showrooms and be blown away, they want to be turned on and geared to Buy – not Die.

Eighteen months ago we transformed the external appearance of our showrooms from 'newspaper sites' text everywhere,

throwing dozens of different messages at passers by who simply don't have the time to take it all in. We changed them into bold, dynamic, modern eye catching locations that work. In March this year we opted to do the same internally using our German pilot franchisee's location.

Dirk and Asta picked the location and we signed it off. It's a fabulous site which sees traffic from a well-to-do part of town pass by each morning and evening as workers make their way into the business district. It's fair to say though, and I'm sure Dirk and Asta will agree wholeheartedly, that the site was in need of a complete transformation. It needed a new shop front, flooring, walls, and a suspended ceiling.

We employed the services of Gülcin Yilmaz, a well known German architect who has a passion for blending art with architecture. Gülcin will be responsible for designing all of our German showrooms as we expand the network throughout the country. She has an understanding of what the German public want and expect from a showroom and she knows their desires when it comes to colours.

Initially Gülcin worked with Dirk and Asta to create the concept which then moved into final floor plans and elevations, colour schemes, material types and a lighting plan.

Lighting is a key feature in our new showroom designs as it helps to create a mood and ambience. Additionally it shows the product at its best, which is why we



also had Gülcin create a lighting plan specifically for the showroom as it ties in with the floor plan and key displays.

Gone are the old style 'sharks tooth' displays, replaced with modern, practical, interchangeable wall displays which lend themselves to a continually evolving colour palette. One day we may even change the colours to reflect the seasons. We also wanted to place more emphasis



on bathrooms as they are a lucrative market and we believe that sales will be fuelled by giving the bathroom displays more presence in the showroom.

Of course, the kitchen is still the hero at the front of the showroom, although this one is a working kitchen – water to the sink, power to the oven, hob, hood and refrigerator – bringing it to life for future promotional events. We've also added another kitchen area towards the back of the showroom – this is where clients can sit down, relax, enjoy a coffee and discuss the proposal with their GT sales representative.

Another new feature is a selection bay which details the Trend Collection colour palette so as clients can select which colours work best with different kitchen décors.

The workmanship is first class. Why? Because we had our own experienced fitter complete the installation which I'm convinced pays for itself in the long-term. Classy interior decoration and our new showroom POS material provide the finishing touches.

Modern, sleek, stylish, aspirational, professional and sophisticated is the future direction of all our showroom fit-outs. Not unlike the continuing evolution of our organisation really and the equation is simple: Increasing all of these = increase in sales.