



Ready for a Closeup

Contractor Express gives showroom design the movie-star treatment.

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Showroom

Long Island's Contractor Express is giving prosaic building products, like doors and decking, the glamour treatment by starring them in vignettes and displays in the company's brand new, expansively remodeled Design Expressions showroom in Oceanside, N.Y.

With Design Expressions, company owner and president Bob Lucas hopes to attract homeowners, and the showroom's design—by award-winning Horst Design International—is calculated to appeal to the upscale retail experience that Nassau County residents like. Lucas says contractors and architects also can benefit by using the showroom as a product selection and design resource when working with their own clients.

There's plenty for customers to ponder in the showroom's 4,000

square feet of display space, a near quadrupling of the original area. They can explore fully kitted-out kitchen exhibits, examine built-out exteriors showing siding, door, window and roofing options, and consider countless choices for millwork and architectural hardware. The showroom also features a new Marvin Design Gallery. With the exception of kitchen and bath cabinetry, all sales are installed sales done by Contractor Express. Professional design consultations also are part of the Design Expressions experience.

"A lot of people build plastic showrooms," says Lucas, "but I wanted a showroom that would wow customers. I got my validation a day after the [June] grand opening when a woman walked into the showroom and said 'Wow.'" —K.T.

Schooled in Service

Seminars put **Truitt & White** at the head of marketing class.

A little guidance is never a bad thing. Offering that guidance through a series of professional builder seminars has helped Berkeley, Calif.-based dealer Truitt & White Lumber increase sales and secure customer loyalty.

A brainchild of the company's advertising department 15 years ago, the seminars, designed to present product and best practices information to their customers, have proven to be a firm winner. In 2006, the addition of seminars in Spanish, an acknowledgment of a changing labor force, garnered wide approval, says Mark Pearsall, the pro dealer's vice president of sales and marketing. "While we have been successful reaching business owners, they're not doing the actual work," he says. "We wanted to reach the guys who install the product."

Pearsall says the seminars cover everything from window and door installation clinics—typically the most popular—to explanations of California's building-code requirements for using fire-resistant exterior building products in areas at risk for wildfires.

Pearsall and his colleagues choose topics that are geared toward the most successful products they sell, like Marvin windows and doors, as well as associated components, like Tyvek, flashing, and engineered wood. When a new product is introduced in a seminar, Pearsall says, "we find that our customers really use it. Folks in this area really rely on us for education."

Truitt & White also uses seminar participants' feedback in choosing topics. When questions arose on where to source green building products, Pearsall and his team designed a seminar on the topic.

Acknowledging its customers' busy agendas, the lumber dealer holds its seminars Wednesdays between 5 and 7 p.m. in an on-site conference room and provides a light supper. The seminars regularly attract between 25 and 50 participants. A list of scheduled seminars is posted on the Truitt & White Web site, and special e-mails and statement inserts notify customers of upcoming programs.

A \$10 to \$15 attendance fee plus revenue from featured product manufacturers and distributors cover most of the series production costs.

For Pearsall, the bottom line is this: "The more we can do to make our customers successful, the more they will reward us with their business." —K.T.

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