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JOHN SENCION, CO-FOUNDER, left,
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Restroom Solutions

Easy suggestions for improving a crucial facility

By Jason Renner

Many consumers visit retail restrooms before they will look at anything else in the store. They immediately develop impressions about the retailer based on how clean and inviting the restrooms seem. In today's competitive environment, it means form and function don't stop at the restroom door.

The good news is there are some relatively easy and cost-effective updates that can be made to ensure customers have a positive restroom experience. The alternative—people leaving to find a better restroom—can be even more costly.

Before choosing new products, it is important to focus on planning up front. Restroom locations, traffic volume and the number of users at peak times should factor into restroom decisions. While ADA guidelines and building codes dictate the number and placement of some elements, architects, product manufacturers and other experts can provide invaluable guidance to avoid costly mistakes or improvements later on.

Trends in Restroom Design

Better restroom design can not only help keep restrooms cleaner, but also make them more user-friendly. One important concept is the unisex or family restroom. In fact, many states have adopted the 2003 International Building Code, which requires unisex restrooms in public-assembly facilities, such as malls and theatres, when they are updated or newly constructed.

Most unisex restrooms are simply larger toilet rooms with additional space for those in wheelchairs or people accompanied by a caregiver or child. Many retailers are catering to older adults, the physically disabled and families by offering more upscale family facilities with a shared sink area, and baby-changing and lounge areas in addition to several toilet rooms. These spaces make trips to the restroom hassle-free for a variety of users.

Every type of facility has its own set of considerations and must be designed to meet users' needs. Stores should be sure to allocate enough space for strollers, wheelchairs and shopping bags.

Those catering to young families will want to provide ample baby-changing stations and oversized trash cans to contain dirty diapers.

Some retailers are differentiating themselves by providing amenities above and beyond the basics, such as private nursing rooms, decorative furnishings and custom accessories—all to give users a better overall experience.

To that end, new products are being developed specifically for this market. Multi-height solid-surface lavatory systems, for example, maximize space while simplifying ADA requirements. These innovative fixtures combine a lower, ADA-compliant sink with a higher sink, eliminating the need for separate fixtures. The lavatories offer convenient wheelchair access and are ideal for parents and their children.

Lavatory systems made from solid-surface materials are very durable, as they are easy to clean and resist impact and staining. A variety of color options are available. These contemporary fixtures give restrooms more visual interest and create a warmer atmosphere.

Washroom accessories also play an important role in maintaining and improving facilities. "Hands free" technology is a critical consideration. People don't want to touch toilet flush handles, faucets, soap dispensers or paper-towel handles. Adding fixtures and accessories with infrared sensors is a simple way to reduce germs and increase consumer confidence in your restrooms.

Empty soap or toilet-tissue dispensers are among the biggest restroom complaints. High-capacity paper-towel and toilet-tissue dispensers are simple solutions to keep restocking to a minimum. Specifying electric hand dryers over hand-towel dispensers eliminates paper waste. In addition, dryers can lower costs in high-volume areas by as much as 90%. Dryers initially cost more but often pay for themselves within just a few months.

Navigating the maze of restroom products, building codes and ADA requirements can be overwhelming. A good restroom product supplier will serve as a helpful partner and ensure that you are getting the best solutions for your washroom needs.



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