

CHAIN STORE AGE[®]

THE NEWSMAGAZINE FOR RETAIL EXECUTIVES

APRIL 2007

www.chainstoreage.com

A LEBHAR-FRIEDMAN[®] PUBLICATION



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Putting the Future in Place

The Container Store Sets
A Financial Growth Plan p. 22

SPECIAL SECTION
Main & Wall
Conference Report
p. 27

ELECTRONIC RETAILING
Online Customer
Reviews
p. 60

HVAC/REFRIGERATION
Food Lion Tests
Eco-Friendly System
p. 72

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Invest in Restrooms

Female shoppers appreciate warmer finishes and accessible fixtures

By Marianne Wilson

When it comes to restroom facilities, having an easily accessible, clean and inviting space can give a store a competitive advantage with female customers. Unfortunately, many retailers don't give restrooms the attention they deserve.

"Our clients typically don't view the restrooms as part of the retail space, so they want to know how small they can go," said designer Kevin O'Donnell, a creative director for Schorleaf, Phoenix. "My recommendation is always to make the restrooms larger, not smaller, because while men won't pay much attention, studies show that women do, and they are asking for larger restrooms with better accommodations."

While most men think about shopping primarily in terms of "getting in and getting out," O'Donnell said, women are more tactile.

"They want to touch things and feel the material," he explained. "In the restroom, using warmer tones and materials helps create the effect of texture."

To keep restrooms from feeling sterile and cold, select warm-colored natural stone or ceramic tile.

"Instead of laminate countertops or bland china sinks, install durable solid-surface lavatory systems with large chunks of aggregate in earthy shades that coordinate with partitions and other accessories in the restrooms," advised Jon Dommissie, director of marketing and new product development, Bradley Corp., Menomonee Falls, Wis. "If using stainless steel for toilet partitions, specify a patterned finish for added texture and durability."

Lighting is key to creating a welcom-

ing space. Dommissie recommends keeping the lighting in the warm temperature range and staying on the softer side. Indirect lighting is also helpful because the light will reflect off other surfaces.

"Avoid harsh fluorescent lighting," he added, "as it only accentuates flaws. Warm lighting will not only make your restrooms more inviting, it creates a more flattering reflection in the mirror."

Integrating green technologies in the restroom is a good way for a retailer to

green choice: warm-air hand dryers rather than towel dispensers.

"Hand dryers eliminate paper waste and are more cost-effective in the long run," Dommissie said.

Retailers should keep in mind that women are often the caregivers for children, as well as aging and disabled family members. Consequently, it is important to make the hand-washing area easy for everyone to access.

A good option is multi-height solid-surface lavatories that incorporate a reg-



Multi-height solid-surface lavatory systems allow for accessibility.

take its social responsibility up a notch while saving on utility bills. A good place to start is by specifying water-saving fixtures, such as waterless urinals and low-flow faucets.

"Further savings can be achieved from the latest touchless technologies which ensure that faucets only run while in use," Dommissie explained.

Other technologies that make it easy for retailers to go green in the restroom space include new lavatory systems that use photovoltaic cells to capture and store regular restroom lighting. Such systems do not require electricity or expensive batteries. Another good

ular sink and a lower, ADA-compliant sink for ease of use. The wave-like configuration of these lavatories adds a note of personality and design to the space, as well.

Many retailers regard restrooms as a necessary evil. They should remember that for female shoppers, the restroom is a yardstick by which to measure a retailer's commitment to customers.

"Rather than cutting space, consider adding on," Dommissie said. "Carving out a little space for a private nursing area or lounge area can pay dividends in future repeat visits."

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