

By Michael Stevens



Thinking 'outside the box' in today's market

The home improvement market hasn't seen a decline since 1991. In the HIRI/Global Insight home improvement products market forecast update of February 2008, the estimate for this year's sales was lowered by \$13.5 billion from to \$302.1 billion. The continued downturn in the housing market coupled with slowing consumer spending is at the heart of these forecasted declines. Sales of home improvement products will rebound in 2009, but with the housing market expected to show only a gradual recovery initially, growth will be below the trend. Retailers in this marketplace are definitely feeling the trickle down effect.

How do retailers in this industry normally attract customers? First, they seek to drive customers into its locations/showrooms through marketing and advertising; second, the internet plays a large role today since prospective customers can review products and product information and then decide where they want to shop for these products. The Internet also provides retailer vendors the opportunity to promote their brands, products and services, and then can direct prospective customers to select retailers. Third and finally, consumer promotions such as home decorating and home and garden shows attract large numbers of consumers. Product and sales representatives can educate consumers and then direct them to the nearest store to shop and purchase.

In today's marketplace, given the current and near-term economic conditions, retailers, especially specialty retailers, may have to think out of the box. Enter Expo Design Center.

Expo Design Center is a specialty home improvement retailer and a subsidiary of Atlanta-based Home Depot.

The Huntington Beach Expo Design Center has embarked on an entrepreneurial endeavor with an HB-based green builder, Living Green Homes and its Project 319, to partner their brand, vendors, and services in exchange for supporting a green residential development that can act as a showcase for both parties.

Engaging consumers at the point of interest where products can be showcased is the surest way to learn about the prospective customer's preferences, establish dialogue, acquire prospects at point of purchase, and provide incentives to drive them back to retailer's location. This seems like a brilliant strategy for the retailer to pursue.



The Expo Design Center vendor Western Floor Decorating, Inc. offers flooring products suitable for the green industry.

"Expo Design Center offers a wide variety of ECO-Options to meet the growing demand for the Green Living Lifestyle," says Greg Schaeffer, Project Sales Manager, Expo Design Center, Huntington Beach.

This special residential development, located at 319 21st St. in HB, is seeking a "Build It Green" GreenPoint-rated designation. Upon completion, it will be one of the first of its kind in Orange County. This energy-efficient and ecologically built residence will demonstrate how homeowners can conserve energy and dollars by adopting and utilizing green building products and services.

Scheduled for completion at the end of 2008, Project 319 will be open to the general public for tours and will include product demonstrations by manufacturers and suppliers participating in the project. The home will feature the latest state-of-the-art digital operating systems, renewable energy components, composite building materials, energy efficient water system, recycled wall

insulation, non-toxic paint and floor finishes, solar energy, and advanced heating and cooling systems.

Numerous Expo Design Center vendors have expressed interest in participating covering categories such as cabinetry, countertops, appliances, tile, fixtures, bathroom accessories & fixtures, lights, paint, and wall coverings.

"We have growing interest from our customers and builders about green products and design options," says Frank Manners, Trade Services, Expo Design Center. "Having the '319 21st Street' project so close, it will help us drive sales and showcase our vendor's products. This is a win-win opportunity for Expo and our vendors,"

Expo Design Center offers professional design services for everything in the home. Customers will find their professional design teams and designer's training, talent and hands-on experience a priceless resource as they move through the renovation or new construction process.

At Expo Design Center, the customer's choices are virtually limitless, each more beautiful than the last. Convenient financing options allow customers to begin projects quickly, without compromising what they want. Once the project is priced and approved, their design team will create an installation timeline, order products, secure permits, and coordinate deliveries.

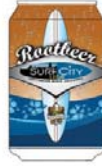
For more information about this program and project, please visit www.Expo.com and www.Living-GreenHomes.com.

Micheal Stevens is President of Achieve Marketing Group, a Studio City, CA-based strategic marketing, sponsorship, and sales promotion firm that support green builders and projects, among others. He can be reached at www.achievemg.com.



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