



# THE MOST IMPORTANT ROOM IN THE HOUSE

Restrooms are often a deciding factor (and sometimes a deal-breaker) for your customers when it comes to choosing whether or not they will return to your garden center.

By Sid Raisch & Robert Hayter

**W**hen we need to go, we need to go. Bio-functions are a fact of life and we deal with them when we need to. Often that happens when we're shopping somewhere. And, if we take the time to think about it, many of us choose where to shop ourselves based on the restrooms. Some people are easy to please when it comes to restrooms, but consider what happens when you decide where to use the restroom and someone else in your family is along for the ride. Our traveling companions have a strong influence as well. And that makes your restroom the most important room in the house.

## Restrooms? Are We Really Talking Restrooms?

If you personally don't feel that it's a bad idea to use the restroom at the convenience store, let's face it, you probably have lower restroom standards than your customers do. As for the rest of us, we can agree that substandard restrooms are often a deciding factor, or a complete deal-breaker when it comes to deciding where to mix the business of doing your business with the pleasure of shopping.

Did you know that research sponsored by Cintas Corporation indicates that 75 percent of former customers of a business do not return because of the condition of their



Once customers enter your restroom, the door closes to your store and the outside world. There, they should have the stress-free opportunity to think about your business without outside influences.

public restrooms? That would mean that the easiest route to keeping customers you've worked hard to acquire would be to provide restrooms that simply don't disgust them.

To build your business you need to meet the standards of typical customers, not the standards of the people in your company who don't think modern restrooms are important.

## Bringing Back the Business

Perhaps one of the most accessible and cost-effective means to get more customers to return to your business may be through the business they do behind the closed doors of your public restroom.

When a person looks for your restroom they have one thing on their mind and that is to take care of their business, and get back to shopping. Once they enter the restroom, the door closes to your store and the outside world. While they are in there they have a complete opportunity to think about your business without outside influences, and they do.

## Restroom's Lasting Impression

Not only do restrooms make an impression on those who use them, the impression spreads into the future. Public restrooms are not a luxury and they do not need to necessarily be luxurious. They are a basic necessity





Restroom breaks are a part of life. Here, Bakers' Acres Greenhouse takes a light-hearted approach to some bathroom humor with this sign.

of business. In some cultures they are even called "necessary rooms." Adequate and functional restrooms are necessary to retain as well as to productively engage both customers and employees. Clean restrooms are a reasonable expectation, and as close as you can come to a fair entitlement for your customers and staff. As a matter of fact, if you're having trouble attracting high-income customers or the best job applicants, chances are that inadequate restrooms may have had an influence on them.

There are of course the emotional factors associated with the most important room in the house, but there are also practical and technical matters that are often ignored.

### Net Neutral

Rather than complicate the delivery of a good restroom experience with fancy decorating and other bells and whistles, focus first on what you can do to provide an environment that is absent of negative experiences. This neutral situation allows the customer to think about why they are at your store, and what they want to buy before they leave rather than even positive attributes such as the fragrance of the candle, or how cute the stenciling on the wall is and how they could do that at home.

### The Royal Flush — Three Areas of Expectations

"Business owners have known for many years that customers expect clean restrooms," says Brian Garry, director-segment marketing, Cintas. "What they didn't know is what people actually think about when judging a restroom's cleanliness."

**Clean is clean — period.** It is absent of dirt, grime and foul odor other than what users generate between routine daily cleaning or upon notification that they need to be cleaned mid-day. The sink, commode, floor, are critical, but all surfaces must be clean. Deep cleaning of all cracks and crevices should be performed at least once each week, but more often during periods of heavy use so that heavy soiling is removed, surfaces sanitized, and the trash is never overflowing.

**Supplies are stocked.** No user should ever be inconvenienced by empty dispensers, and we all know what it is like to find the toilet paper or paper towels dispensers to be empty. In the Cintas survey, more than 76 percent of respondents were dissatisfied if the soap dispensers are empty.

**Function over form.** The basics trump bells and whistles. A functioning door lock, a light, an exhaust fan, hot water, a comfortable seat, are the standard of acceptability, and all of them had better be clean.

### Bathroom Success

Consumers are not critical of restrooms that are not decorated, but they are critical of restrooms that are decorated but not maintained or updated. Choose basic, durable and less trendy finishes for tile and countertops. Skip the fancy wallpaper.

Achieving "Bathroom Success" is not rocket science but there is a

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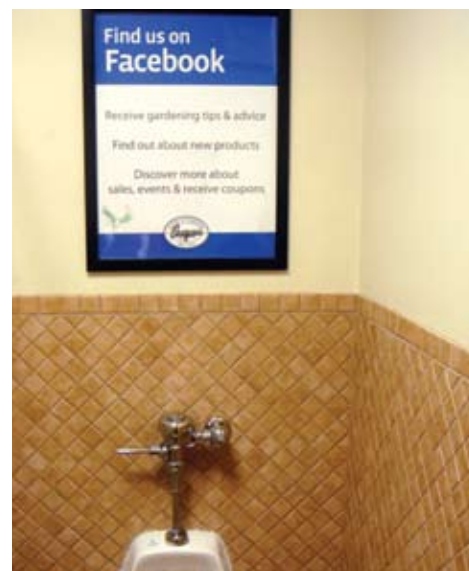
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## MANAGEMENT

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The clean bathrooms at Pasquesi Home & Gardens are a great place to take advantage of its customers undivided attention to promote its Facebook page.

rather simple science to it. Professionally designed bathrooms always feature durable materials that are easy to clean have a long service life cycle. We don't need pleasant scents, but expect the absence of bad odors and this is achieved first by design with adequate positive airflow ventilation and functioning plumbing vents rather than air fresheners to mask the result of design deficiencies or needed repairs.

### A Marketplace Advantage — Clean, Functional Bathrooms

When it comes to building a business, consider keeping your customers coming back by making clean and functional bathrooms a marketing priority of your company. There is no point in paying good money to advertise to attract customers to come to a business with a bad bathroom. The investment in better bathrooms could be the smartest marketing investment you could possibly make. I have been known to recommend to clients that the best way they could improve their marketing results is to invest some of their marketing dollars into a restroom renovation. It works and it is always worth the effort.

### Beyond All Expectations

There is merit in presenting a truly noteworthy bathroom that wins the positive word of mouth in your community if not beyond it, and makes you famous among your customers. While there is certainly justification for exceeding expectations, and it can be a cost-effective endeavor, don't allow not being the very best to keep you from doing the basics very well. That is all we consumers expect of you, and if you deliver on it we'll be back. Yes, your restroom is the most important room in the house. 🌿

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