

SHOWROOM PROFILE

Bringing a vision to life

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Plumbing wholesalers are placing greater emphasis than ever on the importance of showrooms for their businesses and their customers. The focus has turned to architecturally inspired, interactive showrooms that excite and delight customers and trade professionals.

One of the greatest illustrations of this movement is Edelman Plumbing Supply, based in Bedford Heights, Ohio. Edelman operates two showrooms — a 12,000-square-foot facility at the headquarters and a 9,600-square-foot showroom in Westlake, another Cleveland suburb. Edelman Plumbing Supply primarily focuses on residential plumbing prod-



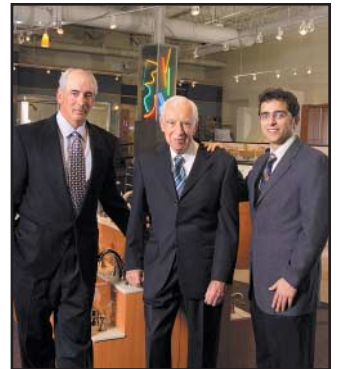
Edelman Plumbing Supply fields dedicated sales professionals in its showrooms. The company typically looks for strong sales experience when hiring showroom professionals. The showroom staff gathers each week for in-house meetings, and also participates regularly in vendor training sessions. In addition, they are encouraged to do product and vendor research on the internet.

ucts, along with accessories, vanities, cabinet and door hardware.

President Sheldon Edelman, who has been with the com-

pany since 1976, believes strongly in the importance of investing in the continual evolution of the showrooms' design and services. The Bedford Heights showroom was given a complete remodel two years ago for the company's 50th anniversary celebration. The result is an exciting and highly functional showroom that appeals to consumers, designers and trade professionals.

Edelman's showroom business — which accounts for 65% of the company's overall business — consists of 60%



Three generations of the Edelman family — Sheldon, Alan and David — are actively involved in operations at Edelman Plumbing Supply.

remodeling projects and 40% new construction, with an emphasis on high-end custom projects. Approximately 80% of the showrooms' customers are referred by designers or contractors.

Showroom vision

The Bedford Heights showroom design is based on Edelman's vision and was carried out by local architects and designers. "I wanted to be able to stand in the middle of the showroom and look around 360° and be able to see all of the displays," Edelman explained. "I didn't want any tall walls in the middle of the showroom. I also don't use vignettes. We used to have a few, but I removed them because our customers work with their designers and they don't want the distractions of other people's design



Pictured at left is the entrance to the hardware showroom; (right) near the main entrance, Edelman displays a showstopper item, in this case a copper tub flanked by an assortment of glass, bronze and cloisonne vessels on stands of varying heights.

Keeping showroom professionals up to date

ideas. This allows designers the freedom to do their job more creatively and achieve their own look.”

As customers enter, there is a reception area consisting of three workstations and the showroom staff’s desks, which allows for immediate contact between the customers and salespeople. Also near the entrance is an eye-catching display of what merchandising director Jim Bemer describes as a “show-stopper item.” Currently, the product on display is a copper tub, flanked by an assortment of glass, bronze and cloisonné vessels on stands of varying heights. This display revolves regularly, with these items often being sold right off the floor.

To the left is a small room that features high-end decorative glass products like sinks, vessels and consoles that are coordinated with mirrors and light fixtures. To the right of the entrance is the 2,400-square-foot cabinet and door hardware and accessories showroom.

“This room is done in dark wood paneling, crown molding, columns and an archway,” said Edelman. “It has the feel of a paneled library.”

Moving into the showroom, product is split into two sections — one for contemporary and one for traditional. Each features like product groups of sinks, vessels, pedestals, vanities, cabinets, mirrors and some coor-

inating toilets and tubs.

“Having these divisions of product really helps customers focus their attention,” said Bemer, who has been with Edelman since 1995 and previously spent nine years with another Cleveland-area showroom. “People usually have a particular style or look in their home, and this helps them narrow their search to a particular section of the showroom so they are not overwhelmed by having to look through the entire offering.”

There is also an extensive bath faucet display area on a main aisle way that holds over 200 different faucets and shower systems in a three-tiered configuration.

Beyond these areas is a special 1,200-square-foot Kallista showroom, which has a different look and feel.

“This section is best described as similar to the Ralph Lauren department in a major department store,” Bemer said. “The flooring changes and it is a completely new environment. Our Kallista showroom has a mahogany floor — compared to carpet and tile in the remainder of the showroom — and the walls are off-white with large crown molding detailing the area and wainscoting halfway up the walls. We built and merchandized the space to Kallista’s specifications. It groups suites of like items together; typical of the Edelman philosophy.”

At the far end of the

showroom is a 13-foot-wide working shower display area. Nearly 20 working shower heads of all different styles are wall mounted, and four are ceiling mounted. The display also includes a collection of interchangeable, quick-disconnect handshowers, six body sprays, three rainbars and a steam generator. It is flanked by fiberglass and acrylic shower modules and tubs, along with tub and shower units.

Additionally, the showroom features a separate kitchen department that consists of a large island, some free standing displays, and two-tier displays that ring the area. The kitchen department displays 75 different kitchen and bar sinks in all styles and materials, both top- and under-mounted. Above the sinks are slatted walls that showcase featured faucets. There are close to 75 kitchen faucets, 25 bar faucets and a dozen pot fillers, along with wall accessories, featured in this area.

The showroom is encircled with an upper deck that is three steps up from the main level. The deck offers an overview of the entire showroom, and is used to showcase vanity sets, toilets and whirlpool tubs.

“The deck design allows customers to circle around the showroom and look over product on the lower level to see it from all angles,” said Bemer. “It really gives them

some perspective and often helps them in their selection process.”

Tucked behind the half-walls on the upper deck are whirlpool and toilet displays, with many working models. “We find that the interactive displays are the best selling tools,” Bemer noted. “By actually getting to experience these working models, it helps customers make the best selection for their needs.”

The trend in colors has changed from bold to whites, neutrals and textures. To make the product pop, Edelman selected a palette of blue tones for the walls.

“We needed to add some punch to the showroom, so we chose blue to coordinate with a theme of running water,” Edelman said. “It really shows off the products to their best.”

An eye for product

Most product changeouts are done following the annual Kitchen & Bath Industry Show, typically a launch pad for many manufacturers’ new lines.

“After the show, we’ll make our product selections for what we want to add that year to our showroom mix,” explained Edelman. “That’s also when we decide if there is anything that is becoming outdated or should be replaced. Of course, I’ll buy a product anytime throughout the year if I think it will be a hit for us, but K/BIS is our target time for new merchandising efforts. It takes us about six to nine months afterwards to update all the displays.”

Bemer added: “We primarily look for stable designs

From humble beginnings to great heights

that we will sell over and over again. But we also want to find the unique one-of-a-kind item that is memorable. Those are our in-and-out buys. We buy it, bring it in and when we sell it we don't buy any more. Those items keep the 'wow' effect going. We also have to be logical about what will sell in the Cleveland market, as we are typically conservative and traditional. Our consumers may take a while to get used to a new design concept before they accept and desire it, so we have to be mindful of that in building displays and selecting product."

The amount of new product constantly being launched is one of the main reasons that Edelman decided to build such large showrooms. The other reason for the large showrooms is to accommodate their bi-annual new product show, which typically attracts more than 600 people. The Westlake facility is being remodeled this year and will incorporate much of the successful design style of its Bedford Heights sister.

"Our showroom design goes through an evolution about every seven years," Edelman described. "We want to keep it fresh, so it's best to go through a major remodel at these intervals. I'm always looking to go to the next level to make our showrooms better than they currently are. And, we always learn from our past mistakes and do better the next time. It's important to me that our showrooms have room for people to move about, and room for new product as our offering con-

tinues to grow. Every year we need to add about 20% new product to our showrooms. In the mid-1990s, product life cycles were about five years, but now it's shrunk to about three years."

Showroom professionals

Edelman employs a total of 32 personnel, with 11 dedicated to full-time showroom sales. As Bemer explained, the company emphasizes strong sales experience when hiring showroom sales professionals, rather than plumbing industry backgrounds.

"We look for salespeople who understand our philosophies," he said. "We have unbelievably talented people working for us who have the ability to coordinate between the homeowner, builder, plumber and designer and make them all happy. Our goal is to exceed their expectations. There are a lot of technical requirements in these projects. Selling plumbing is a complicated process and requires patience, knowledge and a sense of style."

To keep their showroom sales professionals up to date, Edelman has weekly staff meetings at each location, which are led by Gene Groff, who manages the showrooms. The staff goes over new product announcements, current projects, or problems with shipping and lead times. In addition, once or twice a week vendors conduct 30- to 60-minute training sessions to highlight new or featured products. The staff is also encouraged to do product and vendor research on the internet.

"Our sales professionals are not designers, but they do need to be technically educated on the product so they can walk the customers through the particular advantages of each line in terms of quality, design elements and value," Bemer noted.

New showroom staff start out at the showroom's reception counter. They spend most of their time working in the kitchen department near the entrance. They are easily supervised and learn the basics before moving on to more complicated projects.

Over a three- to six-month period, new showroom hires attend sessions with manufacturers' representatives, go to off-site seminars, role-play with other sales staff and spend time with showroom management to learn the business. They work closely with a manager until they are deemed ready to handle clients on their own.

Edelman doesn't charge a fee for its showroom services, but they do qualify walk-in clientele who aren't referred by a designer or trade professional.

"Our time is very valuable, so while we will be helpful and courteous to everyone in our showroom, our showroom professionals need to make sure that they are true buyers before we spend too much time with them or get in-depth writing specifications," Edelman said. "Our sales staff is very educated on qualifying clients. We show list prices on the floor so customers have an idea what they should expect to pay. We are

very committed to serving the trade professional."

Edelman showrooms are supported by a 65,000-square-foot warehouse in Bedford Heights and a 7,600-square-foot warehouse in Westlake. Obviously, Bedford Heights handles most of the company's distribution efforts in a territory that covers northeast Ohio along Lake Erie and extends south to Akron, Canton and Medina. The company uses the Eclipse system to manage purchasing and inventory, and has a buyer just for the showroom lines.

Built from humble roots

Edelman Plumbing Supply was founded in 1952 by Sheldon's father, Alan Edelman, who had immigrated to this country after spending time in a Siberian labor camp during World War II. He made his way to New York and worked in the garment district for a short time before meeting his wife, who was originally from Cleveland.

After their marriage, they returned to Cleveland where his father-in-law was a plumber and owned a hardware store. He suggested that Alan get into the wholesale business.

"There were a number of plumbing manufacturers in the Cleveland area at the time, and my grandfather introduced my dad to them so he was able to pick up some lines," Edelman described. "My dad started selling the products out of a small van. He didn't speak English very well in those days, so he had



Edelman Plumbing Supply's 12,000-square-foot Bedford Heights, Ohio, showroom uses open spaces, architecturally inspired design and interactive product to make the selection process as pleasurable as possible. The two photos at left showcase the displays of various bath product offerings, while the photo at far right highlights the warm feel of the kitchen department.

numbered pictures of all the products that he would take into the stores and the same pictures on boxes in the vans. Customers would order the products by numbers and then he would match the orders up with the boxes in his van and carry them back into the stores.”

As the business progressed, it moved from the basement of the Edelman family home to a small warehouse nearby and a salesman was added. That allowed the fledgling company to start calling on local plumbing contractors involved in residential construction.

In 1958, Edelman acquired its first major line — Kohler.

“Kohler was in the midst of a strike at the time,” explained Edelman, “which worked out perfectly for us. Our business was still very small and we couldn’t afford to buy a lot. But because of their strike, Kohler couldn’t ship a lot so it was a perfect match. Our very first showroom, which we opened in the mid 1960s, featured The

Bold Look of Kohler with all the popular colors of the day like avocado, harvest gold and blueberry.”

Shortly after Edelman joined his father in the business in 1976, the company built a new 1,600-square-foot showroom at its warehouse location in a commercial district on the near west side of Cleveland. In 1990, Edelman grew again by building a 9,600-square-foot showroom in the city’s eastern suburbs. In 1998, the Westlake showroom was opened on the far west side of Cleveland. From its early days with Kohler, Broadway and Jado Faucets as its only luxury offerings, Edelman has expanded its luxury offering to include TOTO, Grohe, Hansgrohe, Bain Ultra, Franke and Kallista, among others.

“We were a Kohler distributor for more than 40 years and we lost the line in 2002 because of conflict over what lines we could sell in our showroom,” Edelman said. “I had to decide if Edelman

Plumbing could survive as a Kohler distributor exclusively, or had a brighter future as a decorative plumbing products distributor. It was the toughest decision I’ve had to make during my years in this business.

“Part of making decorative plumbing successful at the wholesale level is seeking out lines that generate the kind of profit margins that support your business, because the cost structure of the decorative plumbing part of the business is totally different from the wholesale distribution part of the business,” Edelman continued. “To a great extent, when a lot of manufacturers started selling direct to the home centers, it really forced plumbing distributors who were in the showroom business to look for other lines that would create a profit for them and the contractors buying their products. That led us and a lot of other companies to go outside of the traditional suppliers and look for other

lines that would allow us to grow our businesses.”

Edelman is proud to continue the traditions that have made his company one of the most highly respected partners of trade professionals and designers in Cleveland. Most importantly, however, he is proud of his family’s continued leadership of business, as well as the dedicated people the company employs.

“I’m very pleased that my father is still involved in the business he started,” Edelman said. “He turned 81 in March, and still comes to work every morning at 7:30 and doesn’t leave until 2:30 when he goes to the bank. I’m also fortunate that one of my children joined the business last year, continuing the family tradition. David handles marketing, advertising and promotion. I also get great personal satisfaction from watching my entire staff develop professionally. Without them, our company could not have achieved this level of success.” ■

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