

American Standard Showroom Doubles its Sales by Making New Friends

For Showroom Manager, Susan Ciambone opening the Atlantic Plumbing Supply Company's new location was a formidable challenge in May 2007 with the economic downturn looming. "The Showroom at Atlantic" had to hit the ground running. That meant Ciambone had to quickly establish the showroom in the new community. Fortunately, the Long Branch, NJ location was in a busy traffic area. In addition, the showroom was literally in a unique position; it shared the building with a Sipersteins Paint and Decorating Centers store. Ciambone saw collaborative opportunities not only with Sipersteins, but also with designers, architects, and plumbers who brought their clients with them. Find out how collaboration prowess and manufacturer partners such as American Standard helped catapult The Showroom at Atlantic's sales 100 percent since opening.

Case study:

Atlantic Plumbing Supply – Collaboration-Driven Success, American Standard Style

What makes a kitchen and bath showroom stand out, really stand out, from its competitors? Does the difference lie in product, or environment, or in relationships? Or is it a combination of all? The answer is based on many variables that are, at times, a moving target. Susan Ciambone, Showroom Manager at Atlantic Plumbing Supply Company's, "The Showroom at Atlantic" in Long Branch, New Jersey understands this better than most. Having just relocated and transitioning from



a trade-oriented distribution center to a new retail showroom in May 2007, she found herself challenged with kick starting and growing their sales numbers in an economy that was barreling into a deep recession. Like any new kid

on the block, Ciambrone knew she had to make friends quickly to survive. So she took the unique circumstances surrounding the American Standard authorized showroom's new location and used them as a catalyst to steadily increase and, to date, double their sales numbers.

Along the road to success

Of the four Atlantic Plumbing Supply Company locations in New Jersey, The Showroom at Atlantic—the new Long Branch location along a busy road to the shoreline—is the premier center. The 2,200 square foot showroom is housed in a building shared by a Sipersteins Paint and Decorating Centers store. Side by side, both storefronts are visible to traffic and passersby, enabling the showroom to attract lots of walk-ins and shoppers from Sipersteins in addition to regular trade customers. “Our original Long Branch location was off the beaten path and more geared to the trade,” says Ciambrone. “We now have a beautiful, studio-like gallery showroom layout that’s more retail-oriented, which inspires lingering and returning again and again. It has an open-environment feel that’s fresh and uncluttered compared to many outdated neighboring showrooms. It’s also updated with high-quality products like American Standard, including their popular Jado™ and Porcher® brands. And it has working shower and faucet displays, which customers really love!”



Nothing makes friends faster than a party invitation

Collaborating with plumbers, designers, architects and other professionals has played a major role in the showroom's fast foothold in the new location and its overall success. But Ciabrone doesn't count on customers finding the showroom on their own. In 2008 she joined ASID—American Society of Interior Designers—and embarked on a three-week "Save the Date" postcard mailing campaign inviting local interior designers for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. The atmosphere was festive, friendships were born and referrals were shared. The Showroom at Atlantic team also worked an ASID tradeshow booth that resulted in great exposure and lots of interest and inquiries. Additionally, Ciabrone cultivated existing local plumber and vendor accounts that had been loyal patrons to Atlantic Plumbing Supply Company, which has been in business for 30 years. As a token of appreciation for their loyalty, The Showroom at Atlantic hosted a breakfast for them. Manufacturer partners have also played an integral role in attracting new business. American Standard recently held a barbeque event that included a trailer with working fixtures and components, so plumbers could roll up their sleeves to try out the products.

Don't forget to invite the next-door neighbor

Since the two businesses complement one another, Ciabrone immediately saw opportunities in collaborating with Sipersteins Paint and Decorating Centers. The Showroom at Atlantic held their soft opening event together with their building-mate, Sipersteins, which forged a close friendship in the beginning stages and further set the stage for future collaboration in terms of crossover customers. While the storefronts are separate and the environments are completely different, the showroom and Sipersteins are open to each other, so customers can easily go back and forth between the two. The two also recently joined forces to sponsor a local chamber of commerce evening event, which brought in many common-interest attendees.

To make a friend, be a friend

To Ciambone and her team, growing the business and keeping it vibrant is a matter of staying in touch with their trade partners, and attracting new ones through mailers and sending out brochures. "We'll send out a mailer, and immediately follow up with a brochure," says Ciambone. Since there are many older homes in the area, and little ground to build on, The Showroom at Atlantic's promotional efforts result in lots of remodel business with many customers looking to redo their entire bath. "One of our main objectives is to educate customers on the importance of visiting us, so we can establish a



relationship with them as opposed to them buying on the Internet," says Ciambone. "In a showroom, you can see and touch the product. It's also so important to have someone you can trust, someone you have a relationship with, who can help you with issues, handle warranties, and so on. On the Internet, you're on your own, and the warranties would be limited." Ciambone is also focused on doing what it takes to keep her customers coming back. That means providing exceptional customer service. "We don't turn anyone away if they don't have an appointment," she says. "We do take appointments so we can give our undivided attention, but, unlike many showrooms, we do our utmost to provide the same level of customer service for walk-ins." In addition to sharing knowledge and providing information, Ciambone and team go the extra mile and collaborate with contractors, plumbers, and installers to provide information to customers who become overwhelmed with the installation process.

Choose your friends well

Collaboration with the right manufacturer partners is key to driving new business, according to Ciabrone, “American Standard representatives often assist with events and it’s been extremely helpful to have their expertise present. They’ve also referred lots of local customers to our showroom.” Quality product that’s popular with customers also helps draw in traffic. “American Standard’s Champion® 4 toilet, currently rated number one by a major consumer magazine, is one of our best sellers,” says Ciabrone. “In fact, we display all the Champion models, which really helps sales.” American Standard Americast bathtubs and Porcher bath vanities are also favorites with Atlantic customers. And American Standard’s Jado and Porcher brands are constant eye-catchers in the showroom. “We have a lot of Jado and Porcher on the floor,” says Ciabrone. “There’s a certain very rich, sophisticated European flair about these designs that customers are drawn to. The bath suites, especially the Calla™ II Suite, do very well. And the American Standard Modern Rain Showerhead, with its contemporary style and unique square design, is another magnet in our working shower display. Customers just love how the water is dispensed in a square pattern!”

Friendships yield profits

“It’s hard to gauge where we might be in more favorable economic conditions, but in spite of the challenges, we’ve doubled our sales numbers by working together with manufacturer and trade partners to the common end of providing product and service that’s outstanding,” says Ciabrone. Working in collaboration with manufacturers like American Standard and designers, architects and plumbers to drive business was an investment that continues to yield big profits for The Showroom at Atlantic.

###