

Creating a Showroom That Works for You

Think outside the box when designing and using your customer showroom.

By Dave Silberstein

There's no question that a company showroom can be one of the most important investments you'll ever make. It can give you a place to show potential customers, first-hand, how desirable a great projection, sound- and media-delivery system can be. A showroom also allows you to demonstrate the advantages of numerous products, including home-automation systems and whole-house audio.

However, when many installers think about building a showroom, they immediately envision a home theater. And then they imagine bringing in previously identified clients to see that home theater. While I agree that a demonstration theater and qualified prospects are very important, I'd like you to consider taking your showroom concept to the next level.

Whenever you have a party or entertain in your home—even if you have an amazing media center in the living room—everyone ends up hanging out in the kitchen at some point, in the family room or at the game-room bar. When Crestron built its newest Customer Experience Center (CEC) last year in Rockleigh, N.J., we

kept the kitchen in mind. We made sure the first area visitors see on the CEC tour is a kitchen-like environment; this space is what we call our Grand Salon. It revolves around a wave-shaped countertop and bar stools, and the room is equipped with first-rate projection, sound, lighting and control systems. This is the kind of concept room you may want to consider when building or renovating your showroom.

While many installers will build a theater-like demo area, some will show clients their own personal home theaters. Whatever your circumstances, chances are you already have a space that functions like our Grand Salon—one that you use for client meetings or special events. Take a closer

look at your existing demo space and you may realize that you have an opportunity to use the area differently—as a place to demonstrate how you'd outfit the kitchen and family areas of your clients' homes.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Don't get stuck on mocking up the exact space. Many installers feel they have to create individual cubicles in their office to represent the various rooms of a home. Having a designated area that functions well—with enough space to spread out so you can test-drive the technology—is more important than installing kitchen-like curtains and a dishwasher. People will understand the analogy you're trying to make.

- If you do any commercial installation



The Grand Salon in the new Crestron Experience Center.

work in corporate or educational venues, you may want to re-evaluate your business' meeting rooms or conference areas so that those spaces showcase your ability to build meeting-room or classroom systems. In Crestron's Experience Center, we've included a boardroom and a presentation/classroom as an example of this.

- Subtlety works: You don't have to hit people over the head with the technology. Our Grand Salon is designed to demonstrate Crestron's technology without really showing it. While the Grand Salon resembles a kitchen or bar, it morphs into a venue for test-driving an LED lighting system, a 7.1 surround-sound system and Crestron's touchpanels. It allows users to see and feel how their lifestyles can be improved with these kinds of systems.

- Even though you'll probably conceal the technology in your showroom—just like a homeowner would—be sure to show the newest systems you can afford. Crestron has included its new ADMS Intermedia Delivery System in our theater because we want potential clients to experience what a high-end system looks like and what it does. Crestron, of course, can help you maximize your showroom by offering discounts on equipment. Crestron can also help you design and engineer your showroom and create a co-op relationship to help you promote your business via special events in your new or renovated space.

GETTING CREATIVE

It's not enough to just build a great showroom—you need to know how to maximize its potential by thinking outside the box. We try to use the Crestron showrooms in a variety of ways to attract our target markets—luxury home buyers, corporate facility managers, audiovisual integrators, architects and interior designers. The key in making your showroom work for you is finding the people who can afford these systems, and creating an excuse to show your wares to them. For example, Crestron hosts numerous on-site classes and seminars, including CEDIA University classes, and seminars for architects and engineers who need to learn about commercial and residential technology. Recently, one of our

dealers invited 25 architects to our CEC in Rockleigh, and offered a one-hour class on residential audiovisual distribution. The architects received a continuing education credit, as well as lunch. You may want to consider inviting CEDIA or Infocomm to host an event in your showroom, or ask AIA or ASID if they'd like to hold a seminar or monthly chapter meeting in your demo space. Think about what kinds of events your potential clients would enjoy and create the event. Other ideas include open houses, luncheons, design seminars, parties and product showcases. Repeat the events that work well.

Also consider the companies and organizations that cater to the level of client you want to reach. Co-sponsor an event with these companies so they can bring their clientele to you. This is an easy way to develop new business.

For example, a local integrator is working with a Ferrari dealership to host a catered event at the CEC that may involve the unveiling of a new car. Ferrari may display its cars in front of Crestron's showroom and show informational videos in our Grand Salon and our theater. It's a natural partnership of two luxury brands. If someone can afford a Ferrari, they can probably afford a media system as well.

Another idea is to partner with a local artist who can display his or her artwork on your showroom walls. Together you can host a "gallery" show. Or co-sponsor a wine-tasting or culinary event with a high-end wine shop, restaurant or caterer. Creating events like these will bring a new group of people into your showroom—folks who have dispensable income and luxury tastes.

If you're interested in appealing to the female market, consider hosting an event with a clothing boutique, which would probably love to co-sponsor an event outside its retail space—especially if the store can utilize your audiovisual system.

Of course you can always create an event around the manufacturers that showcase their projectors, speakers, amplifiers and theater seating in your showroom. Remember that architects, interior designers and general contractors are good folks to invite into your showroom since they're

oftentimes asked for audiovisual referrals. They may not know who to refer until they experience your showroom and spend some time with you.

The more people you bring into your space, the better. There's a natural appeal to good sound, good acoustics and good video projection, but most folks never have experienced a well-designed theater, sound or home-automation system. Once they see it and experience it, they'll want it.

Be sure that you don't leave out your own employees. Once every quarter, Crestron hosts a "friends and family day." This event allows our employees to bring loved ones into our facility to show them what they do for a living. Sometimes it's hard to explain to our families what we do at work, so your showroom can be a meaningful link. In addition, you might meet some potential clients through your employees and their friends and family.

And don't feel shy about bringing clients to Crestron's many showrooms. We're all around the world—from Las Vegas to Fort Lauderdale, London, Belgium, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong—and we have smaller showrooms in many of our regional offices. We can help you educate your clients about our products, and the media and automation services you offer. It just takes one phone call to find out what's available. ●



Dave Silberstein is Crestron's national product sales specialist. He started as a commercial integrator and has nearly 20 years of professional experience in the industry. Best known for his work in the Crestron Technical Institute, he helped create Crestron's Customer Experience Center in Rockleigh, N.J. He also is in charge of operating the center.