

Showroom With a Difference

Where business meets the future.

“The showroom is clearly a tool,” says Barry Kay, Kay & Sons, Philadelphia, PA. “The role of a showroom is just like any other marketing tool and advertising tool that you have: You’ve got to point it at what’s going on in the marketplace at the time.”

And that’s the point, knowing what’s going on in the marketplace. “Right now, my take is that shading, in particular, is becoming a leading element in the buildings of the future. In the past, shading was about window fashions. Now it’s more about managing light and energy in buildings,” says Kay. “That shift in the marketplace is requiring businesses to evolve in terms of how they do business. We need to provide different services than we ever did before.”

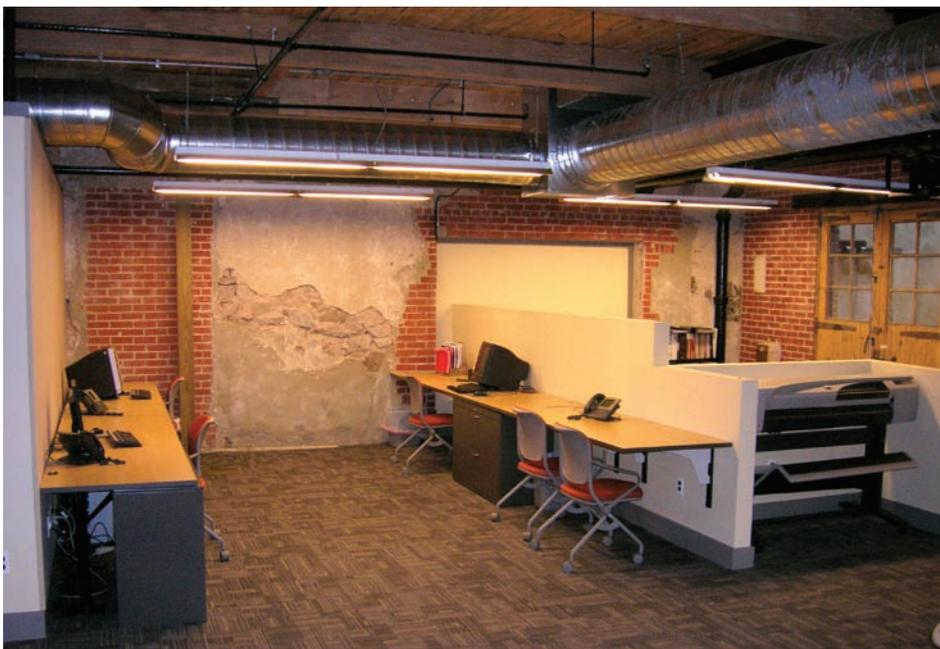
Those services, he says, have evolved to include technology, customer integration and sophisticated management. For Kay, that requires an emphasis on the people that are in his organization and the leadership skills in his company.

“Our role with the customer is changing. We’ve become more of a partner with people in their businesses,” Kay explains. “Our ability to take our education and knowledge about product and the technology that now is available and try to integrate it into our customers’ companies to help them run more profitable and successful is a really key element.”

Kay sees this business model as a blueprint for businesses going forward. Dealers of the future will be different than they are today, he says. They will have to be more technical and have more engineering background. The challenge also will be to work together with customers with the aim of creating value for the customer. They will have to understand that they no longer are in the window fashions business; they are in the light and energy control business.



The technology—from automated shades to dimmable lighting fixtures to master controls—are completely integrated and are practically invisible in Kay & Son’s showroom.



Easily recognized by customers as a real working environment, Kay’s showroom is a blueprint for how the business of light and energy control will be done in the future.

“We use our showroom to show the customer how we’re doing these things,” Kay says.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Kay has been in the industry all his life having grown up in a drapery workroom with a showroom out front. He has been with the family business, which was founded in 1922, and has seen it evolve to where today it handles many commercial or business accounts. Kay & Sons’ most recent evolution came when it moved into a 10,000-square-foot facility in a 200-year-old building along the Philadelphia riverfront. There, Kay has created a showroom that leaves quite an impression on customers and illustrates the direction of businesses in the future.

It’s an open office plan that most of the Kay & Son’s business customers would instantly recognize, but there’s a difference. Technology is integrated into the showroom—completely and practically invisibly. The whole office, then, becomes the showroom.

“We’ve incorporated all this technology into our showroom so that a customer can come—as if they were in their office in the future—and experience the technology. Our core business is the shading business, yet we’ve incorporated addressable, dimmable ballasts in the fluorescent lighting fixtures; we have master control systems; we have coordinated shadings that are part of a daylight harvesting system that shows people how they can utilize the value of natural lighting in exchange for the cost of electric light. But telling people that in a sales pitch versus bringing them in here and having them experience it—that’s a much more palatable vehicle to get that across.”

Some of the products Kay showcases are likely to be things many customers aren’t use to. While everybody may have a DVD player, VCR or a computer, Kay points out that his or her comfort level with these tools vary.

“We make it a little bit more universally comfortable for people because instead of expecting them to understand it through an explanation, a sales pitch or a brochure, we bring them in and they can see it work. They don’t really need to know how it works, but they can see the manner in which it does work and the value they can get out of it in their own work environment.”

What they might see is something like this: an automatic window shade lower because it is reacting to a solar sensor, and the natural daylight flowing in through the window telling the lighting fixtures to dim because they don’t need to be on so brightly and to save energy, and yet the overall light level in the room remains unchanged at a comfortable working level.

“That’s a very powerful experience for somebody versus me trying to explain the value of automated shades,” says Kay.

LIGHT AND ENERGY

Shading systems have become an integral part to the functioning of a building or home, Kay says. Light is a major influencer on the indoor environment and the occupant, and shades can regulate the levels of light, glare, view to the outside and heat gain.

“These factors apply to any building—it can be a condominium, it can be an office building, it can be a hospital, it can be a school. Everybody is concerned about energy costs. Everybody is concerned about comfort. It doesn’t matter what type of building they are in.”

In commercial applications—in a work environment—Kay points out these factors effect the productivity. Energy is easier to measure; in fact, a computer program in Kay’s showroom measures the energy savings in real time so as a customer watches he can see the savings right in front of him. But in an office, productivity is the main improvement that results from these integrated systems.

That might be difficult to get across to a client, so it all comes back to the showroom as a place to communicate and share with the customer. “It says something about how you are going to market as a business. Customers get to see the technology; they get to experience the culture of my company, which is what I’m also selling; and my people, who are the most critical aspect of our success as a company, get to experience and interact with the customers that they’re trying to service as well. Everybody wins.” ●