

People don't want to touch anything when they use the restroom, so everything from flush valves on toilets to faucets, soap dispensers and paper towels should be touchless.

By Jason Renner

Attractive, efficient retail restrooms possible without breaking budget

Nearly every major retailer has the same wish list for its restrooms — cleanliness and durability combined with a customer-friendly look. Maintenance and cleaning issues are the biggest concerns, because let's face it, even the most upscale facilities will turn off customers if they are dirty and unkempt.

The challenge for most facilities is that keeping busy restrooms clean is expensive. But while maintenance is expensive, having a dirty restroom can be

even more costly to a store's reputation. Retailers must find cost-effective ways to provide attractive restrooms that are easy to maintain.

Handwashing should be another concern. The **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** estimates that one in three people don't wash their hands after using the restroom. All of those dirty hands return to stores, touching everything and spreading dirt and billions of germs! A clean, well-designed restroom encourages handwashing and will

contribute to better hygiene.

Whether you operate a regional mall or manage construction for a national retail chain, here are five tips that will make restrooms more comfortable for shoppers, yet durable enough to stand up to frequent use:

Go with the flow

The traffic flow that is. One of the most common problems in restrooms is a design that does not accommodate traffic volume and flow. ADA requirements have made restrooms larger, but it's important to consider adding additional space in retail applications for users with strollers and shopping bags. Wider aisles in front of toilet partitions make life easier for parents or caregivers of those with physical disabilities.

The idea is to keep traffic moving quickly into and back out of busy restrooms. While local building codes often mandate the number of water closets, the type of lavatory fixtures and placement of accessories are left to interpretation and can be a problem.

For example, lavatory systems that accommodate multiple users are a better choice than individual china lavs for high-traffic washrooms. Soap dispensers



Solid surface lavatory systems are attractive and extremely durable, which makes them ideal for busy restrooms. Innovative new multi-height lavatory systems work well for users of all sizes and abilities.

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integrated into the fixture eliminate the need for users to search or reach for soap. Installing hand dryers on an adjacent wall eliminates a bottleneck in the sink area and also reduces maintenance because there is less trash to empty and no dispensers to refill.

Be universally friendly

Many malls and larger department stores are adding family restrooms as part of new construction or renovation projects. In fact, unisex restrooms are required by the **2003 International Building Code** for these projects, but many are going beyond the minimum unisex toilet room requirements. These larger, family-friendly facilities are helpful for parents of opposite sex children, such as a father with a young daughter, and are also a convenient option for individuals in wheelchairs.

Upscale shopping centers have found that adding lounge areas, nursing rooms, and extras such as child-height toilets and handwashing fixtures make shopping easier for everyone. Increasingly manufacturers are creating new products that are universal in their design and fit

seamlessly into attractive family restrooms.

One innovative new solution is a multi-height lavatory system that accommodates users of all sizes. These wave-shaped solid surface handwashing fixtures incorporate a taller sink with a lower one, allowing parents and their children to wash their hands at the same time — without any lifting for children to reach the sink.

Get hands free

According to a 2003 survey of **International Facility Management Association** members commissioned by **Bradley Corp.**, touchless or hands-free technology is the biggest trend in commercial washrooms. People don't want to touch anything when they use the restroom, so everything from flush valves on toilets to faucets, soap dispensers and paper towels should be touchless.

Hands-free faucets have a key benefit for retailers — water conservation. Increased demand for water and rising water/sewer costs mean that it's more important than ever for facilities to reduce water use. Faucets with infrared sensors ensure that water is

not left running long after users have washed their hands.

Do lighten up

Just as in fitting rooms, lighting in restrooms should be more than an afterthought. While most stores don't need over-the-top lighting fixtures, it is important to use lighting to create an inviting atmosphere. Good lighting also lets users see just how clean restrooms are, while poor lighting can make them seem grungy.

Bringing in natural light can be an effective way to create a softer, more inviting space. For many stores and shopping areas, this may be easier given the trend toward open air lifestyle centers. If an exterior wall faces the outdoors, why not bring some of that light inside? Shoppers may stay a little longer if they don't feel trapped inside a dark, gloomy store on a nice day.

Don't forget the accessories

Finally, do not overlook an important part of any restroom — the accessories. This includes toilet partitions, towel dispensers or hand dryers, trash receptacles, toilet tissue dispensers

and diaper changing stations. When it comes to durability, it is better to specify a vandal-resistant product that is made for high-traffic washrooms right from the beginning. These accessories may have a higher cost upfront, but they will perform better and last throughout the restroom's lifecycle.

Stainless steel accessories are usually a good choice for busy restrooms. Recessing paper towel dispensers and other fixtures makes them even tougher. Sometimes a surface mounted accessory can be a temptation for bored teens who may decide to try to knock them off the wall. In addition, recessing these units gives the restroom a more polished look and saves space.

One major discount retailer is even taking stainless steel beyond the basic accessories. The company is opting for stainless steel toilet partitions over plastic or other materials. Textured stainless steel partitions are the most expensive option, but the chain has found that the initial cost is worthwhile because it's easier to maintain and is more durable.

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