

## **A Canadian Perspective**

According to Freddie Naimer, president of Union Lighting Co. Ltd. in Saint Laurent, Quebec, the internet has affected Canadian showroom sales just as it has showrooms in the United States.

But if you can't beat them it's best to join them, Naimer believes. Union Lighting is currently in the process of adding a shopping cart to its website.

"We feel that having a website with a shopping cart is imperative in today's market – not only as a sales vehicle but also as a means to market our store," he says. "We're going to be spending a lot of money on search engine optimization but when you analyze it, it's really less money than if you opened a brick-and-mortar store."

### **One Door Opens, Another Sale Closes**

Although the internet has affected the showroom's retail sales, Naimer remains optimistic.

"I read an article that was all 'doom and gloom' about the retail lighting industry," Naimer says. "It said that the internet was taking over. I couldn't disagree more. Although there are less of us around since the 1980s, the showrooms that operate today are better displayed and better staffed.

"Yes, the internet will do a certain percentage of the overall business, but I feel that most consumers today – although they will do their research on the web – would still prefer to buy from a local lighting showroom," Naimer says. "They make our jobs easier because they educate themselves before coming to our showrooms. It is for us to close the sale, not the door."

### **LED the Way**

Union Lighting is investing in training its sales staff, particularly on the subject of LED lighting.

"We are providing our sales team with lots of training on LED products because this is a very fast-growing part of our business," Naimer says. "LED is the future. I was never a CFL person. We're selling a lot of LED now, and we're going to sell more of it as the price comes down a little bit more. It's absolutely the future."

According to Naimer, the showroom's biggest hurdle is convincing people to invest in LED lamps even though they last a lot longer and are more energy-efficient than halogen incandescents and CFLs.

"The people who are buying LEDs are people with a much higher budget or those who want the latest high-tech stuff," he says. "The challenge is convincing people to spend more because they see the lower-quality product at the home centers that sells for less and they're comparing our products to that. We have to explain and show how it's not the same quality at all."

### **Change Is the Only Constant**

Changing consumers' minds about LED lamps is not the only kind of change with which the showroom is contending.

"There's so much change happening in this business," Naimer says. "It's not really the lighting business anymore, it's the electronics business – and it's a tough one. You can't really keep a lot of inventory because if you don't sell it right away, it's obsolete. It's like having yesterday's computer; nobody wants it. It's the same way with the lighting industry."