

## Making Smart LED Lighting Decisions

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LED lighting is still new, and some professionals have been reluctant to consider it. It seems as if they are waiting for the fad to end or the technology to stop changing. Neither is going to happen. It is time to revisit some key aspects of this exciting light source.

LED is directional light. Like an MR16 lamp, light emits in one direction. Because of this, an LED luminaire that is directional will always be significantly more effective and efficient. Under cabinet, landscape, track heads, step and recessed lighting are designed to push light in one direction. This allows for the most effective use of the lumens generated by the LED.

Because an LED lighting fixture is a bit more expensive than incandescent, it is also best to recommend use where extended periods of illumination are expected. Kitchen under-cabinet and recessed lighting along with outdoor lighting are traditionally the longest operated light sources in a residence and the most obvious choices to reduce the owner's lifetime cost.

Lighting professionals have never needed to help the consumer buy the right "color" light. With incandescent and halogen, there is only one choice. Now, there are multiple LED color options, but only a few good solutions. America lives with residential lighting in the 2700K to 3000K (Kelvin) color temperature range.

While 3500K is often called "warm white" there is no incandescent, halogen or xenon lamp currently available in this color temperature. It should not be used. Stay within the typical homeowner's 2700K to 3000K range.

The second element of color is CRI (Color Rendering Index). This is a zero-to-100 measurement of the way in which color is interpreted by the light. Zero represents a total lack of color and 100 is perfect incandescent color rendering. For color sensitive areas in the home, such as kitchen countertops or bathroom mirrors, a minimum CRI in the mid-80s should be used.

In less sensitive areas, such as toe-kick lighting, cove or tray ceiling illumination, a CRI in the 70s can be effective, but in no circumstance should CRI less than 70 be used in a residence. Objects take on a gray pallor with low CRI. This can be very uncomplimentary on human skin tones and foodstuffs. A higher CRI provides a more natural look.

The FTC has recently mandated that lumen output must now be the largest feature on light bulb cartons. Consumers will begin an educational transition from wattage to lumen output. This comes at a perfect time, as all LEDs are not created equal. The lumen output from one LED is not necessarily the same as that provided by another of the same wattage consumption. The lighting professional will need to spend more time considering the lumen output and less on the wattage consumption to help their client purchase wisely.

Unfortunately, most LED retrofit lamps are not yet ready to take the place of incandescent lamps. The Department of Energy has been testing MR16 lamps for the last three years and has yet to find one with light output greater than that which is provided by a 20-watt incandescent.

Some LED "A" lamps have appeared, but they are very expensive. Many have substandard light output or color characteristics. For now, it would be in the consumer's best interests to buy LED luminaires and use CFLs as the retrofit of choice.

Yes, LED lighting is a moving target, but with the proper information, smart selections can be made and recommended to the lighting distributor's customer.

## Showroom Uses Social Media to Build Customer Relationships

Lewiston, Maine-based showroom Lighting Concepts successfully implemented a social media campaign with surprising results. According to Peggy Deblois, marketing director, the showroom initially decided to become active on Facebook and Twitter to increase its search engine visibility since the showroom's website has e-commerce functionality. But what they discovered was something else entirely.

"We got into social media thinking we needed to do this to drive traffic to our online store," Deblois says. "But it's actually helped us increase our relationships with local traffic and the people who are able to actually come in the store. We saw it as an opportunity to personalize someone's online experience."

Deblois believes customers have become very reliant on the internet. "People do their shopping research on the internet today," she says. "We're finding that about 90 percent of our in-store traffic comes in holding something that they've printed from online. A huge percentage of the people who are walking in the door are walking in pre-qualified. They know what they want to buy. Their first visit is happening online."

In addition to being active on Facebook and Twitter, Lighting Concepts posts informational videos on YouTube, uses Constant Contact for monthly e-mail marketing, and features a blog and e-commerce on its website. Also, the showroom posts multiple resources for consumers on its website, including articles and informational tools.

"There's a lot to learn when you're going to make a lighting purchase, especially if you're doing a remodel or a construction," Deblois says. "Having all of those resources online is huge for our customers. They like knowing what they're talking about before they come in to make their purchasing decision."

To save time, Deblois uses built-in shortcuts and applications available in Constant Contact and Facebook.

"In Constant Contact, when you send a marketing e-mail, it will give you a 'Tweet this' option, which puts your message in the right number of characters so it will send out automatically as a tweet," Deblois says. "That's why we're able to keep on top of Twitter - that makes it easy for us to do that."

Also, Deblois uses Facebook's SellSocial application. "If you are a business, you can add an app to your Facebook page that's called SellSocial," Deblois explains. "So if you were on our Facebook page you would now see on the left-hand side a little icon that says Shop Now. When you click on that, it actually opens a little mini store where you can see some of our products and the price points."

"Quite honestly, we don't expect to sell a lot of product that way, but we look at it as a new version of a flyer," Deblois says. "This is a way for people who are interested in us to see our price points so they know that we're competitive with everyone else. Also, it allows us to show a variety of things like best sellers or clearance items."

In addition to improving local relationships with customers, being on Facebook and Twitter has resulted in increased online traffic, Deblois says. "Since we started these social media efforts, we have doubled the online visits to our site," she says. "We have between 100 and 120 visits a day on our site."

All told, Deblois believes the internet has definitely helped rather than hindered Lighting Concepts' ability to develop relationships with local customers and build in-store traffic.

"Obviously retail is going online, but we don't want to lose the relationship part of our business because that's always been who we are," Deblois says.