

Proactive Showrooms Newsletter

Ideas and inspirations for lighting showroom owners and employees.

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Located in Stuart, Fla., Capitol Lighting's new showroom spans 4,500 square feet, bringing the best of its bricks-and-clicks model.



Proactive Showrooms is a publication of the American Lighting Association. Have a story idea? Send an e-mail to bglenn@americanlightingassoc.com.

Capitol Lighting Changes With the Times

Capitol Lighting's eight showrooms are the offspring of a family retailing tradition that dates back to 1924, when Max Lebersfeld, an electrical contractor and immigrant from Austria, Hungary, opened a showroom in Newark, N.J. Today, **Capitol Lighting** has expanded its operation into four locations in New Jersey and four in southeast Florida.

The Lebersfeld family has made a lot of changes since they founded Capitol Lighting in 1924. Although the eight-location operation was forced to lay off employees as a result of the recession, during the last 12 months Capitol Lighting has been in a hiring growth phase.

"Our recruiting efforts are playing a more significant role in our growth strategy," says Eric Lebersfeld, president of Capitol Lighting. "We're actively looking to hire the highest quality people out there and give them a path to success within our company both for inside sales and outside sales."

Changes and Choices

Lebersfeld says business has changed significantly in recent years, especially the retail business. "You cannot be complacent or expect the foot traffic to be what it once was," he says. "Customers have more options than they've ever had before, and we've got to try to make ourselves available wherever the customers are."

Lebersfeld says Capitol Lighting's marketing has also changed dramatically during the past couple of years. "It ry not do any marketing that can't be tracked in some way to show its return on investment," he says. "We use direct mail, radio, newspapers, e-mail marketing and a variety of online instruments, both on our site and other complimentary sites."

Online Overture

Capitol Lighting founded its website – www.1800lighting.com – in 1996 and added true e-commerce capability in 2005.

"The internet has certainly changed our industry, but any challenge can be viewed as a threat or as an opportunity," Lebersfeld says. "We've chosen to view it as an opportunity. Life is 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you react to it. We didn't invent the internet, but we've chosen to embrace it and make it part of our customer experience."

Lebersfeld believes e-commerce is a growing segment but having a local showroom presence is just as important. "We believe that customers use the internet either for a pre-shop or a post-shop, but in the end they do generally purchase in a showroom," he says. "We believe in online commerce and are building that portal every day. But we believe mixing these two prongs creates a good strategy. The majority of our customers who come into our stores have been online, either on our site or somebody else's."

He emphasizes that going online takes dedication, time and money to do it right. "But the worst thing you can do is put your head in the sand and say 'it's a fad' because it's not going away," he adds. "However, if you choose to use it to your advantage then it's another arrow in your quiver."

Lebersfeld says his company works on increasing search engine optimization for its website on a daily basis. "It is a constant work-in-progress; it's not a set-it-and-forget-it operation," he says. "I've got people looking at it and working on it every day."

Going Places

All eight of Capitol Lighting's showrooms are set up on Google Places, which allows local business owners to customize their listing on Google Maps. When your Google Places listing is optimized properly, your business listing can appear on the first page of Google, thus increasing your search engine optimization.

Although Google Places is free, Lebersfeld cautions that your Google Places account needs to be regularly monitored. "You can't set it and forget it because people have the ability to post comments on Google Places and you have the ability to answer them," Lebersfeld says.

Although the past couple of years haven't been easy – for Capitol Lighting or anyone in the lighting industry – Lebersfeld believes in the importance of making the most of each day.

"Even in the most challenging times I try to have fun every day," Lebersfeld says. "If you're having fun and you enjoy what you're doing the challenges can be turned into opportunities. We certainly work hard on ourselves personally and we want each of our employees to work on themselves personally, too, because if you have happy employees they're going to make happy customers."