



## The Results Are In! ASA Quarterly Market Survey: Showroom Operations - PART THREE

Welcome to the latest ASA Quarterly Market Survey. This time, we're zeroing in on showroom operations. Each ASA Quarterly Market Survey features questions posed by ASA distributor members themselves.

This is, by far, the greatest response we've had in terms of members submitting questions to the survey. ASA members operating showrooms came out of the woodwork with their interest in this survey and submitted a ton of questions.... more than 110 questions.

Hence, in appreciation of your time and schedule, we are breaking the survey up into three mini surveys. And this is the last part!

The first one centered on [General Showroom Operations](#). The second one centered on [Sales, Supply Chain, and Vendor-Supplier Relationships](#). This last section centers on [Marketing, Employee Recruitment, Employee Training, and Future/Forecasting](#).

Some of the questions have been kept open-ended to allow for distributor elaboration, which enhanced the value of the report. Your responses and identity have been kept strictly confidential.

Read the results now!

# EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT

## How/where are you sourcing new help?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:

- I am not involved in sourcing new employees, but I know we use LinkedIn among other things.
- linked in, indeed and word of mouth.
- Word of mouth from existing employees with a sign on bonus to the employee and LinkedIn
- It varies by market - referrals are best, but getting applicants varies significantly by market.
- work of mouth, staffing agency, indeed, LinkedIn
- Social Media along with Recruiting sites such as ZipRecruiter and CareerBuilder
- Using 3rd party HR company to post ads and conduct initial screenings.
- Job sites (i.e., Indeed, ZipRecruiter), personal references or professional recruiters for more skilled or management positions.
- Word of mouth for the most part. We have promoted the showroom receptionist to sales over the years if they have what it takes to be a productive salesperson.
- college recruiting, indeed, high school career centers
- Using LinkedIn and word of mouth for experienced candidates.
- Indeed, online, referrals and recruiters.
- We use Indeed and place an ad, also inquire with our contractors.
- Indeed, through word-of-mouth LinkedIn
- Not hiring right now
- Recruiter, Indeed
- Employee recommendations and design schools.
- Web

## What skillsets and competencies do you look for in hiring successful sales design consultants?

### THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:

- We prefer an interior design degree and some sales experience but are very open to other options.
- Organized, friendly, outgoing, quick learner and the ability to adapt to a ever changing environment
- Sales experience, Customer Service experience. People that are used to working with the public directly.
- It varies by location and needs, but typically looking for sales focused customer service individuals. Design, cabinet design and plumbing knowledge are a big time plus.
- ability to multitask, eye for design, math skills (calculating margin), past luxury sales experience
- Outgoing and cheerful personality along with the desire to learn the products and business.
- Prior luxury sales experience, design/creative background
- Project management, sales and people skills, prior design experience.
- The old saying hire because of positive attitude train for aptitude. Any type of prewise sales experience is always a plus. Any kind of construction knowledge is a plus.
- vision and spatial ability
- Design experience (any industry) with and without sales experience if they have capability to do sales.
- Retail background, preferably high-end products. Strong customer service skills. Strong follow up skills.
- Excellent customer service, organized, adaptable to service situations, we hire for attitude.
- Experience in high-touch customer service, some experience in luxury is preferred. Attitude and personality are the most important things. We are looking for friendly, engaging, and nice people.
- Attentive to detail, Friendly personality, hungry for knowledge, can close a sale.
- Passion for helping the customer, interior design, multitasking, organizational skills
- Designer degrees carry some weight. Culture fit and dedication are two traits we strive for.
- Industry Knowledge, computer skills

## **Are there specific backgrounds outside our industry that you have found crossover well to plumbing showrooms?**

### **THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:**

- Working in the service industry as a server or bartender is always great experience regarding customer service.
- Fashion
- Food services (waitressing) a Retail sale where they worked off commission-based pay.
- Not anything consistently, we have found, but anything with backgrounds with attention to detail, customer facing, and track record of follow up.
- jewelry, restaurant server or bartender
- Generally, someone in the hospitality or service industry
- Hospitality, luxury retail
- Interior design, construction project management, other building materials sales.
- Designer, other showroom type sales like furniture, lighting appliances, etc.
- cabinet design, lighting sales, builder experience
- Tile and Counter Showroom seem to match well as they are very experienced in Bath and Kitchen trends.
- Furniture, tile, flooring.
- Anyone that comes from retail sales seem to do well in the showrooms, have a better understanding of customer service.
- Foodservice and hospitality
- Sales background.
- Retail home furnishing, tile, residential construction, interior design
- None.
- Some retail positions.

# EMPLOYEE TRAINING

**To a company that may not have a training program, what is your recommendation on how to best integrate internal and external resources into an employee training program?**

**THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:**

- I just recently became our first corporate showroom trainer. I am using my own 40 years of experience as well as having our manufacturers' reps do product training. I also utilize our buying group online training and online vendor training.
- Internal Mentors and making sure the mentor want to do it - find your best trainer who on boards their team the fastest and dig into what they are doing...
- Set reasonable goals and expectations without overwhelming the individual.
- Need mix of online trainings, self-paced readings, daily one on one sessions, representatives, shadowing other associates
- There's information on the web to help the training process. We utilize the team to help train a new salesperson. Reps are a key part of the training process.
- find a quality learning management system but do your homework.
- We start by having new hires shadow our existing internal experts while scheduling supplier meetings throughout the first month of employment.
- Especially for product training it is critical that a good relationship is established with the manufacturer reps.
- Utilize ASA, buying group training as well as manufacturer training.
- There needs to be a healthy mix of tools through ASA and other providers along with internal trainings on specific products and brands. No external organizations can do 100% of the training legwork. Training takes time, energy, and patience.
- Shadowing your best consultant.
- Involve HR in assisting with ASA University training for new hires

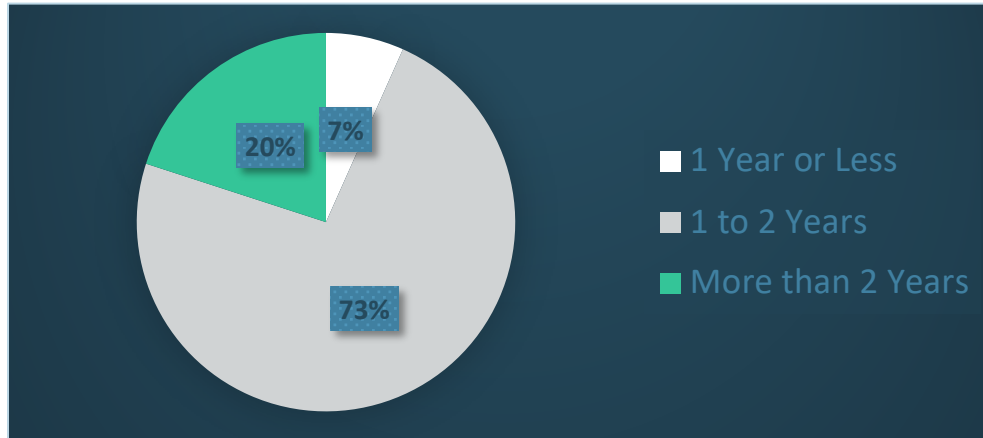
## **To a company that may not have a training program, what is your recommendation on how to best integrate internal and external resources into an employee training program?**

### **THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:**

- I just recently became our first corporate showroom trainer. I am using my own 40 years of experience as well as having our manufacturers' reps do product training. I also utilize our buying group online training and online vendor training.
- Internal Mentors and making sure the mentor want to do it - find your best trainer who on boards their team the fastest and dig into what they are doing...
- Set reasonable goals and expectations without overwhelming the individual.
- Need mix of online trainings, self-paced readings, daily one on one sessions, representatives, shadowing other associates
- There's information on the web to help the training process. We utilize the team to help train a new salesperson. Reps are a key part of the training process.
- find a quality learning management system but do your homework.
- We start by having new hires shadow our existing internal experts while scheduling supplier meetings throughout the first month of employment.
- Especially for product training it is critical that a good relationship is established with the manufacturer reps.
- Utilize ASA, buying group training as well as manufacturer training.
- There needs to be a healthy mix of tools through ASA and other providers along with internal trainings on specific products and brands. No external organizations can do 100% of the training legwork. Training takes time, energy, and patience.
- Shadowing your best consultant.
- Involve HR in assisting with ASA University training for new hires.

## In your experience, how long do you believe it takes to develop someone into a competent, confident, and productive showroom sales associate?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



- One year minimum.
- 1-2 years
- 1 year
- 6 months to build confidence - setting that expectation at the start is important so that they don't lose faith.
- 1 year
- 9 months to a year
- 6 months to handle simple clients/projects, one year to be self sufficient
- 9-12 months.
- I think you have two sectors in training. 1. Knowing the computer system, knowing the inventory, returns etc. 2. Knowing the product and how it works, goes together, fit and finish etc. If they need to learn a sharp person would be full steam ahead in 6 months. If they know 1 or 2 it would be 3 months or so.
- 12-24 months
- 6-12 months depending upon their experience
- 9-12 months
- It varies, but an average would be about a year.
- 3 months to be serviceable for easy sales, 6 months to be able to work through an average job, and 12-18 to be able to handle a full house (best case scenario).
- 6 months
- 3-6 months
- One - three years.
- 6 months to a year

## How do you conduct all-employee training?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



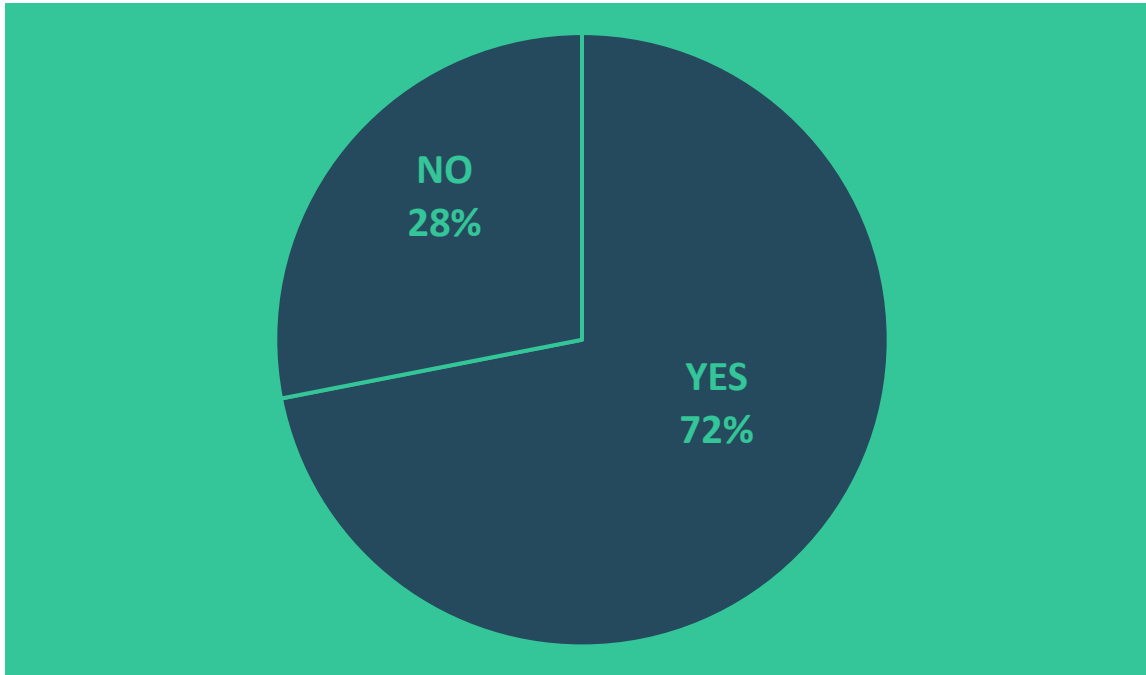
OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY) ...

- I am also starting Teams meetings bi-monthly for new employees.
- we don't have all employee training.
- WE DO INDIVIDUAL BASIS TRAINING THROUGHOUT THE YEAR
- Several different ways but depends on position and if virtually or in person. annual manager meetings in person
- on an "as-needed" basis with no set timeframe
- Only via Zoom, done separately.
- with smaller groups once a quarter.
- N/A - we have too many diverse positions very little applies to everyone.
- training is ongoing based on the needs of a particular showroom.
- Twice a year bringing everyone together.
- We don't do all-employee training. We have specific training for each department.



## From one ASA member: “We find showroom staff excel in sales expertise, but often lack operational aptitude.” Do you encounter the same issues?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



ELABORATE:

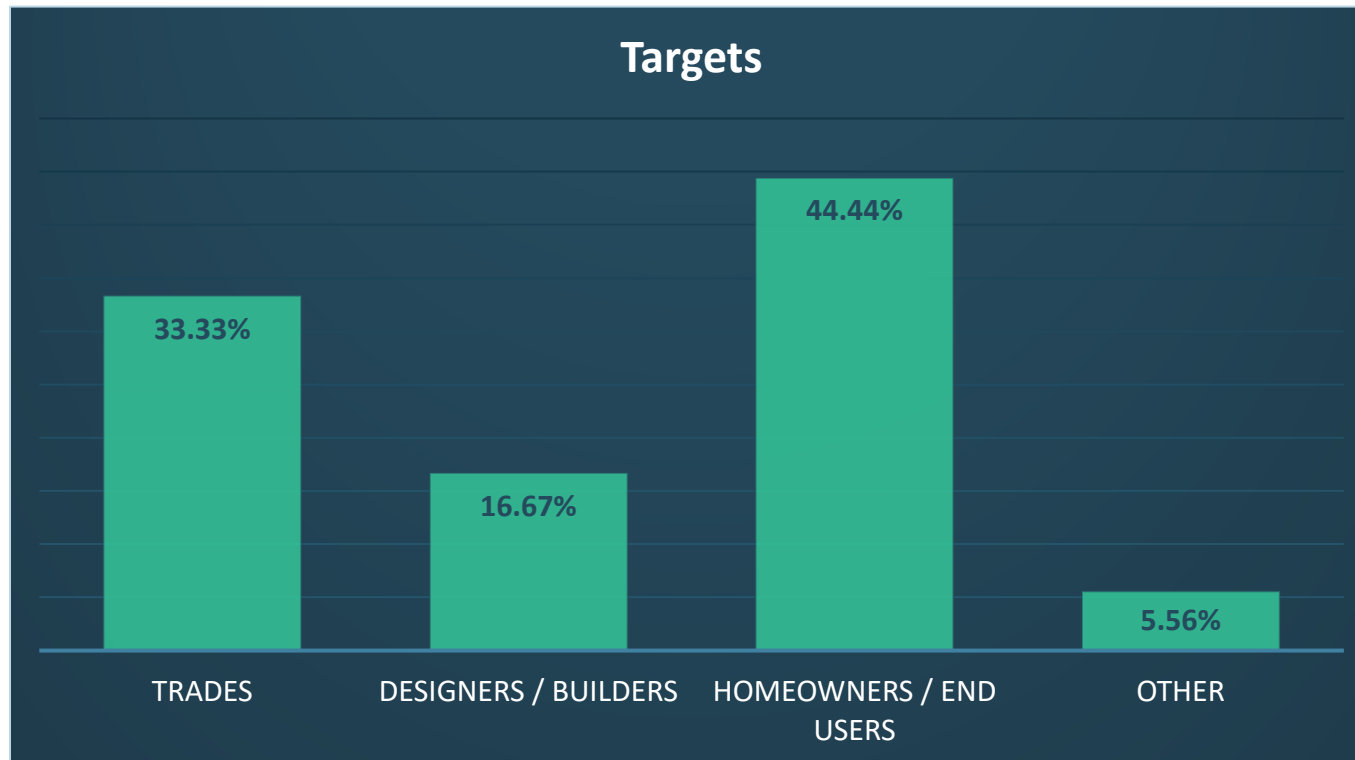
- I think product knowledge is the biggest challenge.
- We have found that if they are good at "sales", their ability to stay organized and operate efficiently suffers. I believe that the sales side is very organic and allows them to be free-spirited. The organizational side of the business is not something that comes nature to them.
- Showroom associates are asked to do a lot - how do we find the right person to fill each of these voids is a challenge. play to their strengths and find ways to support weaknesses through self-improvement and/or removal of roadblocks by management.
- Strong salespeople more focused on selling than administrative. Hire administrative staff to let them focus on sales.
- Our showroom staff consistently fail to effectively manage ordering material on a timeline consistent with the project. As a result, inventory control and management for showroom projects is a challenge.
- Our greatest struggle is getting salespeople comfortable with or knowing luxury.

- ❑ Staff just doesn't get how to perform returns correctly, nor do they seem to understand the ramifications when they don't update the system in a timely manner when they grab stock "off the shelves". They also order too, too far in advance and we sit on inventory for over a year.
- ❑ They have to have some overall knowledge on the operations side of things.
- ❑ This is half true. Our sales staff could improve both areas.
- ❑ Do not take into consideration operational costs. Delivery etc.
- ❑ Showroom staff as well as outside sales staff all lack operational aptitude. It are not their DNA. Showroom staff tends to be a bit more operationally aware than other outside sales staff.
- ❑ Most Showroom designers have poor etiquette for paperwork and communication.

## MARKETING

### Who do you target your marketing efforts toward?

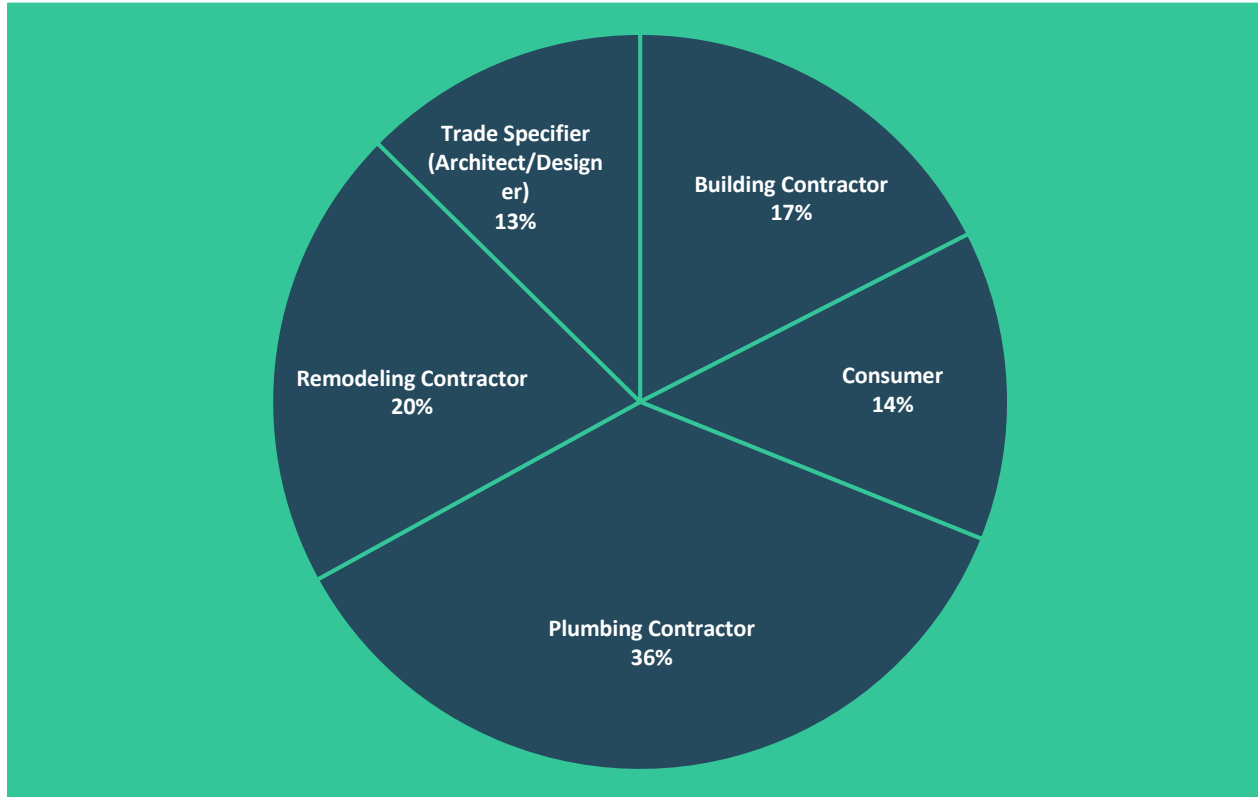
THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



## What % of your total showroom business is sold to each of the following customer groups:

NOTE: THESE RESULTS ARE NOT DESIGNED TO ADD UP TO 100 PERCENT, RATHER PROVIDE AN AVERAGE FOR EACH CATEGORY PER RESPONDENT.

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



## **If you currently sell to homeowners and contractors, have you found a marketing strategy or promotion(s) to be effective to the homeowners without upsetting trade relationships?**

### **THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:**

- We sell to homeowners but at a higher margin. Most of these sales are lighting or small remodeling projects.
- Social media
- We make sure that if we sell direct to consumers, we price them the same price or higher than what the plumber would sell the product to them for.
- This is a challenge we face - we view that the marketing to consumers needs to focus on inspiration and experience vs promotion on price.
- Before we engage with a homeowner we inquire if they have already contacted a contractor
- We market out brand and experience but no sales promos/discounts to consumers.
- We have different price levels with the trades being the deepest discount. Every now and then we have to grease the wheel but not to often.
- No most of our retail business is previous experience word of mouth.
  
- It hasn't been a problem as our homeowners are "walk-ins", usually they are DIYers, or they bring their contractor with them.
- We do not market or sell retail.
- We don't promote to homeowners. We promote to the trades. The trades tend to get better pricing, more programs, more ongoing attention, etc.
- Control over the order process from start to finish.
- Yes.
- Protect the trade's pricing.

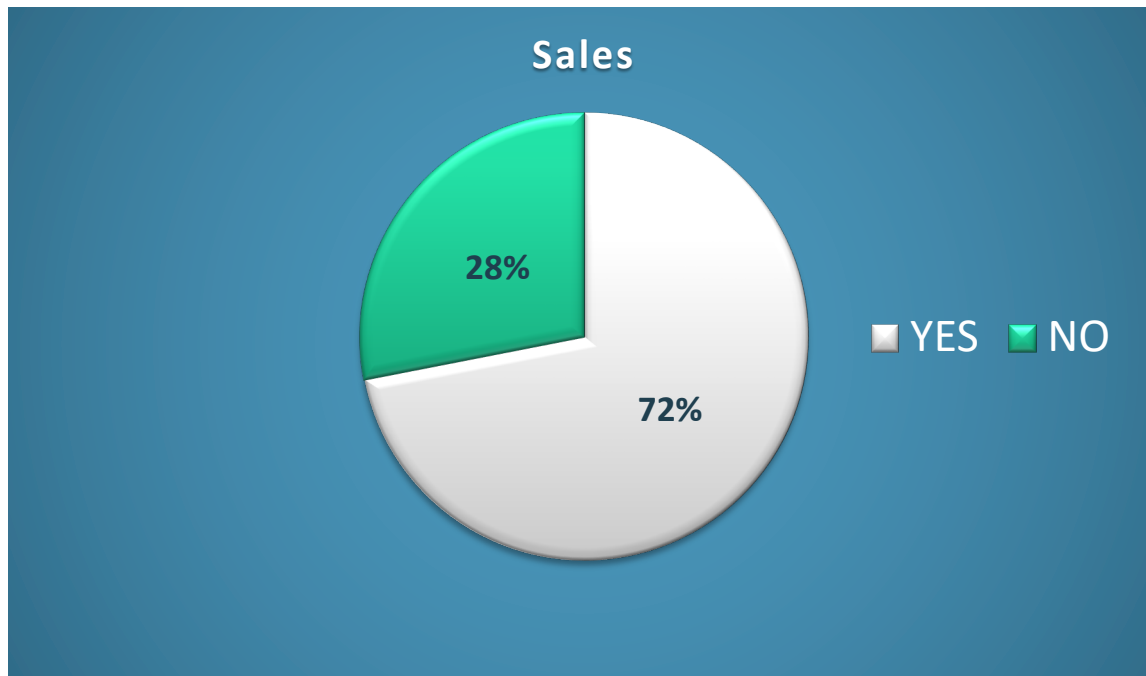
## **Wins and losses in marketing. What initiatives have been the best and worst received?**

### *THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:*

- We are successful with our annual "Red Tag" sale. We sell off display fixtures at deep discounts. The plus is we often get other sales added on.
- TV commercials
- We've started posting more on Instagram and are beginning to see some traction from it.
- Social media seems to be the best marketing venue.
- We don't market in a tradition sense. We constantly update our contractors, designers, etc., about new products and host lunch and learns. These have paid off great!
- Open houses have not been well received. Social media helps showroom traffic.
- We are still working on it. Events tend to be well received, but getting significant attendance is a challenge.
- TV and Radio are still a win. Coupons are of little or no value.
- Our showroom specific website has been a success. Creating showroom spec books has been well received as well

## For those with locations in different parts of the country, do you adjust displays and inventory based on region?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



ELABORATE:

- Some of our showrooms are in smaller towns so we tend to have less expensive offerings.
- Higher end markets w more custom products. Locations with seasonal clients with displays specific to design/culture of area.
- Not big differences but we have a couple more competitive lines with a showroom with a Home Depot across the street.
- N/A only in Wisconsin
- Same area
- Size of the branch and showroom effect inventory and the number of displays.

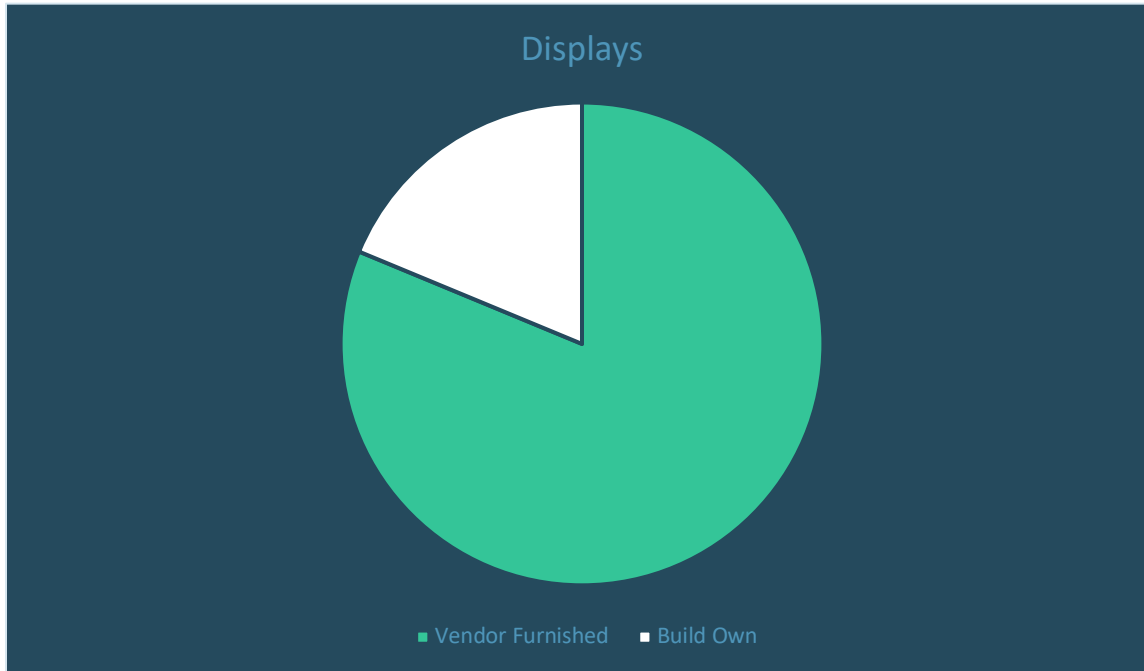
## How often do you refresh or replace displays?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:

- We always add new displays as product is introduced. Larger working displays get updated every 5 years or so.
- As they get discontinued, we add new, we also move items around in the showroom to make the items feel new and create new interest.
- We are constantly updating the displays. If we don't see movement on a piece within a year, we remove it and replace it.
- constantly updating and budgeting for updates throughout our stores. Often on cadence with vendor launches and updates.
- all the time
- We refresh or replace as needed.
- Constantly
- Not often enough. Between cost and available time, displays have not been refreshed or replaced frequently.
- ongoing
- annually
- The base of our displays remains for 3-5 years, and fixtures are updated every 6-12 months.
- It is continuous do not have a set schedule for updates or remodels.
- Depends on what the display is. Larger manufacturer displays are put up for multiple years with light refreshes (some fixture swaps), while things like vanities are swapped at least once a year.
- 1-2 years
- As new product become available.
- 2-5 years. New trends occur more often.
- yearly

## Do you use vendor-furnished display systems, or do you design/build your own?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



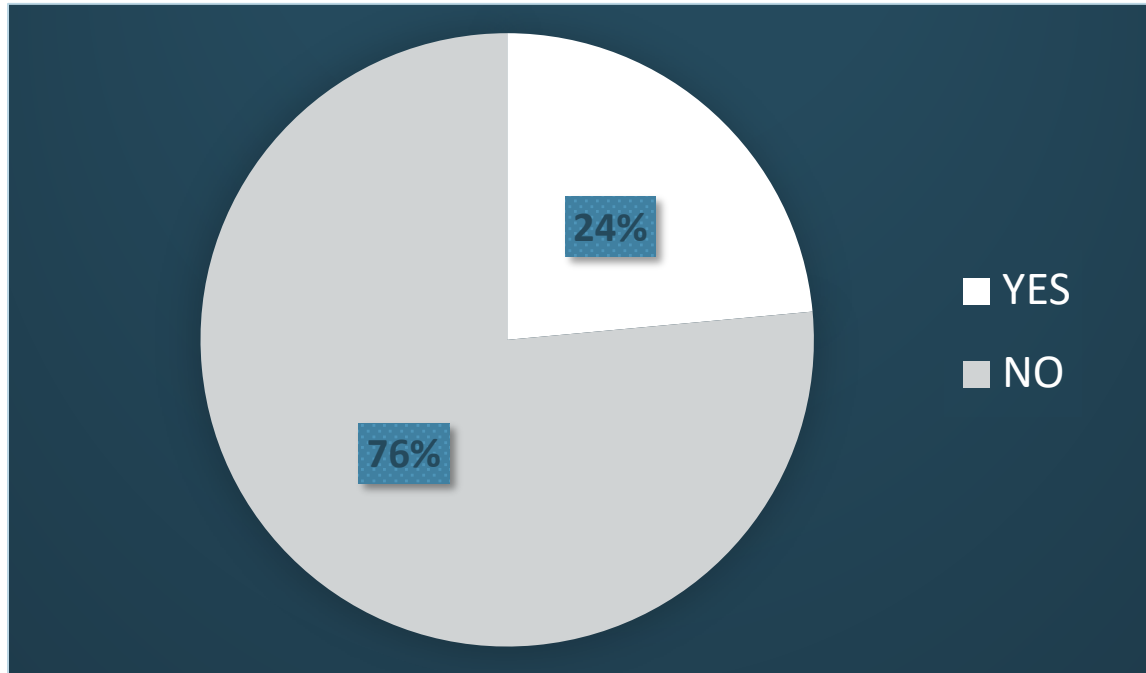
### ELABORATE:

- We have both. Sink and faucet displays are vendor-furnished. Everything else is our own design.
- We do a combination of both.
- we do have some of our own custom as well.
- Both
- We use both.
- We use both.
- We do build some of our own displays for larger items such as bathtubs, toilets, shower surrounds, etc.
- Mostly vendor furnished but also design our own.
- We sometimes have to build our own, but we prefer manufacturer branded displays.
- Build our own when necessary.
- We have used both, but vendor furnished more often.



## Does your organization include a merchandiser to track trends, select product, design displays and replace slow-moving/discontinued product?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



ELABORATE:

- That is now my responsibility so is a work in progress.
- our Director of Showrooms oversees merchandising.
- We wish!
- This is a new position for us.
- Showroom personnel help.

## Who is responsible for cleaning the showroom and/or displays?

### THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:

- Two of our showrooms have a cleaner come in. The other two are cleaned by showroom staff.
- We have a cleaning service that comes in once a week. We also will clean things as needed
- we have a cleaning service
- Showroom teams keeps up to date on general cleaning, but weekly cleaning crews handle deeper clean
- a cleaning service
- Generally current employees contract to clean our various showrooms after normal business hours.
- Admin staff straightens daily but weekly cleaning crew
- Showroom consultant and cleaning staff.
- We have a cleaning crew.
- showroom leadership delegates the responsibility & evening cleaning staff.
- Showroom staff
- Showroom staff, cleaning company vacuums and windows/doors
- We have a cleaning company.
- Showroom staff
- Outside service for heavy cleaning. Staff does daily dusting etc
- We use cleaning services.
- Showroom personnel

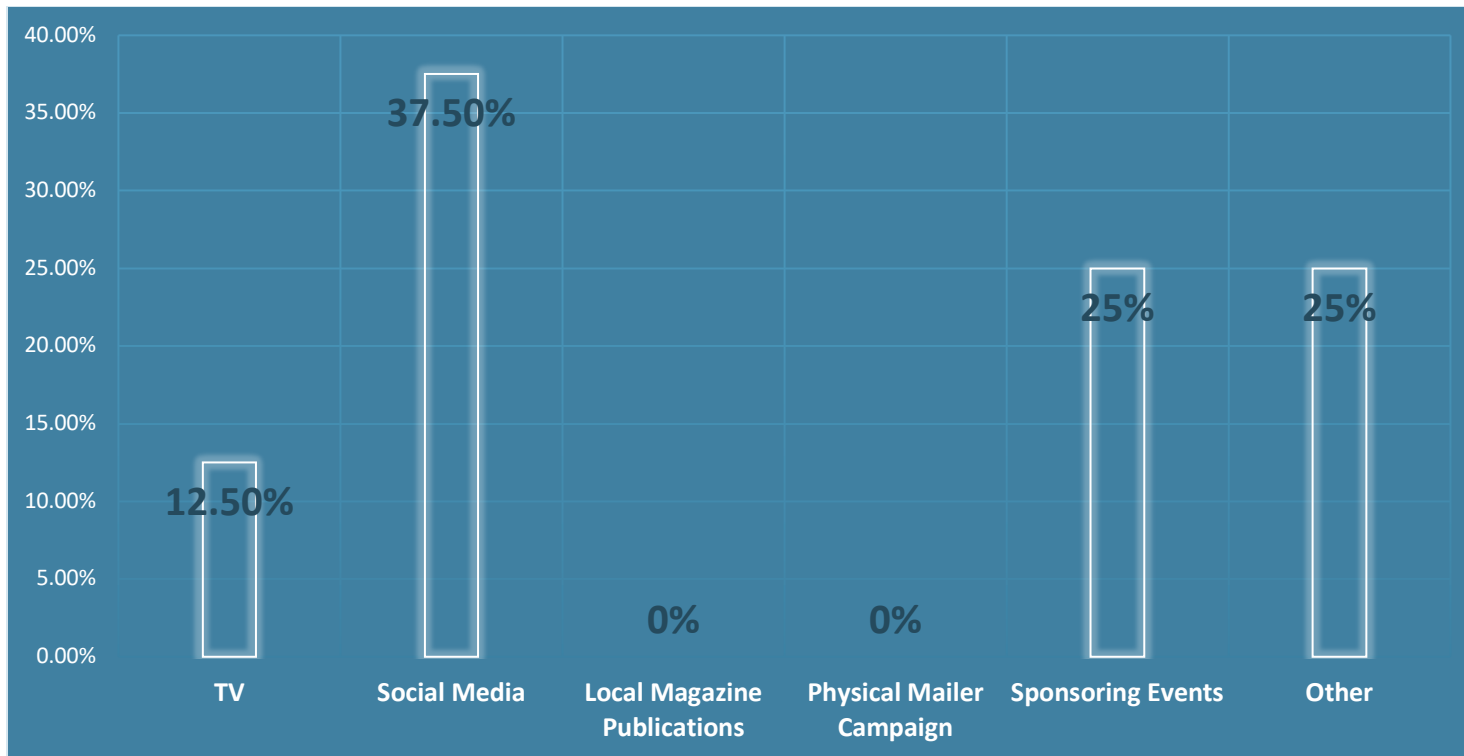
## How often do you do major renovations/look refreshes in your showroom?

### THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:

- Every few years or if things are discontinued.
- As needed.
- Every other year.
- We think a suite or vignette should have a 5-year life cycle typically -
- every few years
- As needed by no sooner than 2-3 years.
- Once/twice a year pending scale.
- As with displays, not frequently.
- We update display year-round but major renovation every 4 to 5 years.
- annually target refreshes.
- The base of our displays remains for 3-5 years, and fixtures are updated every 6-12 months.
- Not often enough, just as needed.
- Every 5 years roughly.
- 7-10 years
- At least annually
- We have done five or six in my 34 years with the company.
- As needed.

# What have you found to be the most effective way today to drive foot traffic to your showrooms?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



## What types of promos have been most effective for you?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:

- Kitchen sink and faucet promo prior to the holidays.
- smaller designer/builder experience events
- we don't do promos thru the showroom.
- We haven't done any promos in our showrooms.
- We give back to the community in so many ways people know us from that. We also have job trailer all over town with advertisement on them.
- Lunch and learns - partnering with suppliers to introduce new products and discuss trends.
- We do not run promotions in the showroom.
- Sponsorships
- None
- Product promos.

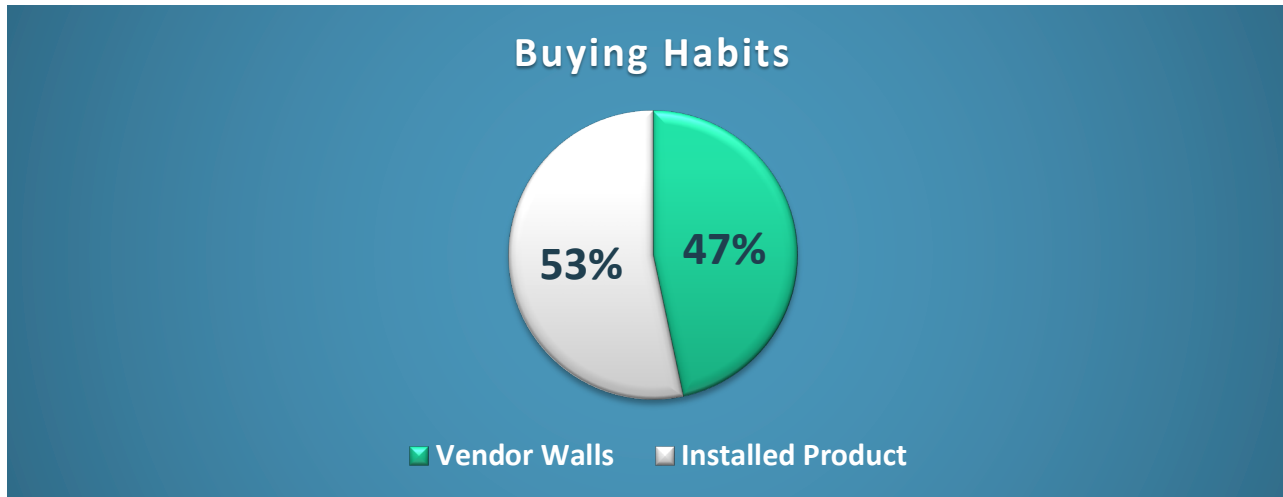
## What is the average length of a sales cycle?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:

- 1-2 months
- 6 months
- 4-7 months
- 45 days on average
- 6-12 months
- it depends on the project, but an average is probably close to 6 months.
- 3 months
- 8 months
- 2-6 months
- 1-6 weeks
- 120-180 days
- 2 months.
- 45-60 days
- 12 months.

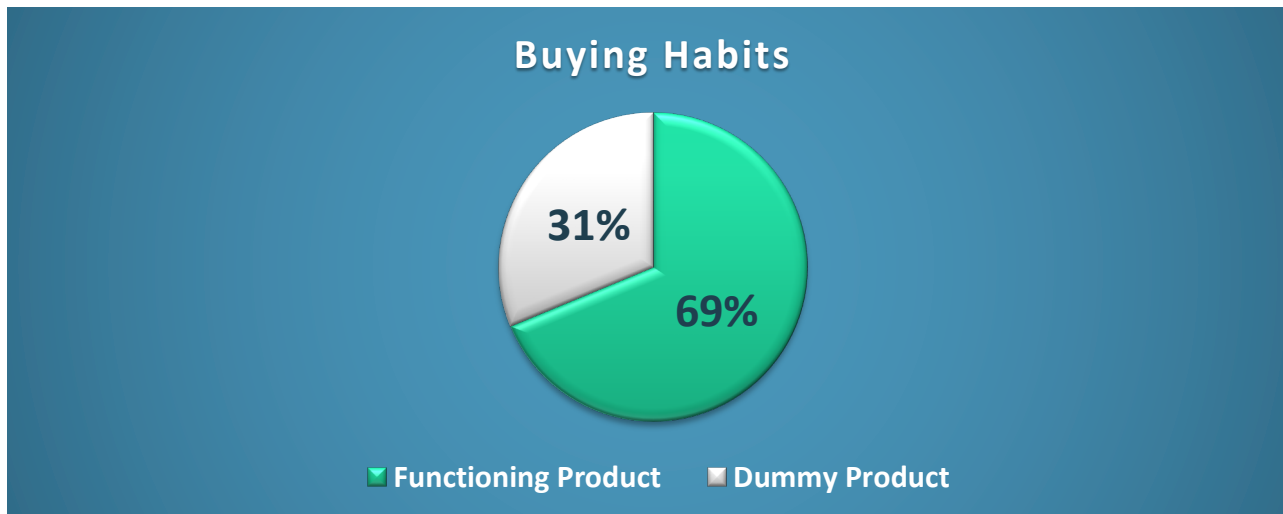
## Buying habits: What works better?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



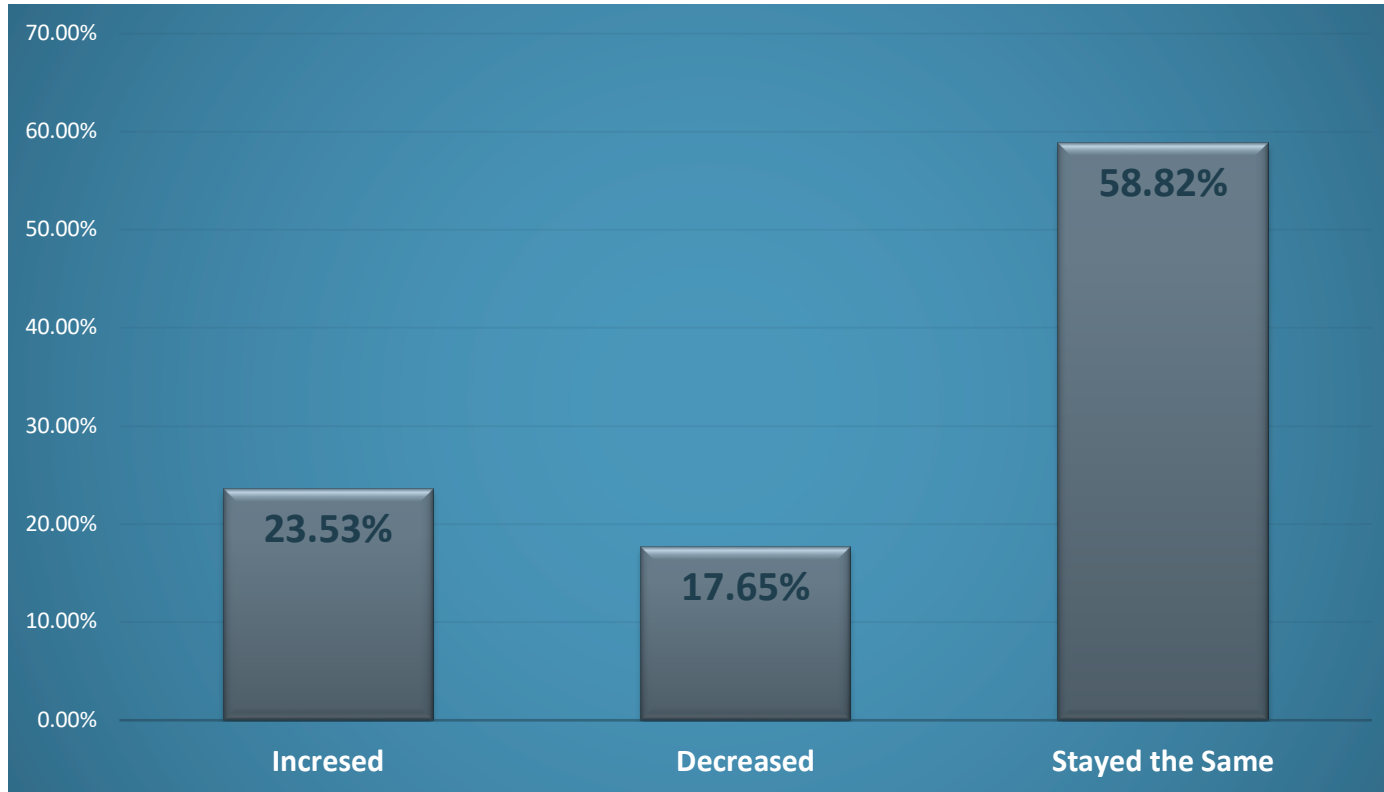
## Buying habits: What works better?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



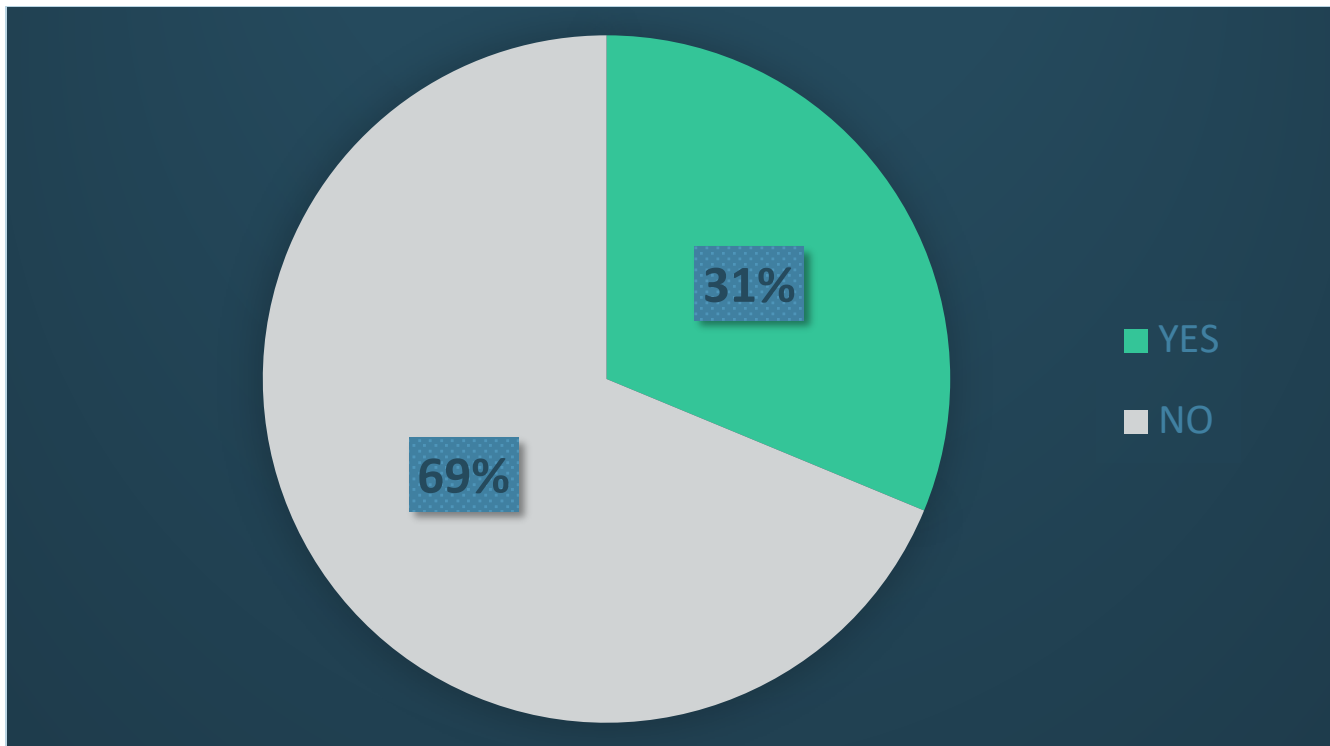
# In the last year, have your co-op display dollars?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



## Do you have a dedicated social media specialist on staff?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



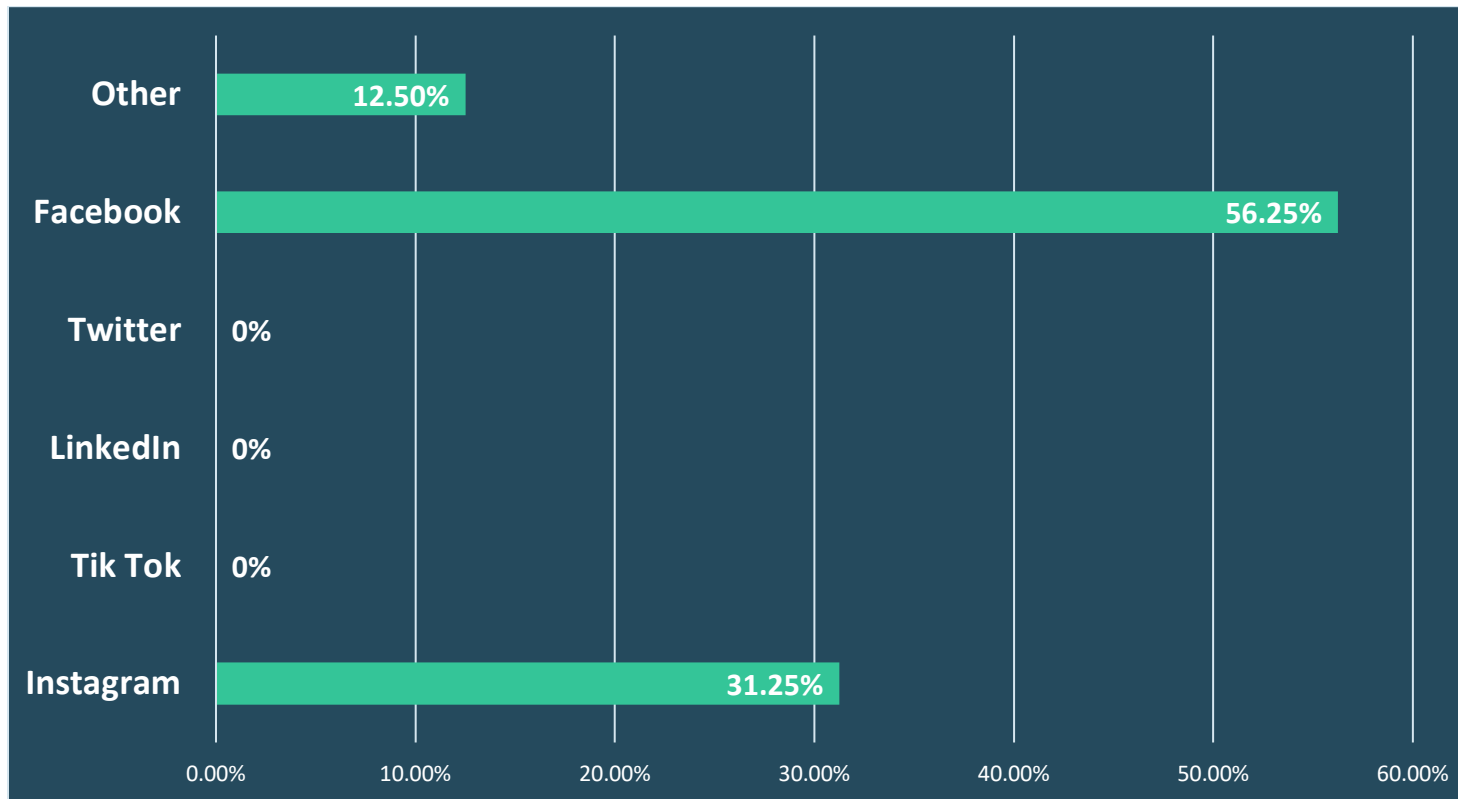
ELABORATE:

- We just recently started having each location handle their own posts.
- we have an associate that does our marketing that posts but our social media has not been strong or a priority for us.
- Use independent contractor for allotted monthly hours.
- We have a marketing manager.
- One of our Showroom Staff runs our social media.
- We have a part-time staff member do social media.
- We use a shared service.
- Marketing manager.



## Best platform you have success on social media-wise?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



ELABORATE:

- We have the most engagement on Instagram.
- We are beginning to post more on Instagram.
- It depends on the audience. They are all effective if targeted properly.
- Just added Instagram.

## **What types of events do you conduct on a regular basis to help with branding/name recognition/special sales?**

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:

- We participate in home shows in several of our markets.
- We host NKBA events in the showroom.
- We try to do Showroom training events for our Plumbers/ Designers or Builders 2 times a year with our preferred vendors.
- Working on quarterly events to foster trade relationships and awareness around new product launches.
- Events are usually centered around various builder or designer events.
- Designer in house trainings/custom events
- None.
- CEU designer events. Showroom events with what's new in decorative plumbing. We do customer trips also.
- summer BBQ for the trade- designer events throughout the year featuring a product or manufacturer.
- Lunch and Learns
- We do not hold events - not marketing to the public.
- This question is too broad. We do lots of different events from CEUs to happy hours, but we don't have anything recurring or on a regular cadence.
- Open House
- We are final starting this up again after a 3-year hiatus. Designer events with snacks and cocktails are our target. Also host local NKBA events as well as K & B remodeler events.
- None in our showrooms.
- Monthly Promos

# FUTURE / FORECASTING

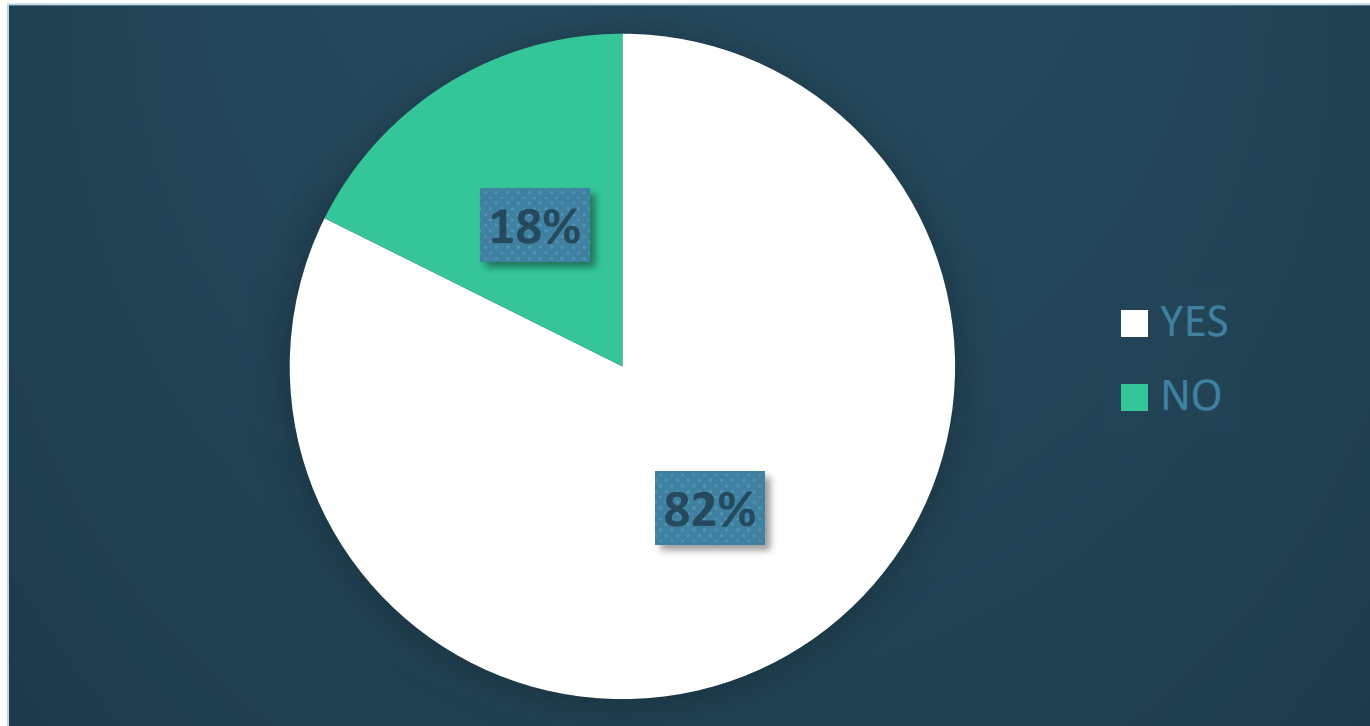
**Have you already taken steps to integrate artificial intelligence into your showroom operation?**

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



## Do you think AI will impact the way consumers select products and design their spaces in the future?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:

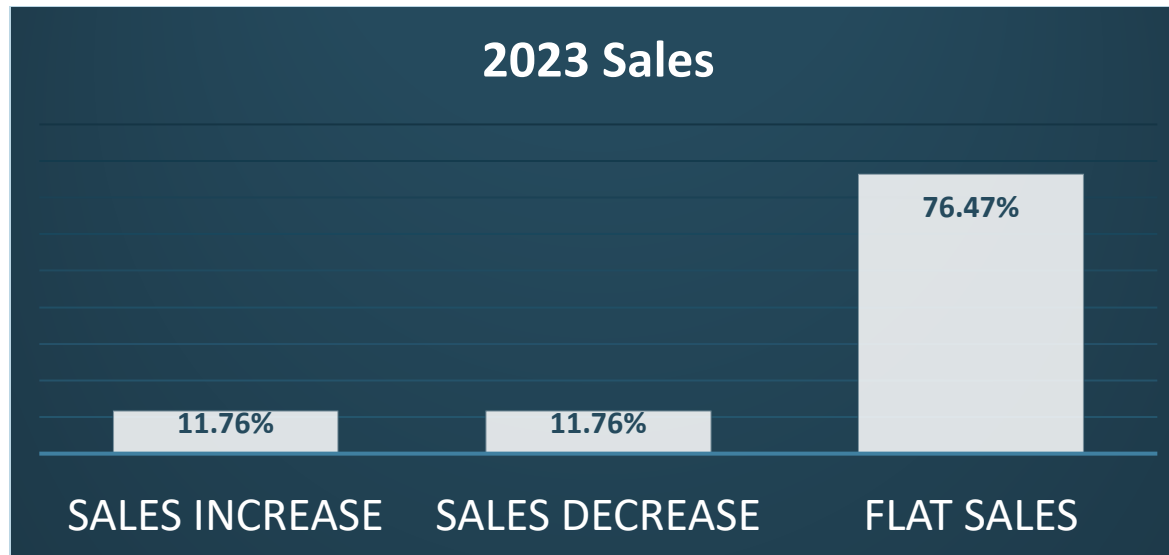


ELABORATE:

- I really don't know how but I am sure everything will be affected by AI.
- But I think it will be some time before we see it affecting us.
- Rooms designed with AI at the touch of a button with product advertisements and recommendations.
- Not in foreseeable future
- AI is scary, but it will likely have an impact.
- Not sure yet. but if I had to guess I would say yes. there will be a lot of pros and cons with A I
- I'm sure it will, just a matter of time.
- It will influence design inspiration and push manufacturers as it helps shift trends, but it won't necessarily change the selection of specific products. AI has a long way to go to be able to build out functioning fixture packages for a complete project.

## What does business look like for the remainder of 2023?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:

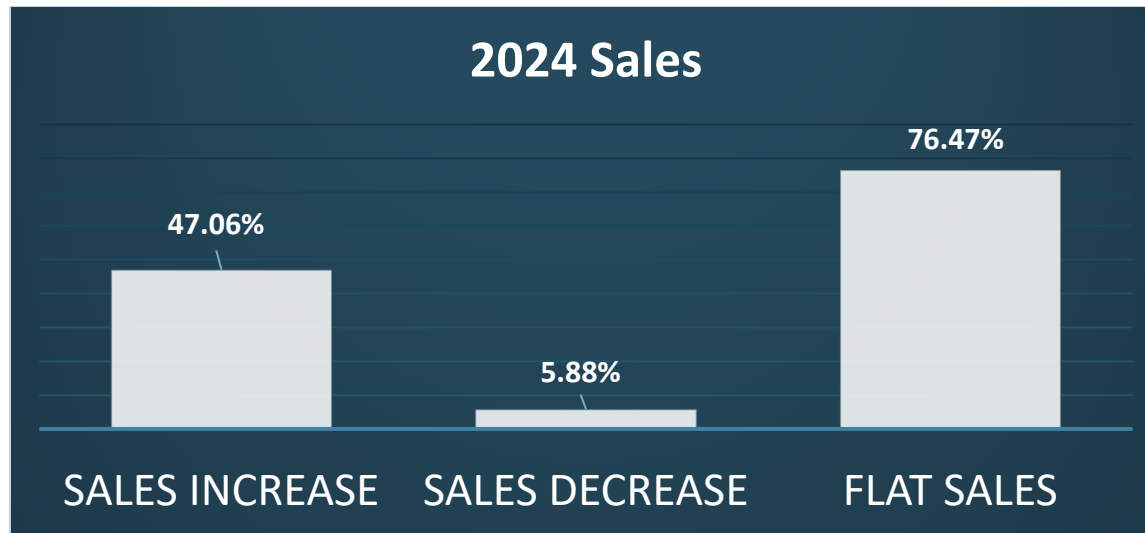


### WHY DO YOU FEEL THIS WAY?

- We are fast approaching the end of the year so most new orders will not ship until next year.
- Things have started to slow down, and I think that trend will continue with conversations we have had with builders and plumbers.
- It generally decreases around the holidays.
- Seasonal slowdown combined with high interest rates and persistent inflation.
- Judging showroom traffic, customer feedback, what we see going on with our water works division.
- Good comps and remodel environment.
- We're entering the slower season which is Nov-Jan
- How the year has trended so far and with holidays coming up, interest rates, etc.
- Economic uncertainty, high interest rates, relatively low pent-up demand as many people who were interested in renovating or moving already have in the last 3 years.
- Trending that way
- The market while having slowed down a bit is still strong.
- Higher interest rates have slowed down showroom sales.

## What does business look like heading into early 2024?

THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:



### WHY DO YOU FEEL THIS WAY?

- We are working hard to grow business at 2 of our showrooms and just recently added plumbing to one.
- I think people are beginning to slow down and wait to see what the elections will bring.
- Market share opportunities
- New housing is still declining but remodel should be increasing.
- Ongoing high interest rates and persistent inflation will negatively affect project costs and budgets. Further, I believe the chaos and uncertainty of our government will delay certain types of projects.
- world events, interest rates, GDP, peoples lack confidences with our government.
- inflation impact and presidential election year
- Building is growing in Central Ohio as they expect the population to grow from 2.5 million to almost 5 million in 3-5 years. That means new houses, schools, businesses, offices, apartments, etc.
- Again, based on this year, too many variables going into the new year.
- Large investments in new channels and ways of going to market.
- Economic forecasts
- The market while having slowed down a bit is still strong.
- Lot of commercial and multi-family work.

## What is the future of brick-and-mortar showrooms?

### THE DISTRIBUTOR SAYS:

- I think they will stay around. People still like to look at and touch products that they are putting in their homes. They also appreciate the knowledgeable help they get from showroom consultants.
- I think they will stay around but the shift will be a more luxury, boutique feel. We have to elevate the experience.
- I think you will see some of the big suppliers buying up as many small companies as they can, but I believe the local consumers will struggle with buying from large companies and will try to stick with local brick and mortar.
- I think the future is strong for brick-and-mortar showrooms- People like to experience products that go in their home, and I believe showrooms play an integral role in the inspiration for remodel projects - Creating a seamless omni-channel environment will be key to transact within
- it depends on the vendors you choose to display & sell and if they support brick & mortar.
- I don't feel like they will be going away anytime soon since consumers still like to "touch and feel" products but online will continue to put pressure on brick-and-mortar.
- The right clients still expect feel/touch and don't want to handle ordering specific components online. They want support with cohesive design and after-market support. Work with trade clients who believe in supporting the same.
- I believe they have a strong place in the market for any customer that is not solely price driven, desires options and values consultative sales.
- I think the end user's still finds value in being able to feel, touch and see product in person. With the right sales team the customer will still find value in the showroom salespersons expertise. It's not about being the cheapest it's about being the most cost-effective way to complete their project with the least number of headaches for them.
- I believe it is strong despite the activity of national brands to promote online trend.
- They will only grow as most designers and homeowners want to see and test items in advance of purchase.
- Who knows, with internet, AI, etc. unsure if people will want the experience of coming into the showrooms to see and touch products or if they will not find the value in it anymore. Younger people tend to do everything online so I would think brick and mortar stores may fade out.
- Strong. The plumbing industry is too complex for showrooms to disappear entirely. There will be significant consolidation as the me-too showrooms can't compete, but those able to differentiate themselves will be able to maintain and grow within their niches.
- Still needed and wanted by consumers and manufacturers.
- Still necessary and viable. Just like car dealerships, furniture, tile, swimming pools,
- Uncertain with the changing world and the internet.
- There will always be a need for Hands ON showrooms. the Internet can provide a large amount of information, but it cannot replace the feel and touch of an item.