

...the...
...the...
...the...

Retail Authority

BY SUZANNE VANGILDER

Sports Authority, one of the largest sporting goods retailers in the United States, is responding to the current retail conditions by implementing some business-as-unusual strategies in their store designs. Based in Englewood, Colo., the retailer has more than 460 stores in 45 states and a standard concept that is regionally customized to optimize product/market match. Head-to-head competition is stiff in athletic equipment sales, so Sports Authority is always looking for ways to differentiate through product mix and retail environment. By staying on top of market trends and materials technology, Sports Authority continues to succeed in an economy that is tough on retail.

VENDORS AESTHETICS / STORE AESTHETICS

Bruno Schloffel is the director of store design for Sports Authority. In addition to designing spaces that appeal to consumers, Schloffel must also coordinate vendor-specific branding into company-specific themes. "It is the shop within a shop kind of thing," he explains. "Essentially the vendors get a piece of real estate in the store,





“Those components that look like aluminum are actually made from metallic vinyl that is vacuum formed onto an MDF substrate by Premier Eurocase, our primary laminate fixture supplier. The wood finish is also vinyl.”

BRUNO SCHLOFFEL, DIRECTOR OF STORE DESIGN, SPORTS AUTHORITY

and they dictate the design of those fixtures,” says Schloffel. Complicating matters from a design perspective is the fact that different brands have varying degrees of in-house capabilities. “The big vendors, the Nikes and the Underarmours, dictate their fixture design to reinforce their marketing strategy and often provide their own fixtures,” says Schloffel. “We collaborate with the smaller vendors to design and source fixtures that represent their brand but also match our philosophy.”

Sports Authority’s overall design uses colors and materials to identify the different departments and unify the visual impact of the store. For example, the golf section has a country club theme. Contoured silver and wood fixtures display clubs and drivers. And the whole department has a TFM wood backdrop and specialty carpet that resembles a putting green. “Those components that look like aluminum are actually made from metallic vinyl that is vacuum formed onto an MDF substrate by Premier Eurocase, our primary laminate fixture supplier. The wood finish is also vinyl,” says Schloffel. “The engineered materials are very durable, and we can create nearly any design with them.”

Innovative materials and new technologies play a large role in the development of Sports Authority’s store designs. In addition to 3DL vinyl, TFM, acrylic panels and energy-efficient LED lighting are widely used in display areas. Beyond achieving more sophisticated visuals, designing with modern materials often results in significant budgetary savings both in terms of value engineering and operating costs. “The beauty of what the vendors bring to the party is that for most of the big ones, the Nikes and Underarmours, cost is not the object, so they bring things like LED signs and new technologies. Then we adapt those concepts and try to find a more cost effective way to do it across 400 stores,” says Schloffel.

CIRCLE #17 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Put our expertise to work for your company.




cefla finishing group

cefla finishing
delle vedove
düspohl
falcioni
sorbini

Cefla Finishing America recently opened the company’s new 150,000 square foot facility in Charlotte, NC.

The building is comprised of a 50,000 square foot machine manufacturing area, parts distribution, warehousing, and technology departments. This significant investment in the North American Finishing Industry includes the largest and most complete testing laboratory and showroom, along with dedicated classrooms to support Cefla’s unique Education & Training program.

Cefla Finishing Group takes long term success of our customers and finishing systems very seriously. We developed CAFÉ (Cefla America Finishing Education) courses to provide a comprehensive understanding of, not only the machinery, but also the other process components that contribute to a successfully operating finishing department.



America Finishing Education) courses to provide a comprehensive understanding of, not only the machinery, but also the other process components that contribute to a successfully operating finishing department.

ONE COMPANY different experiences



cefla finishing: Competence center for spraying application.



delle vedove: Competence center for mouldings and vacuum technology.



düspohl: Competence center for wrapping.



falcioni: Competence center for windows.



sorbini: Competence center for roller and flat panels

CAFÉ subscribes to the famous proverb: “Education expensive? – try ignorance!”

CEFLA FINISHING AMERICA INC. | CHARLOTTE, NC | TEL. 704 598 0020
www.ceflafinishinggroup.com

By tailoring product mixes to meet the preferences of the “new consumer,” and applying digital and material technologies to the store design process, the Sports Authority is moving forward with, well authority.

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Another way Sports Authority stays abreast of new materials and manufacturing processes for fixtures is through supplier relationships. “We attend shows like GlobalShop and Store Point to get ideas, but one thing that has become clear over time is the importance of having a relationship with your suppliers,” Schloffel says. “You have to be able to talk to the people and to have confidence that they understand what you want. We choose suppliers that are proactively working with us as a company and bringing new ideas to the table, not just taking orders and collecting a paycheck.”

Sports Authority has a long-standing relationship with Premier Eurocase, located in Denver, Colo. Andy Wilzoch, head of Premier Eurocase, understands that keeping store designers informed about his company’s capabilities helps them to design better fixtures. “When Andy gets new equipment, like his vacuum press, he’ll call me up and say, ‘You need to come over and see this thing I got from Germany. It’s amazing!’ I’ve been through the entire panel processing operation, which is very cool,” says Schloffel. “Afterwards we sit down and figure out ways we can make something useful from the machines.”

Because the fixtures and design elements are more or less implemented across all the Sports Authority stores, the development process is a collaborative effort between Schloffel, the vendor and the fixture manufacturer. “Typically we do an internal sketch and design process first. Then we work out a 3D rendering for the merchandiser and present it to the vendor. When everyone is happy with the piece from a visual perspective, I sit down with Premier Eurocase and ask them how they are going to build it. Then we adjust the design so that it fits the performance criteria and can be manufactured efficiently,” says Schloffel.



THE NEXT BIG (SMALL) THING

Schloffel brings his knowledge of design and processes back to Sports Authority’s visual merchandising group and merchant team, the people that buy merchandise for the company. They work together to assess market trends and plan stores. One recent development takes advantage of both the current condition of retail real estate and the “new consumer’s” affinity for local, customized retail.

In August 2010 Sports Authority will open its first Elite store. “The real estate situation is tough right now for big shopping centers,” says Schloffel, “but there are a lot of small footprints available.” The Elite concept is a series of small, higher-end, regionally based satellite stores. In addition to stocking specialty items to serve niche markets (think

areas that have strong sports teams), Elite stores will also include an element of e-tailing that gives consumers in-store Internet access to Sports Authority’s entire line. Although not yet open for business, the Elite concept seems to have real market appeal, and has already attracted several high-profile vendor brands that choose not to sell in the larger retail sporting goods environment.

Although the retail segment took a hard hit during the recession, innovative companies like Sports Authority are persevering. By tailoring product mixes to meet the preferences of the “new consumer,” and applying digital and material technologies to the store design process, the Sports Authority is moving forward with, well authority. **s&p**