

Extreme Makeover: Hobby Store Edition

Re-envisioning your store



Hobby-Sports.com in Portage, Michigan, got a new coat of paint and a sign, as well as window graphics featuring their top brands.

When customers walk in your store's front door, what do they see? Are the aisles stuffed with stock? Are the shelves dusty and in disarray? Is it easy to see where the model section ends and the train section begins?

All those things add up to the impression of your store that could be hurting sales.

At the September 2022 National Retail Hobby Stores Association Convention and Table Top Expo, three retailers shared their experience re-envisioning their stores to be more attractive and boost sales.

Robbie Allen, RCHQ, San Antonio, Texas; Rex Simpson, Hobby-Sports.com, Portage, Mich.; and Todd Anderson, RC Excitement, Fitchburg, Massachusetts, shared a simple message about store appearance.

Their simple message was this: it's not just about how your store looks; it's how it feels. Is it dark and cluttered? Can customers see across the aisles? Is there a flow for them to walk through and exit past the cash register?

"To me, re-envisioning your store means taking a step back from what you're doing and looking at it differently," Anderson said.

Making store improvements is only part of the process. Share photos on the store's social media and marketing outreach to get customers excited. Before-and-after images highlight the difference, so people get engaged.

"It creates chatter online, and we're already seeing a huge amount of people coming in and hadn't been in a long time,"

Anderson said. "It definitely creates more foot traffic."

At RC Excitement, Anderson took a page from the Apple store playbook, de-cluttered aisles, and opened up floor space by taking out a racetrack. Now customers spend more time browsing the aisles and sales have risen while the store can be staffed with fewer employees.

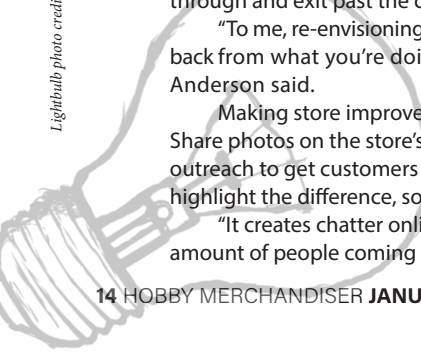
First impressions of your store start outdoors. "Most customers have a positive or negative feeling about your store before entering it," Simpson said. That's why he invested in a fresh coat of paint and a new sign at the street that features the name and images of popular items like RC trucks and drones.

Each store is unique, so there's not a one-size-fits-all solution, and there may be some bumps along the way.

"You don't want just one answer, we all make mistakes, and if something doesn't work, we just change it again," Simpson said. "You always want to be improving the store and learning from mistakes."



Robbie Allen, Todd Anderson and Rex Simpson shared their stories of re-inventing their stores.





Before the makeover at RC Excitement, lighting was dim and aisles and shelves were cluttered.

Afterwards, (right), aisles are wider, lighting is brighter, and (below) demo vehicles set on low tables make it easier to walk through.



At RCHQ, Allen has crafted a hobby shop that's a blend of retail and racing. A former high-end women's clothing store in the Rolling Oaks Mall, the store features high ceilings, bright lighting, and plenty of space for racers and customers to feel at home.

When Allen moved into the mall space, he installed over 200 new light-bulbs to brighten the floor for retail and racetracks. He owns another store nearby that offer full-service sales and repairs for a broad range of RC vehicles. The mall location is more of an entertainment venue, with cars and parts on hand just for the series that run there.

The goal is to make the store feel new and inviting, so customers feel comfortable spending time there. The longtime store veterans recommended taking a fresh look at the layout, flooring, shelving, signage, and all that things that can get stale. Simply changing a few things can give people a reason to come in the door and stay awhile.

"Start small and make simple improvements so you can create some momentum," Anderson said. "It's better to have constant improvement." HM



Easy makeover tips

Start small. You don't have to redo the whole store all at once.

- Freshen up the entryway
- Move display racks and cases
- Create more display space
- Update lighting
- Add a track or activity area
- Create multipurpose areas

Make a plan, tell people your ideas and prepare for minor bumps and expenses over what you estimated.



At RCHQ in San Antonio, the former clothing store has plenty of room for multiple racing venues and attractively displayed merchandise.