

# Bed, Bath, and HME



**The big chain stores may beat you on price, but service and proper displays can help lure cash business your way.**

**By Jack Evans**

### BEGIN WITH THE BEDROOM

For family caregivers and their loved ones at home, life around the bedroom can be either relaxing or frustrating. When all of the available bed accessories, ADLs, mobility products, and respiratory aids are provided and used, daily life for patients and caregivers flows much more easily. When they are absent, daily life can become a nightmare.

Too many HMEs simply store used rental beds in one corner of the store, have ADLs piled high on their deep shelves, and stack walkers and canes below the shelves against the wall. These are storerooms, not showrooms. How can customers possibly learn how these products can be used together to foster independence and dignity?

### BATHROOM SAFETY BY DESIGN

Everyone knows that the bathroom is where most people fall and hurt themselves. People of all ages need bath safety products. By creating a model bathroom on the showroom floor, an HME business is able to visually demonstrate what customers need to provide complete bathroom safety for their loved ones at home.

The key to developing a profitable bath safety category is to educate consumers that buying one grab bar or one elevated toilet seat will not solve their safety issues. When consumers face a planogram of bath safety products, it is too easy for them to select the products they want, pay for them at the register, and then walk out the door. But when these same products are displayed out of the box on the showroom floor in a model bathroom, customers can see how they work together to provide safety and independence in the bathroom.

What do you need for a bath safety display?

- 1) Start with a bathtub, which is often available for free at home improvement stores if it is scratched or cracked.
- 2) Build a short, 4-foot slat wall at the head of the tub to attach the plumbing fixtures, diverter valve, shower head, and handheld shower.
- 3) Position two different sizes of grab bars on either side of the shower.
- 4) Display a bath chair below in the tub, a nonslip mat on the bottom.

In almost every retail shopping area, I can find a CVS, RiteAid, Home Depot, Lowe's, Target, Costco, Wal-Mart, and Bed Bath & Beyond. What do they have in common? All of these retailers sell a sampling of HME products for cash. However, these products are simply added to their existing merchandising mix without any special designation as HME or HHC (home health care). There is strong consumer demand for these HME products, plus HME offers higher margins than everyday over-the-counter (OTC) items.

Given this market demand, why not reorganize an existing HME business into a retail operation? Imagine the possibilities. This is an opportunity to sell every product, for cash, that family caregivers or end users need to make their respective lives better each and every day at home.

The starting place for retailing HME is in the home. By recreating the rooms of a house, HME businesses can help consumers visualize products to use in their own homes. Room displays help to educate, demonstrate, and then sell HME products. The best way to promote add-on and related products is to physically show how the products work together to improve the end user's daily quality of life.

## Tools and Tactics

- Recreate the rooms of a house to help consumers visualize products in their own homes.
- Recreate a designer bedroom on your showroom floor.
- If your business includes respiratory and CPAP, expand the bedroom into a "sleep center."
- Make sure consumers know that buying one grab bar or one elevated toilet seat will not solve their safety issues.
- Shop your local competition to ensure you do not stock the same brands.
- Remember that you cannot win a head-to-head price war against the chains.
- Include a bariatric unit so that customers know you sell extralarge products.

# Retail Sales

- 5) Display a transfer bench positioned half in and half out of the tub, along with a tub safety rail.
- 6) Include a commode next to the tub with an elevated locking toilet seat and safety frame.

Adjacent to this tub/shower/commode display, shelve the products in retail packaging so that customers can easily see the full line of bath safety products you stock. Include a minimum of two options for each product, offering customers different price points and features. Offer plastic blow-molded and adjustable aluminum products, color options, and even teak alternatives. And remember to shop your local competition to ensure you do not stock the same brands, because you cannot win a head-to-head price war against the chains.

In front of this bath safety department, display on the floor a complete sampling of the major bath safety products, such as bath benches, bath chairs, transfer benches, and commodes. If you have room, display at least two options for each product so that customers can touch and try these products and help close their purchasing decision. Include a bariatric unit as well to visually educate your customers that you also sell extralarge and heavy-duty bath safety products.



Jack Evans

**Recreate a designer bedroom on your showroom floor.** Start with an electric hi-lo bed that looks nothing like a hospital bed.

- 1) make the bed with sheets; regular sheets do not fit electric beds;
- 2) use a memory foam mattress overlay and show one corner beneath the sheet;
- 3) display an incontinence pad over the sheet;
- 4) place personal care items on the foot of the bed, such as a bedpan, urinals (male and female), and a reacher.
- 5) place a wedge, cervical pillow, and waterless shampoo at the head;
- 6) wheel an overbed table over the middle of the bed;
- 7) make up this table with wide-handled silverware, a plate with high edges, a nonspill cup, a reminder pillbox, and a can of Ensure;
- 8) display a trapeze bar across the top half of the bed; and
- 9) place an IV pole, patient lift, and commode beside the bed.

If your business includes respiratory and CPAP, then expand the patient bedroom into a sleep center. Tuck a mannequin into the bed, and place an interface CPAP mask over its face.

## THE FAMILY ROOM DISPLAY

- 1) a top-of-the-line lift chair;
- 2) a digital blood pressure monitor on the table beside it;
- 3) a peddler and exercise ball in front of the chair;
- 4) a television monitor and tape/DVD library on all disease states and core products;
- 5) a "product of the week" highlighted with a sign on a table display; and
- 6) a popcorn machine, cookie oven, plus tea or coffee.

Increase sales by inviting your customers to sit and relax. The longer customers stay, the more they will buy. And the more they learn about any particular product category or disease state, the more often they will return. ■

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