



# 'If You Build It, They Will Come'

Iowa Business Uses Expansion to Widen Audience, Create Retail Destination

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**W**hen a fire destroyed Marcus Lumber Co.'s shop buildings, lumber shed and delivery vehicles in 2004, the Leavitt family found a way to turn their bad luck around. Instead of closing its doors, Marcus Lumber was reborn with a brand new 18,000-square-foot building that included an expansive showroom.

Within the past year, Marcus Lumber has added an additional 7,500 square feet to its building as part of its expansion and renovation plans. According to Grant Leavitt, a fourth-generation member of the Leavitt family, which has owned the 137-year-old Marcus, Iowa, business since 1920, the family hopes their most recent remodel will solidify Marcus Lumber's reputation as a destination retailer.

"Our business is located in a small town," Leavitt says. "The overall population is decreasing in our county and town. By expanding and remodeling Marcus Lumber, we wanted to make a statement that our home improvement store is worth traveling to. That desire helped fuel our own desire to create a showroom people would talk about and appreciate."

## Following the Leaders

Before Marcus Lumber opened the doors to its new showroom, the Leavitt family went through years of research and planning. Leavitt says they visited several successful independent retailers' stores across the country, which included Fox Home Center in Alsip, Illinois, Millard Lumber in Omaha, Nebraska, and two stores in Ohio.

"We made it a point to visit several hardware stores and lumberyards," Leavitt says. "We spent an entire day at Hartville Hardware, asking questions and gaining inspiration from their leaders. It was invaluable."

Hartville Hardware, located in Hartville, Ohio, is considered the largest hardware store in the U.S. and helped the Leavitts see a destination retail location in action. While in Ohio, the family also went to Keim Lumber Co., in Charm, Ohio. While Keim Lumber is larger than Marcus Lumber's business in scale, it also serves consumers in a small, rural community.

"All the stores we visited provided us with great examples of things we wanted to implement in our showroom," Leavitt says. "Many of these businesses were



larger than ours, but they gave us many great takeaways and provided us with the chance to connect to other retailers and take note of ideas that were implemented into our operation.”

Aside from visiting other retailers, the Marcus Lumber team also made a point to attend a variety of trade shows, like the International Builders’ Show, the Kitchen and Bath Industry Show and their co-op markets, Leavitt says.

The remodel was a family affair, which included Grant Leavitt, his brother Clay, his father Bob, uncle Jim and cousin Tom, making it a total team effort. The ambition to move the business forward stems from the example of the third generation, which includes Bob, Jim and Tom. With help from their strong team of employees, Leavitt says it has been a success.

### Showing Off Their Showroom

Walking through the doors of the newly renovated Marcus Lumber presents shoppers with everything they need from a hardware store—and much more. For the professional builder or DIYer, the newly renovated showroom is what really leaves an impression, Leavitt says.

The showroom includes a window center, which features 30 installed models on display. It also has model homes equipped with siding and stone, plus 80 different types of doors, which include exterior, interior, patio and storm doors. There is even a composite deck surrounded by artificial turf and a realistic backdrop to help customers visualize the products in real-life settings.

“When we first added a showroom after our fire in 2004, we saw the improved shopping experience our customers had,” Leavitt says. “The showroom is meant to make selling more enjoyable and, quite frankly, easier.”

Expanding on the idea of a full mock home in the store, the showroom is meant to provide inspiration for all spaces in the home. It has bathroom fixtures and installations for customers to walk through, including 27 bathroom vanities, plus working shower and faucet displays that highlight the latest trends in style and finish.

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At **Marcus Lumber**, customers have the opportunity to design and plan their dream homes by walking through the new showroom. The store has 27 bathroom vanities in addition to working shower and faucet displays, which help customers choose what items they want to purchase.





One way **Marcus Lumber** creates a unique experience for its customers is through technology. Designers can help customers create and visualize a remodeled room with virtual reality glasses.

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The store also has 12 different kitchen displays featuring various types, styles and colors of cabinets to choose from. One of the model kitchens is a fully functional test kitchen that the family plans to use for events and demonstrations.

“The test kitchen features a 12-foot-wide screen that shows store ads and can tune into a camera above it,” Leavitt says.

The remodel also incorporates technology to help customers create and visualize their rooms through virtual reality.

“This technology isn’t widely used by our customers yet, but having the capability in our store is huge,” Leavitt says. “Our thought process is that people who are intrigued by virtual reality will be impressed by our capabilities and tell their friends about us.”

Down the line, Leavitt says they plan on adding more technology to the business, like QR Codes and video signage, which are just another way to stand out.

“Customers can go to Sioux City, Iowa, to shop or they can come to us for their home improvement needs,” Leavitt says. “Our goal was to build something so impressive that they want to come to us first. Since we revealed our new showroom, it has paid off in dividends. This was a complete team effort and our employees have helped make our dreams a reality.” ➡

## Building a Foundation With Help From Retailers

When the Leavitt family decided to create a new showroom experience at Marcus Lumber, they turned to their peers in the industry for inspiration. Before beginning their remodel and expansion, the family visited a handful of hardware stores and lumberyards across the country seeking advice and ideas they could implement in the store design.

- **Hartville Hardware, Hartville, Ohio**  
Dubbed “America’s Largest Hardware Store,” this retail business is the epitome of a destination retailer. Hartville Hardware has many unique features, including an 1,850-square-foot Idea House, which is a complete house built inside the business to showcase the store’s Kitchen & Bath Design Center.
- **Fox Home Center, Alsip, Illinois**  
Considered a premier design center for consumers in the Chicago suburbs, Fox Home Center offers high-quality products that aren’t found in big-box stores.

The showroom covers a wide array of designs for the kitchen, bathroom and closet.

- **Millard Lumber, Omaha, Nebraska**  
Millard Lumber is a three-store chain that features design centers in two of its locations. The company provides a wide variety of services, including design consultations, delivery, installation services, green alternative building options and more. The business also offers a broad selection of home improvement product offerings, including windows and patio doors, decking, trusses, walls, floors, millwork, insulation, roofing, cabinetry, hardware and more.
- **Keim Lumber Co., Charm, Ohio**  
Keim Lumber Co. is another Ohio business that is large in size and provides a wealth of ideas for its customers. The store’s showroom displays everything from plumbing and bath displays and model kitchens to doors, windows, closets and more.