



BY PHIL SASSO  
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Phil Sasso is president of Sasso Marketing Inc. (sassomarketing.com), a technical marketing agency specializing in tools and equipment. Subscribe to his free marketing tips at [philsasso.com/blog](http://philsasso.com/blog)

# Redesigning your truck to recharge your sales

Few “remodel” their store, but those who do see results.

**H**ave you ever looked around your truck and said to yourself: “I should update this place”? If you’re like most tool dealers I recently surveyed, you’d say “no.” Or at least you’ve never actually done anything you’d consider a dramatic remodel or redesign to your retail space.

About three out of four dealers I asked have never changed up their truck interior or exterior. In fact, the same number of mobile tool dealers do not have a video monitor for demos – a proven money-maker.

Consider that you may have become blind to your truck layout, and you may not realize that customers see your truck as a little beat up, a little dated, a little disorganized and/or boring. I’m not judging. It’s human nature to become complacent with your surroundings. Look around. Has your truck design become stagnant?

## The dare

Let me challenge you: if you want to shake up your sales, shake up your truck layout and design. It may take an investment of a few days’ time and a bit of “coin” (as the young folks say). But don’t let that put you off.

The thought of spending money and taking a few days off your truck might make you nervous. You may be focused on all the sales and collections you’ll miss. But a good dealer can make up for that in less than a week with a little extra hustle. And I’m confident the fresh influx of customers and non-customers coming out to see your new truck layout will likely buy tools, increase your cash flow and impact your bottom line.

Full disclosure: lately I’ve been watching a lot of home makeover shows like “Fixer Upper,” “Property Brothers,” and “Flip or Flop.” (I’ve discovered Hulu.) So, my challenge may be more TV Fantasy than reality. A six-week down-to-the-studs home remodeling project looks easy from the comfort of my armchair. In the meantime, it took me six months to get around to installing a new toilet that sat in my garage gathering dust. So, I’m not one to judge.

But, consider this: a well-planned makeover by a bricks-and-mortar retailer usually pays for itself in a few months. Even just changing up one small area can make a big difference.

## The panel of dealers

My survey sample was a small group of volunteers that represented a good cross section of flags and independents with an average of eight years or more experience from across the continental U.S. and Hawaii – and even one from Canada.

About six out of ten of these dealers were driving a truck they bought used. The average driver had been driving the same truck for four years. That says to me, unless they refurbished the truck when they bought it, most trucks could be looking a little shabby by now.

About a third of dealers said they expect to buy their next truck within the next two years, a third within the next five years, and half of the remaining dealers never plan to buy another truck. So, especially for those of you keeping your truck for a while, a little reboot could go a long way.

## Independents day

When I asked dealers what they felt was the best merchandising design feature on their truck, their answers ran the gamut from LED lighting to adjustable shelving to product-specific tool displays.

Two clever dealers said “me” and “talking about the product” was their best product merchandising feature. I agree – a tool dealer is a salesman, not an order-taker. But there’s a delicate balance between salesmanship and merchandising.

Two independent dealers taking my survey seemed to have strong ideas about simple store design features that made a big impact. Not being associated with a flag means these dealers don’t have the support of an outside team, but it also gives them the flexibility to find their own creative design and merchandising solutions.

“There’s a counter as soon as customers walk in with new tools displayed,” is a major feature for



**Go online for more**

Want more sales tips? Go online for more exclusive content specifically tailored to you. Visit [vehicleservicepros.com/distributors](http://vehicleservicepros.com/distributors).





Photo courtesy of J. Vahrmeyer.

*Ten-year independent tool dealer John Vahrmeyer and his five-year employee, Matt Rowaan, drive 2001 and 1999 Chevy P30s in the Niagara region of Eastern Canada. Each truck has four LED strips mounted on the ceiling to light up inventory.*

independent mobile dealer Jackie Rose. It serves as a powerful promotional opportunity for the 19-year veteran dealer and a great conversation starter about “What’s new?”

Rose bought his current truck new about 16 years ago and redesigned it more than five years ago. He currently runs a video monitor on his truck rotating through tool demos. He is one of the only 26 percent of surveyed dealers running a TV on their truck dedicated to product promotion.

## Northern exposure

Meanwhile, 10-year independent dealer John Vahrmeyer and his five-year employee, Matt Rowaan, have a slightly less conventional approach to truck layout on their 2001 and 1999 Chevy P30s. The two dealers, who brand their trucks “TOOLBOX Automotive Tools and Equipment,” call on about 750 customers in the Niagara region of Eastern Canada over a two-week rotation.

“We’ve got the Niagara region covered pretty good with two trucks,” says Rowaan. Each truck has four LED strips mounted on the ceiling to light up their

inventory. As anyone from the incandescent and fluorescent lighting eras know, tool truck illumination used to be a major headache. Today’s LEDs offer both space and power savings with brighter, whiter light.

The two Canadians have custom-made wooden shelves to display Castle Products branded additives, cleaners and lubricants. Since these products are consumables, they mean a lot of repeat business and create a regular flow of customer traffic through the dealers’ trucks. “They’re also handy to display tools at eye level on certain shelves,” Rowaan says.

Another unconventional approach of the TOOLBOX duo is that a 73” toolbox is permanently mounted to the wall, says Rowaan. They use several custom drawers under the toolbox to store items like nitrile gloves, turning often wasted space into useful storage.

## Awesome displays

“I have a custom-built cordless tool display – I actually built it myself,” says Cornwell Tools dealer John Patterson, who just began his twelfth year as a dealer. “I bought this truck used four years ago ... the gentleman who had the truck before me had extra shelves above the toolbox openings. As soon as I saw the space I knew exactly what I was

going to do with it.”

“It gives me the ability to display all the [air tools] I carry so they’re not just laying on a shelf,” Patterson says. “Everything has a battery in it, so as soon as they pick it up they can play with it ... It displays eleven 12V tools and five 18V tools – and I’m actually out of room.” Patterson always keeps an extra battery in the charger so no tool ever goes uncharged.

On the other side of customizable is adjustable shelving.

“I have tracks on the wall where I can move shelves up, down, take shelves out, put shelves in, and stuff like that,” says Michael Gruber, a 12-year veteran tool dealer with Mac Tools out of Virginia. “Sometimes, depending on what boxes I have on the shelf, I take them out. They’re kind of heavy, so I don’t really move them around too much because of that.”

Gruber has been selling out of his Freightliner M2 for about a decade. He bought the truck new and still feels the extra cost of the adjustable shelving was worth the premium he paid.

He also recently converted to LED lights.

“I love it,” says Gruber. “It was too dark with the fluorescents.”

## Change-up and cash in

So, again, I challenge you to take a long look at your truck and decide what updates would improve the buying experience for your customers.

What do you need? Better lighting? Custom displays? A new product section? Better use of space? Somewhere to hide overstock? A new desk? To re-lace your ceiling?

Whatever your update or creative idea, why not share it with the world? Take before and after photos and email them to me with your name, and cell number at [makeover@sassomarketing.com](mailto:makeover@sassomarketing.com). Maybe I’ll post them on Twitter or Instagram. But for sure, I’ll give you all the credit. 