

# Designing a

# WINNING

# Showroom:

**AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVE RETTINGER**



**FEATURING DAVE RETTINGER**

(PRINCIPAL, RETTINGER FIREPLACE SYSTEMS)

**WITH TIM REED**

(PRESIDENT, WHYFIRE)

**Tim Reed:** *Joining me from New Jersey is Dave Rettinger, the principal of Rettinger Fireplace Systems. It's great to have you here, Dave. We've talked a lot about sales and leadership in the past, but I want to focus on something new today—your showroom. I know you've put a ton of work into your new space. Before we dive into the details, what has that process been like for you?*

**Dave Rettinger:** Absolutely, Tim. It's always a pleasure to speak with you and share ideas. The Fire Time Network has helped me elevate my game, so I'm happy to give back. And honestly, this conversation is coming at the perfect time. Our showroom is a cornerstone of Rettinger Fireplace Systems—just like it is for many hearth retailers across the country. We've just undergone a major transformation, so it's a great moment to reflect on the journey.

**TR:** *I'm excited to hear more about that. What exactly has changed with your showroom over the last year and a half?*

**DR:** This showroom project has roots going back 30 years. We've had a showroom for most of our time in business—at least officially—but we never owned the building. We were always leasing, and from day one, my dad's goal was to eventually own our space. That opportunity didn't come until about 25 years into the business.

When we finally got the chance to buy a building with enough space to grow into, it completely changed the game. For 17 years, we had an amazing showroom in a strip mall. It was beautiful, and we could host our clients there, but it never felt permanent. Once we purchased our own property, it opened up new possibilities—both from a showroom perspective and an operational one.

**TR:** *That's awesome. I think a lot of retailers are working within the constraints of their existing space—whether it's leased or inherited—so they have limited flexibility. It's pretty exciting to be able to start from scratch. That said, you had one shot to design this space, and if anything went wrong, it was all on you. How did you handle that pressure, and what were your top priorities in the planning process?*

**DR:** That's a great question because when you're building a showroom from scratch, there are a million directions you can take. So, the first thing we did was ask: What's missing from our current showroom?

One of the biggest factors was the overall flow—how the different departments interact with each other. I remember my dad always saying he wanted our company to feel like an auto dealership. When you walk into a dealership, there's a clear structure: a sales desk, a parts desk, a service desk, and a financing area. We started with that idea and asked ourselves, *What are the key functions of our business? How do they need to work together? What's the best operational layout?*

From there, we allocated space accordingly—both for each department and for the showroom itself, which was the main draw. We also took a long-term approach, asking, *What will Rettinger Fireplace Systems look like in 10 years? If we doubled in size, would this space still work?* Our architect helped us explore that, and in the end, adding a second floor was the best way to future-proof our space.

**TR:** *That's really smart. It's great that you could adapt the design as your architect introduced new ideas. In your opinion, what's the single most important element of a showroom?*

**DR:** First impressions. When customers walk into your showroom, they should immediately feel confident that they're in the right place. They should feel warm, welcomed, and reassured that they made the right choice by coming in. There also needs to be a sense of credibility from the moment they step through the doors—or even from the second they pull into the parking lot.

That first impression is everything. Do customers feel safe here? Do they feel welcome? Are they in the best place for what they need? In a fireplace showroom, customers should walk in and think, *Wow, I've never been anywhere like this before.*

**TR:** *Yeah, I completely agree. It's easy for a showroom to get overlooked in the daily grind of running a business. Products change, displays get outdated, and key models disappear. I think a lot of showrooms in our industry end up looking neglected for that reason.*

*But those first impressions matter. The second customers walk in, they get a gut feeling—good or bad—that shapes their entire experience.*

*So, when you were laying out your new showroom—deciding where to place inserts, fireplaces, and stoves—what was your approach?*

**DR:** That's a great question. I actually just had this conversation with a family member who

## "THAT FIRST IMPRESSION IS EVERYTHING."

does business consulting. He asked how we organize things internally, and I told him that our approach has become less product-oriented and more customer-oriented. Instead of structuring the showroom around product categories, we built it around the customer's project profile.

The showroom layout should be built around customer needs, not just product categories. That's why we segment the space by project type—much like WhyFire guides customers through their selection. If a couple is shopping for a fireplace insert, they aren't bouncing around looking at freestanding stoves or new construction fireplaces. Instead, we guide them to a specific area of the showroom where we can sit down at a desk or on a couch, have a conversation, and go through their options.

We even explain this to customers when they visit. If someone starts wandering into a different section, we'll gently remind them, "Based on what you told me earlier, this area has everything you need. We can focus here and make a selection with confidence." It helps streamline the process and keeps customers from getting overwhelmed by unnecessary choices.

**TR:** *You're hitting on something really important: Keeping customers focused is key to the sales process. In many showrooms, people bounce from product to product with no clear direction, making it hard to compare options and stay on track. That's why I love having a designated area where nearly everything fits their needs. If they point to something across the room, we can say, "That's for a different type of project—this section has the best options for you." That kind of clarity simplifies the process and reassures*

*customers that we've done this before and know exactly how to help them.*

**DR:** That's exactly right. It all comes back to credibility—the trust you establish the moment someone walks through the door. But even before that, we believe there should be no invitation to the showroom without a clear understanding of what the customer wants to accomplish. That's why we've been intentional about how we handle showroom visits. Our customer service reps ask detailed questions upfront, and our website makes it clear that showroom consultations are by appointment. That way, when a customer arrives, we're expecting them.

We even take it a step further—we have a welcome board at the counter with the names of the people coming in that day. It's a small touch, but it makes a big impact. It's helped elevate the customer experience, reinforce our credibility, and show our level of organization. It also gives us the authority to guide customers with confidence. Since we already know what they're looking for, we can say, "Based on what you told us, we're in the right section, looking at the right products, and this will solve your problem."

**TR:** *Wow. I want to hear more about that sign. Does your team use a TV display for it?*

**DR:** No, it's actually a little chalkboard easel. It's simple, down-home, and gets updated daily. We do it for builder clients too. It'll say something like, "Welcome, [Builder Name], we're so glad you're here." And we even have a little paper cutout of a fire taped to the board. It's a fun, classic touch.

**TR:** *I love that. It's great that it's analog—that someone on your team is personally writing the welcome message each time. That's a re-*

## "OUR APPROACH HAS BECOME LESS PRODUCT-ORIENTED AND MORE CUSTOMER-ORIENTED."



*ally thoughtful detail. And that actually brings me to my next question: How do you think about hospitality and refreshments in your showroom?*

**DR:** They're essential. Hospitality isn't just about being nice—it's about making customers feel welcome and comfortable. Refreshments should always be visible and easily accessible, not something people have to ask for. In our showroom, we have a bin filled with small bottled waters, like the ones you see in an Uber or limo. It's placed right at the check-in counter, where customers are greeted. Whether they've scheduled an appointment and see their name on the welcome board or they've just walked in, they're offered water as part of the process. It's a simple gesture, but it sets the tone for a warm, professional experience.

**TR:** *Wow, that's such a great touch. Thoughtful details like that show customers they're truly valued. It's those little things—the warm greeting, the personalized welcome sign, the easy-to-grab refreshments—that create an inviting atmosphere and make people feel at home.*

*But as important as hospitality is, a showroom isn't just about looking nice or feeling welcoming—it also has to function well. The bigger a showroom gets, the more there is to manage, and sometimes, size can work against you if it's not carefully thought through.*

*So, let me put you on the spot—what's one thing companies with really big showrooms need to be careful of?*

**DR:** You can't lose track of the people in the showroom. It doesn't matter how big your space is—if customers don't feel acknowledged, you risk losing them. You can have the most understaffed showroom in the world, but if you have someone playing the role of an "air traffic con-

troller," you can still create a great experience.

I'll give you an example. Just this past Saturday, we were incredibly busy—like a lot of hearth retailers this time of year. And as you'd expect, customers were eager to pull us in different directions. But we've trained our team to be intentional about managing showroom traffic. We operate on a first-come, first-served basis for walk-ins, and when customers see that we honor that process, they respect it. The key is having a greeter whose job is to engage customers and keep them from walking out.

If a couple walks in and all of our salespeople are occupied, the greeter acknowledges them right away and sets expectations. The greeter might say, "As you can see, everyone's busy at the moment, but we're so glad you're here. Someone should be wrapping up shortly, but if you'd rather not wait, feel free to grab lunch and come back. Or, I'd be happy to set up a consultation for you." Giving them options keeps them engaged and makes them feel valued.

If you don't have a system like that in place, it's too easy for customers to walk in, look around, and leave feeling ignored. That's something we've always been hyper-aware of. We want every customer to feel like the most important person in the showroom, even when we're busy.

At the same time, we don't want walk-ins to feel like they're an inconvenience. Yes, we ask if they have an appointment, but if they say "no," we immediately reassure them. Instead of making them feel like they should have scheduled ahead, we say, "No problem at all! Let me get you checked in." Then, we manage their expectations: "It looks like our next available salesperson should be free in about 15 minutes, or if you'd prefer, we can schedule you for a 1:30 consultation." It's all about making sure people feel welcomed, informed,

and in control of their experience.

**TR:** *Wow, I love that. I think you might have cracked the code. One of the biggest challenges retailers face is managing a busy showroom with limited staff—like on a packed Saturday when only two people are working, but six customers walk in. It sounds like your support staff plays a key role in keeping things organized. Can you walk me through how your team handles air traffic control in your showroom?*

**DR:** Absolutely. Our air traffic controller is named Heather, and she's so good at what she does that she'll probably be a sales rep within the next 30 days. She loves helping people and absorbs knowledge like a sponge.

That's something people often overlook about these positions. Not only do they prevent customers from feeling ignored and walking out, but they're also an investment in future sales staff. When people are immersed in the sales counter experience every day, they're learning constantly. That's why I'm a huge advocate for a sales island—a central hub where greeters and salespeople work as a unit, with the showroom flowing around them. It creates constant knowledge transfer and promotes a team-selling mentality. A greeter can turn to a salesperson and say, "Hey, you just worked with a customer like this—how did you handle it?" It becomes a collaborative process instead of a solo act.

I know some business owners hesitate to pay someone just to greet customers. But you're already paying for those leads. In marketing,

**"WE WANT EVERY CUSTOMER TO FEEL LIKE THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON IN THE SHOWROOM, EVEN WHEN WE'RE BUSY."**

getting someone through the door can cost up to \$100 per lead. Why risk losing that investment by not having someone there to engage with customers? Hiring an entry-level customer service staff member to make sure those leads don't walk right back out the door is one of the best investments you can make.

**TR:** *As you say that, I realize this approach can work even in smaller showrooms. Let's say you've only got two people working on a busy Saturday. In peak season, you might have 15 to 20 buying groups come through in a day. If you have someone managing air traffic control, they can help team-sell, manage wait times, and book in-home appointments—probably closing two or three more projects in the process.*

*Now, we talked about the challenges of running a large showroom. What about smaller retailers? What do they need to be especially mindful of?*

**DR:** My gut tells me variety is important—but not in the way most retailers think. The mistake is cramming in multiple versions of the same product just because they come in different sizes. Instead, every display should represent a specific project profile.

I'd start by identifying the jobs you love doing most. If you specialize in direct vent inserts, dedicate space to that. If replacing old fireplaces is your bread and butter, make sure that's reflected. From there, curate the best products for each project type. Focus on the models that are versatile workhorses—ones you can use in multiple scenarios. Showcasing those bestsellers makes the most impact. And realistically, you only have space for one per category, so every selection needs to be intentional.

Finally, I'd focus on creating smaller boutique-style spaces—designed around experiences rather than just product displays. You don't want to fill the space with a nauseating amount of fireplaces just for the sake of having them. Instead, make the showroom feel inviting. Maybe that means going to the next

level with refreshments—having more than just water at the counter. A full coffee bar. A seating area that actually feels like a living room. And in the right scenario, maybe even offering an adult beverage. The point is to make the experience memorable.

**TR:** *That's so good, and I want to ask you a million more things. But as we wrap up, I want to hear more about seating areas. How does that play into the showroom experience?*

**DR:** We actually call them closing stations because nobody closes a deal standing up. Think about it: Would you buy a car standing next to it? No. You'd sit down at a desk, go over the numbers, and feel good about your decision. The same principle applies in a showroom. Seating areas aren't just a place to stash remotes and brochures. They need to be intentional spaces where customers can sit, review their proposals, and be guided through the final decision. This is where the closing conversation happens. It's where you help customers feel confident that they're making the right choice.

**TR:** *That's so good. Okay, final question: Do most retailers have too many products on dis-*

*play or not enough?*

**DR:** Too many. It's all about being laser-focused and knowing exactly what you're trying to sell. Trying to be everything to everyone is a losing game. If you look at the Pareto principle, you'll see that 80% of your sales likely come from just 20% of your products. You have to take that seriously. A lot of retailers feel like they need to showcase every wood stove on the market, but is that really the bulk of your business? Or are you selling more wood inserts? More direct vent inserts? When was the last time you actually sold a suspended gas fireplace? If your showroom tries to cover everything, you're not just overwhelming customers—you might be alienating your core audience. The people who walk through your doors in large numbers are looking for something specific, and if they leave confused, you've missed an opportunity.

**TR:** *There's so much here, Dave, and I know our readers are going to get a ton of value out of it. Thanks for doing this interview today. I really appreciate you taking the time.*

**DR:** My pleasure, Tim. Thanks for having me.



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