Touch. Try. Learn.

Technology teaches customers at RadioShack destination location

By Maureen Patterson

There's much debate in the field of architecture on whether technology should be seen or hidden.

At RadioShack's StoreOne facility in Fort Worth, TX, technology is not only seen, it's celebrated.
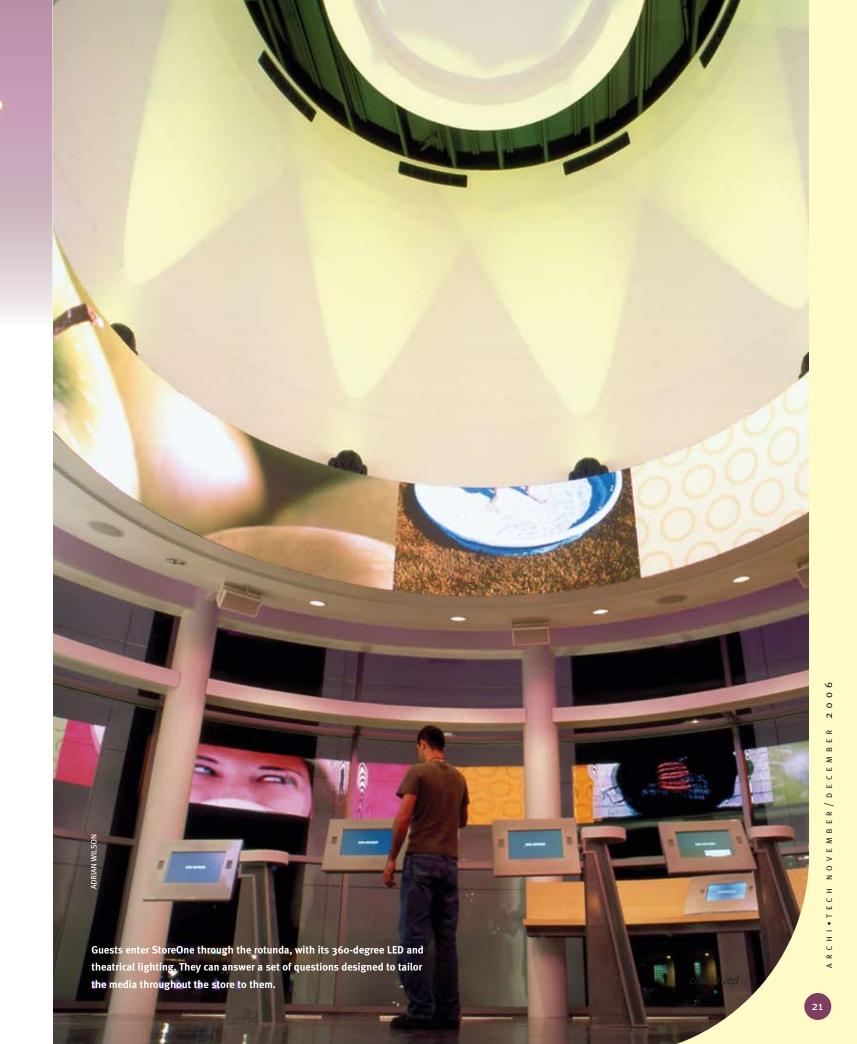

In the home office pavilion, visitors can take and e-mail pictures. They can stand against a backdrop, here showing a Texas longhorn, via a Diazit image scroller. StoreOne uses building technology to make consumer technology easy and enjoyable.

Located on the edge of the company's headquarters, StoreOne invites consumers to experience technology like never before. The interactive, engaging facility showcases both consumer and building technologies in all their glory. It also serves as a product and retailing testing ground.

"We tried to create a place that really demystified technology – a place to touch, try, and learn about technology that's available to consumers in their lives today – and that's very much what RadioShack is about," says architect Randall Stone of New York-based Lippincott Mercer, a brand strategy and design firm. "Technology is often about the future and what it can do for you in the future, but this is really about what technology can do for you today."

Today's products for homes entertain, motivate, captivate.

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Guests enter StoreOne through the rotunda, with its 360-degree LED and theatrical lighting. They can answer a set of questions designed to tailor the media throughout the store to them. *continued*

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In the StoreOne auditorium, visitors can literally feel the excitement. A SimEx Iwerks theater playback system includes 28-4D flip up pan seats, which feature a drop effect, fore-aft motion effect, water squirt, neck air blast, leg tickler, and seat vibrator. There's also a SimEx Iwerks 6-channel surround sound audio system and custom rack-mounted control interface, as well as 50-degree ETC Source Four ellipsoidal spotlights with HLP575 lamp and MR16 track heads with an RGB dichroic lens.

Today's products for buildings inspire, instruct, enrich.

StoreOne brings that all together in one facility, guiding users on a multimedia tour of products – and possibilities. Users can journey to kitchen, home office, playroom, garage, and family room pavilions, where they can enjoy consumer electronics in an easy-to-learn environment. They can venture upstairs to a 4-D theater, where the seats sometimes jostle in tune with the movie, the wind blows at them, and water is squirted at their faces.

But first, they enter a space that immerses them in technology in a way that welcomes.

A Grand Entrance

Guests enter StoreOne into the rotunda, with its Daktronics custom-built 360-degree, 12mm, 5-foot-high by 64-foot-diameter LED display along with QSC audio amplifiers and Renkus-Heinz surface-mount speakers for theater-quality sound. A HighEnd Systems Studio Spot 250 moving head fixture with MSD 250 lamp, 40-degree wide-angle lens option, and custom template set project different colors, patterns, images, and textures in concert with the audio and LED video.

A RadioShack media group creates video content that changes regularly, such as trivia and images of people, products, and logos.

"We said, 'We want more than a store. We want a store that thinks. We want a store that's smart and that delivers this 'wow' factor that everybody talks about,'" says Jason Friedman, chief executive officer of Creative Realities Inc., a Fairfield, NJ-based experience technologies firm.

continued

RadioShack's StoreOne celebrates technology and architecture, creating an exciting user experience and a branding tool for the building owner.

Behind the scenes, an AMX NetLinx controller and MIDI-interface control content on the screens, while a Whole Hog II PC lighting controller takes care of performance lighting with its programming wing, playback wing, and USB hub widget. A Daktronics iOi-3 LED sign controller and Venus 7000 control and design software also help control the show.

The rotunda delivers the "wow" factor front and center. Says Friedman, "There's this energy when you walk in that space and you see all this stuff happening. It's so literally immersive, because you're in the middle of this huge facility in this huge rotunda area, seeing all these different colors and images and textures flying around you. It's an unbelievable experience."

But not unfriendly. Tim Abbott, RadioShack's program director on the project, says the company wanted the facility to immerse visitors in technology, but to do so in a way that is familiar and welcoming. Guests can use one of seven interactive kiosks in the rotunda that ask questions to determine their communication styles, interests, and needs. These

17-inch LCD monitors with touch screen overlays gather information such as whether the person is a technophile or technophobe – whether, for example, the person's VCR at home is blinking "12:00." They receive an RFID (radio frequency identification) device that has an embedded microchip.

Customized Media

It is then that technology takes on a life of its own, customizing itself to each user.

In what Stone refers to as "layering," the media changes as the person walks through the space. Forty-inch Samsung LCD monitors with tilt wall-mount brackets display information, as do screens at each pavilion. Based on the preference of the person walking through, as identified by the RFID, the monitors may display general or more technical information.

Kiosks at each pavilion further tailor information to each guest. For example, one person may want details on the features of a phone, while another may just want to know what colors it comes in.

Getting the Best from Tech

RadioShack's StoreOne facility in Fort Worth, TX, uses targeted technology to elicit an emotional connection to consumers.

It does so because the design team carefully considered each application and why it was necessary.

Jason Friedman, chief executive officer of Creative Realities Inc., a Fairfield, NJ-based experience technologies firm, suggests others do the same when designing technology into facilities: "If

you do not have a business reason to use it, don't," he says. Before deciding on the technology for StoreOne, the team knew exactly why they wanted each application.

A second rule of thumb: "Don't use the technology unless you know how you're going to use it," Friedman says. Technology is neutral. It won't do anything for branding or customer experience unless it's set up that way.

Take RFID (radio frequency iden-

tification), for example. "By putting in an RFID tag, it's not going to transform the experience. But knowing how to use that RFID tag to trigger different things that are going to result in an emotional response from your audience, that's powerful stuff. That's the stuff that we can use to really take the customer experience to the next level," he says.
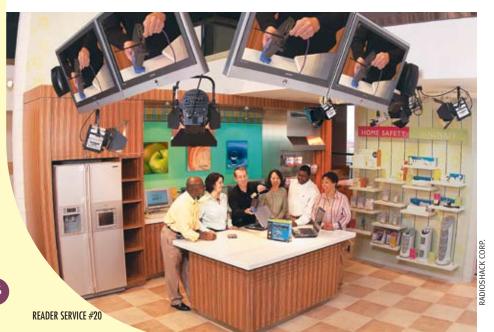
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Lighting portrays products like actors on a stage. Here, ETC Source Four PAF floodlights with HPL575 lamps showcase a rousing game of remote control cars.

The RFIDs track the way customers move through the space, information that is good as gold for a retailer like RadioShack. "It's a great way to take that information back, based on that technology, to our marketing department and to understand a little bit more how consumers shop – what they're shopping for and how long they're shopping, what piques their interest, what doesn't pique their interest," says Abbott. The company can also use that knowledge to design their buildings to garner more sales per store.

This is where a building becomes more than a place to house merchandise: It becomes a research center, where companies can achieve bottom line benefits from the information gathered through building technology. It moves the concept of retail to the next level. Designers become branding experts, marketers, integral to the success of the business.

"We want people to leave this space and talk about what a great facility it was, what a great experience they had, and be able to share the 'wow,' if you will, with all their friends to keep that whole excitement and that whole buzz going on," Friedman says. "We believe in helping people use technology to create these 'viral' marketing programs and to create things that will spread through word-of-mouth."

Engaging Customers

StoreOne invites people to play with products. Users can see what plasma vs. LED vs. projection looks like. They can take pictures of their kids and e-mail the photos home. Not only can they see remote control cars, they can race them.

The building design, with its product-type pavilions, frames key merchandising concepts. Lighting focuses them. Architectural lighting creates a good ambiance. Performance lighting, such as in the rotunda, creates a show. Specialty accent lighting showcases products in the best light. "The lighting plays a big role with all the media and the audio and how all of that integrates together. It's a really dynamic palette that allows you to play with a lot of different things to take the customer on a journey," says Friedman.

That journey makes products more accessible to consumers. Such accessibility – allowing consumers to easily understand products and to know a brand before purchase – is a trend in retail, says Stone.

Greater understandings lead to better connections with products. "Retail is ever increasingly finding ways to differentiate itself, and the consumer is looking more and more for a deeper, more emotional connection with the brands that they want to purchase from," says Stone.

StoreOne provides those connections.

It's also flat-out just a gorgeous place to visit.

Wow. ●

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"The Gadget Guy" conducts technology demonstrations in StoreOne's kitchen area. Sony CCTV cameras film the demonstrations, which are recorded by a Philips DVD recorder. Products aiding the show also include an Extron video scaler, Sennheiser wireless microphone system with lavaliere microphone, and Kramer composite video switcher. Lighting includes Altman Proline 4- and 5-inch hanging Fresnels powered by ETC dimmers and controlled by an AMX NetLinx with DMX interface.