

# window fashion VISION

30 years of window treatment inspiration

## Your 2017 Guide to *Success*

SIMPLE STEPS TO  
*keep projects*  
ON TRACK

MAKE YOUR BIO  
*work for you*

LEARN TO MAKE  
*big changes*  
MANAGABLE

DISCOVER  
*hot trends*  
IN DECORATIVE  
HARDWARE & TRIMS

# Power in Partnerships

*Trust and support can be business differentiators*

by Steve Brown

*Like many design businesses, our company has evolved over the years. Our success can be attributed to many factors, but if I had to point to just one, it would be the power and importance of creating successful partnerships.*

First, a little background on Custom Decorators, Inc., (CDI) the company I refer to above. Since purchasing the company from its founder, Stephen Zimmer in 2014, CDI has expanded its retail network from two to seven, launched a direct-to-consumer sales model, increased our sales coverage to 90% of North America and refocused our product offerings to what we do best—custom window treatments. And, as I said in my introduction, I attribute much of this growth to our successful partnerships.

To me, there is a big difference between building a partnership and simply doing business. At CDI, we strive to create relationships that go beyond a financial interaction. The win-win business partnerships that drive CDI include:

- Our retailer partners in North America;
- Our large network of designers and installers; and
- Our vendor, Hunter Douglas.

## Partnering With Retailers

CDI's turn-key design services have made it possible for many of our retail partners to sell custom window treatments. With our help, they can enter this new category with little to no investment, making immediate profit without having to invest in infrastructure and/or inventory.

When retailers pass the lead to us, we take care of everything—from scheduling design consultations to installation and warranty services. We also manage and recruit the network of designers and installers necessary to service a nationwide program.

## Partnering With Design Professionals

CDI partners with over 600 designers and installers in North America, many of whom own their own businesses. We want our designers to focus on one thing—selling in the home, which is why we handle lead generation/marketing, accounting, customer service and back office activities (e.g. scheduling appointments, product ordering, warranty services, etc.) for our designers.

We have a dedicated care team just for our designers and installers, providing them on-call support whenever needed.

Many of our designers think of us as their assistant, and our value-added services are why they choose to partner and grow their business with CDI.

## Partnering With Our Vendor

Finally, as Hunter Douglas' largest dealer, we've sold millions of window treatments over the years. But we do more than just peddle its blinds and shades. Because we represent one of the most respected window treatment brands in the industry, our designers, installers and support teams are expected to go the extra mile for clients every day on behalf of Hunter Douglas. In turn, Hunter Douglas looks to CDI as its field of experts, consulting with us on new product and promotion introductions. The company also helps support our relationship with our retail partners by tailoring product offerings and marketing activities to the specific need of the sales channel.

## Developing Partnerships

As you look at your business, I encourage you to evaluate each of your business relationships to determine which are potential true partnerships that you could nurture for mutual long-term business growth. Characteristics of true partnerships include:

- Willingness to compromise or adapt product and/or service offerings to support business goals;
- Recognizes business challenges, proactively recommending solutions;
- Commitment to meeting agreed metrics for success;
- Excellent communication among all parties;
- Forward-looking/growth-oriented mindset.

When these characteristics exist, true win-win partnerships can dramatically improve business performance. ✂



Steve Brown is the President and Owner of Custom Decorators, Inc., a premier provider of in-home design and installation services for major retailers in North America.

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