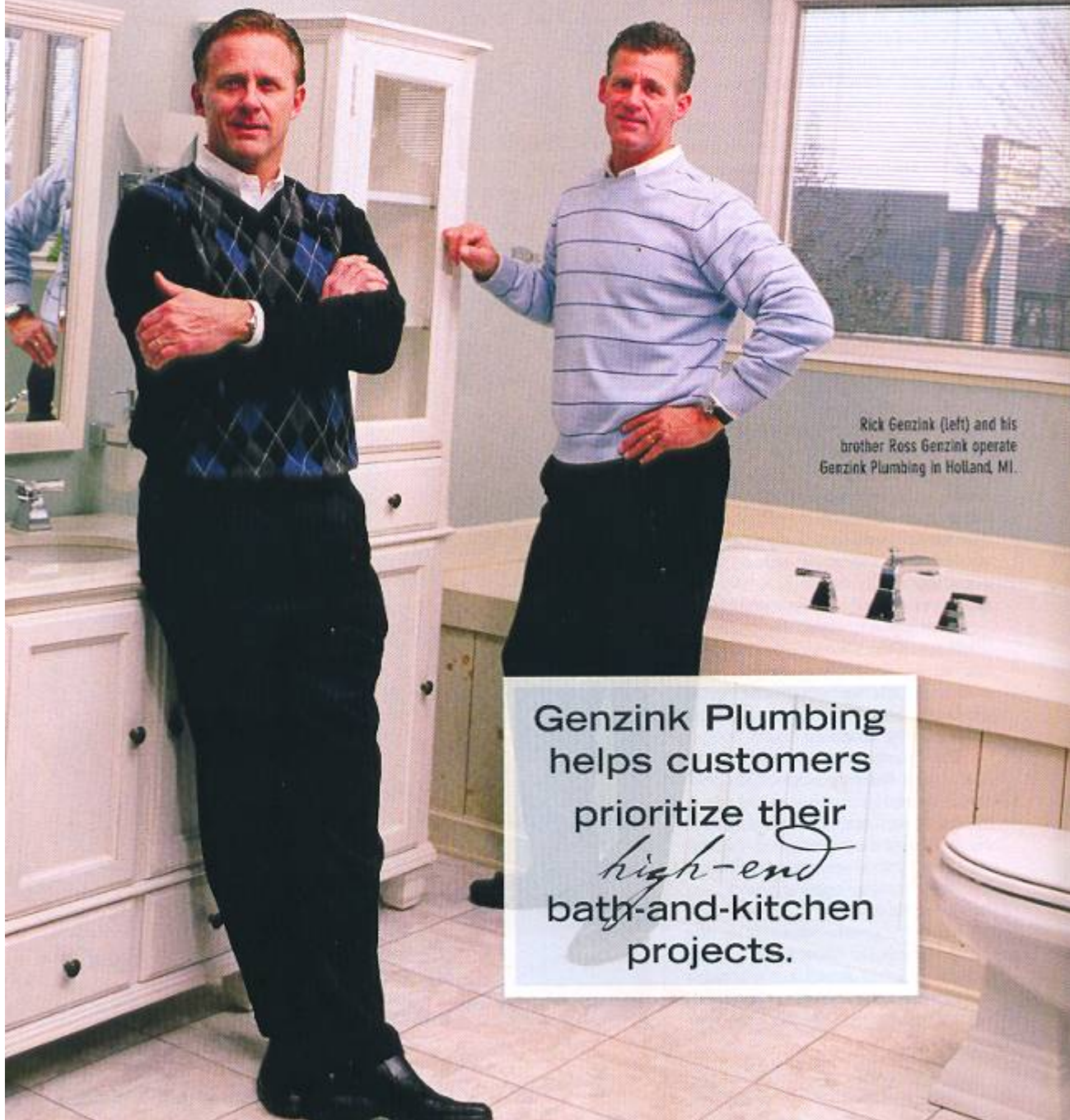


Winter 2008

# Bath & Kitchen Pro

## THE POWER OF HOMEWORK

■ By Bob Miodonski



Rick Genzink (left) and his brother Ross Genzink operate Genzink Plumbing in Holland, MI.

Genzink Plumbing helps customers prioritize their *high-end* bath-and-kitchen projects.

elling up can have a different meaning to Rick Genzink than to other construction contractors who talk about up-selling customers.

"We don't want to start in the master bath," says the co-owner of Genzink Plumbing in Holland, MI. "If you start by suggesting \$400 faucets, you lose their trust right there.

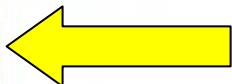
"We start with the bathroom in the lower level in the house, which usually is the customer's least priority. Then we would move from the lower level to the kids' bathroom. We build our way up with the more expensive products upstairs."

Genzink Plumbing's Kohler-registered 5,500-square-foot bath-and-kitchen showroom features more than 20 vignette-style suites along with displays for faucets, showerheads, whirlpools, lavatories, kitchen sinks,

hardware, countertops and other products. Manufacturers include American Standard, Delta, Brizo, Newport Brass, Hansgrohe, Grohe, Elkay, Blanco, Jacuzzi, MTI, Toto, Fusion, Santee and Mansfield. Almost everything on the showroom floor is higher end, although many of the sales consultations start in the suite of standard plumbing products for the bath.

Genzink's showroom staff explains to customers that these products are popular, attractive and functional. Any up-selling is done merely by asking questions.

"We never want customers to feel pressure from our end. It's their house," Rick Genzink says. "We're just asking questions and listening to their answers. When guests come to the home, how do you want it to look? What's the flow of people through the house?"



Photos by Ken Shurt



Lana Hasper is a showroom consultant at Genzink Plumbing.



Several of the shower systems and tubs in the showroom feature running water.

"We have to be organized, and we have to do our homework. We have to help our customers prioritize what they want and stay one or two steps ahead of them."

### Building Trust

Genzink Plumbing's basis for success is the fact that it installs what it sells, Rick Genzink says. Russ Genzink, Rick's dad, started the company 46 years ago in the family's garage in Holland in southwestern Michigan.

Rick Genzink and brother Ross now operate the firm in its 8,000-square-foot building, where it's been since the mid-1970s. The plumbing contractor employs 35 people, 28 of whom are installers in the field.

Building trust with customers is another essential element of the company's success, Rick Genzink says.

"If people don't get the feeling that I'm working for them, I'm not setting myself apart from anyone else," he explains. "I'm willing to come in early and get home late. I spend a lot of time at night with customers."

"Plus, I try to make it fun for customers on the showroom floor. We want people to be

relaxed and comfortable, so when they leave here they'll have a good feeling."

Creating that atmosphere comes with years of experience, and company employees also take advantage of training offered by wholesalers and manufacturers. They stay current with design trends by reading magazines; developing relationships with area designers, manufacturers reps, manufacturers and wholesalers; and attending trade shows, especially the Kitchen/Bath Industry Show.

"We keep up with our relationships and find that people are willing to share," Rick Genzink says. "We learn a lot from our customers, too. They tell us quite a bit about what is going on."

Trust is necessary in working with designers as well as customers, he adds. Once that partnership is established, a designer feels much more comfortable recommending products based on the contractor's suggestions. Those, in turn, are based on the contractor's knowledge of products that comes from installing them in homes.

One designer has a particular faucet she likes so much that she refers to it as "my faucet" when talking with her clients. Rick Genzink originally had recommended the faucet to her.

"The more expensive the home, the more the designer gets involved," he says. "My job is made easier by the designer coming in. They're going to be familiar with what's the latest and greatest."

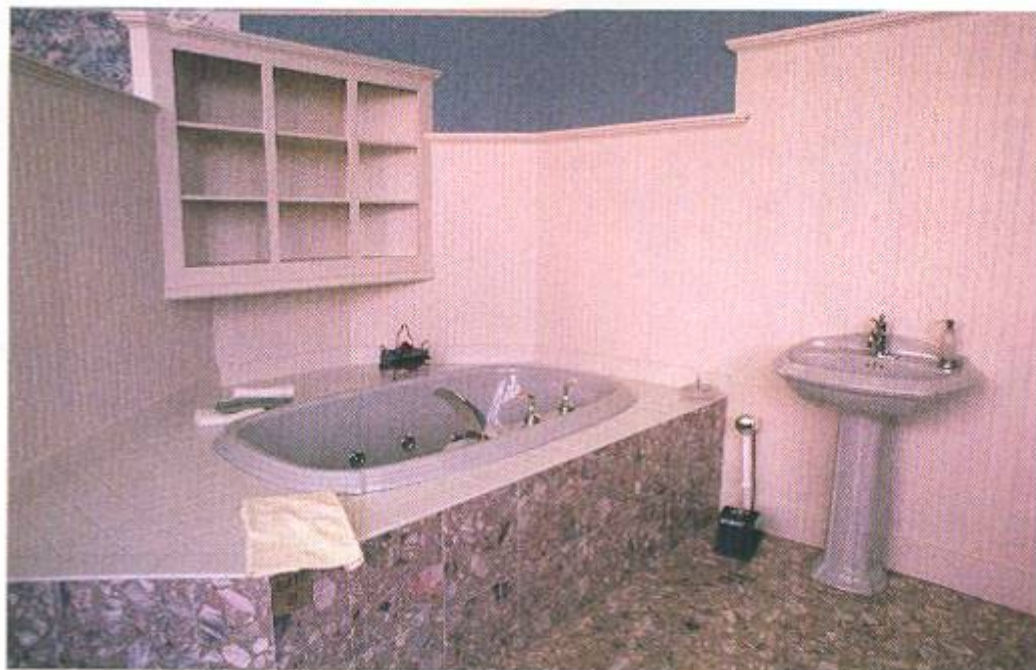
"If customers hire a designer, they'll get back what they pay for the designer with the design they get."

### Business In The Downturn

Genzink Plumbing's trading area is 75 miles to the north, south and east. Single-family houses range from high end to tract to rural, and the number of multifamily units is increasing. Holland's proximity to Lake Michigan five miles to the west means that the area has many expensive summer homes owned by people from Chicago and elsewhere.

While the high-end market is more immune to the housing downturn, Genzink Plumbing has felt the impact as other construction contractors have. Five years ago, 90% of the company's business was residential; now the split is closer to 65% single-family houses and 35% multifamily and commercial projects.

"We're working on a 320-unit apartment building in Kalamazoo, which is more apartments than we've done in the last 10 years combined," Rick Genzink says. "We're doing more remodeling now, too. We're more diversified and more nimble."



The 20-plus vignettes in the showroom are updated to keep them fresh.

"We capture everything that walks in the door. Everyone is a salesman today."

Work that the company once subcontracted, such as shower door installations, it does itself. Staff spends more time on the showroom floor than it did.

"Once we have got a customer, we ask the questions to build the sale," Rick Genzink says. "We sell more accessories and add-ons."

Another change from five years ago is that The Home Depot has arrived in Holland. Since Genzink Plumbing sells different product lines, the contractor hasn't heard that much from its customers about Home Depot.

The Internet has made a bigger impact on pricing. Some customers want to know why products they see online are less expensive than in the showroom.

Once customers pay taxes, shipping and handling for their online purchases, the prices are not that much different, Rick Genzink says. The contractor has the same policy that it has for products bought at big-box home centers: It will install a product bought elsewhere but won't warranty it.

"We tell customers that a faucet literally can ruin your house," he says. "For a few dollars more, buying your faucet from us allows us to warranty your product. When your faucet breaks on a Saturday afternoon when you're having a party, where would you get the parts? Who will fix it?"

A growing number of customers are showing they have more concern about the environment than they do about saving a few dollars on a faucet or toilet. Green building products aren't always less expensive to install, Rick Genzink says. In fact, the first cost can be more expensive.

"One customer wanted a dual-flush toilet even though her house is right on Lake Michigan and her water comes from a well," he says. "So the issue wasn't her water supply or saving money on her water bill."

On another job, an apartment building owner bought dual-flush toilets, which flush with 1.6 gallons of water for solid waste and 1.1 gallons for liquid, for all the units. He had more concern about saving water in the building than the money he would have saved if Genzink Plumbing had installed less expensive single-flush models.

The tight housing market has emphasized the importance of a well-run business operation to Rick and Ross Genzink.

"Everybody makes mistakes, but you learn from your mistakes and don't repeat them," Rick Genzink says. "We want to be proactive and don't want to be creating fires. You set up your organization so that doesn't happen." **BKP**

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