

Showing the LIGHT

How can salespeople convey lighting benefits such as security, convenience, aesthetics and energy-savings? Integrators share their secrets. **by Tom LeBlanc**



Lighting control units in themselves are tough to sell. By pressing a button and triggering a lighting scene in a showroom, however, conversion is 90 percent, says Clipsal.

Walk through the front door of Schneider Electric's Square D Clipsal retail store, located in a strip mall in Orlando, Fla., and you're immediately met by another door. This new door isn't made of glass like most strip mall doors. Schneider designed it to look like the front door of a house, perhaps the front door of a custom-electronics client's house. Behind the front door is a front hall. There's also a living room, a sitting room, a bathroom, a media room, a kitchen and an outdoor scene.

In this Square D Clipsal showroom, which the company shares with its dealers, there are "standard" and "specialty" lights for comparing and contrasting.



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All in all, it's a really nice showroom that allows consumers hands-on looks at lighting and lighting control products in authentic home vignettes, and it's located in a high-end, high-traffic retail area. The strange thing is, though, Schneider doesn't really expect a lot of foot traffic. The design center, which opened in November, is primarily a venue for Schneider's network of Square D Clipsal system dealers to bring their clients and show products in a lifestyle environment. Most dealers, after all, don't have a showroom that allows them to come close to showing clients what lighting control can accomplish in their homes. And that's the key, says Square D national sales manager David Bruce.

"When people are able to see lighting control in a lifestyle vignette the conversion rate is over 90 percent," says Bruce. "It's a lot harder to show this stuff in brochures."

That 90 percent figure seems pretty high. What's a "conversion?" Bruce says it's when a client is given a quotation on a system, they're interested but not quite there, they experience a lifestyle-based lighting control demo and they pull the trigger. "We absolutely believe in that 90 percent figure," he adds.

Sight vs. Unseen

You won't get an argument from many integrators. Seeing a technology in action, in person, obviously packs more of a punch than describing it. Lighting control is a unique category to sell, however, because most integrators say the learning curve is higher and the resistance is greater. But for the clients who do invest in lighting control, they say, the satisfaction rate is off the charts.

"Once you've lived with lighting control, you'd have a hard time going back," says Andrew Wiatrak, owner of Minnetrista, Minn.-based Sensation Design Group.

Offering virtually the same statement is Keith Bartholomew, director of operations for Advanced Communication Technologies (ACT), Hingham, Mass. "Once people have lighting control they



Telling the woman of the house she can press a single button and illuminate every room if she hears a noise is a big motivator, says Clipsal.

won't ever want to live without it." He adds that "the 'wow' factor you get from putting lighting control in and controlling it is actually greater than you get with high-definition TV."

Both Bartholomew and Wiatrak have the ability to demonstrate lighting control to clients. So does Matt Frias, owner of Osterville, Mass.-based AViX, but he didn't always have that ability. Frias says while it's much more difficult to sell the technology without a real demo, it can be done. "I've sold many systems by just explaining the concept of the system to clients," he says. "I'll give them scenarios. For example, 'your outside lights can turn on at night and then automatically turn off at whatever time you would like them to, and will adjust to daylight savings time as well.'"

Frias can now show scenarios in the AViX showroom. "We have a system up and running," he says. "They can use it as if they were in their own home. It's a retrofit system, which is a good starting point because they can relate it to their own home. Of course, I tell them it's much better when installed in a new construction."

Generally, it seems that whatever an integrator says to a client about lighting



control, it's news to him. "With consumers," says Bruce, "one of the biggest things we've found is how little they know. Their limited knowledge may go as far as a dimmer."

In fact, there's an average of 1.2 dimmers in American homes, says Bartholomew, citing a Lutron training session. "Most people have very little experience with control if the only dimmer they have in the house is in the dining room, and they probably only eat in there four times a year."

One thing that helps in the Clipsal showroom to close the awareness gap, says Bruce, is showing clients a before-and-after scenario. "We've actually

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installed what we call standard lighting downlights. These are standard lights, standard bulbs. In addition to that we've put in specialty lighting. The intent is to say, 'this is probably what you're used to and this is what you get when you apply lighting control.'"

Another obstacle is reluctance. It's one thing to convince a customer to invest in a home theater; that's something most people have on their radar as wanting someday. It's another thing to convince a client he should invest in a better way to control lights. This can be overcome, says Bruce, by making clients realize how affordable lighting control can be. "We figure that the average price is somewhere between \$3 and \$4 per square foot installed."

Selling the Benefits

If dealers are able to overcome the obstacles, they still have the challenge of explaining the benefits. So much of the lighting control appeal is subjective. That puts the most smooth-talking sales guys and the companies with the best showrooms at supreme advantages. There are tangible benefits, though, says Bruce. Integrators who can learn how to demonstrate and/or describe the benefits can improve their odds.

Security—There are few things more marketable than security. It can be really simple, says Wiatrak. "If there is a security breach or a fire alarm a lighting scene can be triggered. People are interested in that."

Frias says he explains security benefits similarly. "You can have the lights come on in the event of a fire so you can see your way out, much like in an airplane, where the lights form a path to the way out of the house. You can have exterior lights flashing if there is a break-in. There are vacation modes that simulate the house being lived in so potential intruders will think someone is home."

Something about light just makes people feel secure. Bartholomew's wife is a police officer. "She comes home carrying a gun, but she still feels safer because the lighting control [senses her arrival and]



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—David Bruce, Square D

lights a path to the front door," he says.

Bruce adds that the security issue is particularly effective with female clients. "Let's say the lady of the house is home alone and she can illuminate the entire house with the touch of a button if she hears a noise. It's really simply communicating to the customer and saying, 'Did you know you could do this?'"

Convenience—Security and convenience often go hand in hand. That button that illuminates the house when the woman hears a noise is also pretty convenient. "You avoid having to walk around the house to turn off all the lights," says Bartholomew. Of course, that point is proportionally more effective as the client's square footage increases.

Wiatrak, who uses a large section of his personal home as his office and showroom, says he programs mood and function lighting scene buttons. "In my home there's 'party hard,' 'party soft,' evening scenes and pathway scenes. 'Head to bed'

shuts off all the unneeded lights and lights a pathway to the bedroom."

For Frias, convenience comes down to the HOUSE OFF button next to the bed. He says clients love that they can hit one button and turn off all the lights.

Speaking of the touchpanel next to the bed, Bartholomew adds that he can program it so clients can see when their teenage kids come home because they can check to see if they've turned their bedroom light off yet—the ultimate in parental reassurance.

"For consumers, we've found that convenience is their No. 1 priority," says Bruce. "It's the ability to push a button and everything goes on or off. I don't have to go around and touch every button."

Aesthetics—Lighting can completely change a room as much as a paint color can," says Bartholomew. He adds that we tend not to notice, but lighting is used to enhance artifacts and highlight things all the time and it's a matter of bringing it to the clients' consciousness. He talks to customers about how jewelry stores use lighting to show off diamonds, and restaurants use dimming to add ambiance. "We don't notice it, but we would notice it if the restaurant had fluorescent lights."

Square D looks at lighting control much like art, says Bruce. "We take some of the things people feel good about owning [paintings, sculptures, etc.] and make



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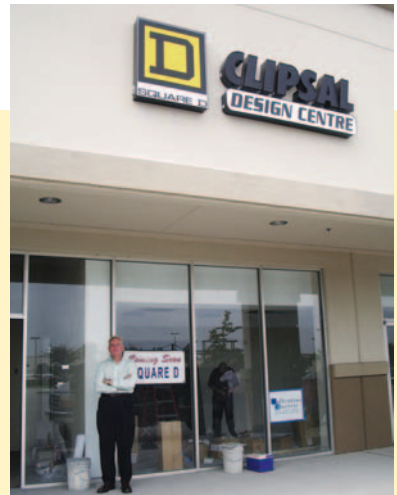
Many integrators don't have enough show floor room to demonstrate a 60-inch TV, let alone a whole-home lighting control system. If you can't show it, how are you supposed to sell it to consumers who have merely flicked a switch to turn on the lights their entire lives?

The folks at Schneider Electric, who launched a residential lighting control line in early 2006 under the Square D Clipsal brand name, think it's a tough sell. That's why it launched a retail store in an upscale Orlando, Fla., shopping center in mid-November. Primarily, the space is a venue for area electricians and integrators to bring in clients and demonstrate lighting control in a lifestyle environment, although the company does expect some customer foot traffic.

When dealers don't have the space to demonstrate a simulated home, "people say, 'well, I've been flipping my lights on for years ... why do I need something like this?'" says Brad Wills, director of new business development for Schneider. "Until they see it in a space that looks like something they might actually live in, they don't realize how it might simplify their lives."

Before the company went forward with the retail space idea, they talked to a lot of installers who said it was something they really wanted, says Square D national sales manager David Bruce. "We told them we'd give them a place in a retail location that gives them the ability to take their customers in and we'll facilitate the process. That turned out to be a major motivator [to go forward with the plan] because they said they'd support us if we did that," he says.

Most of the traffic in the store, Schneider expects, will be appointment-based. Still, it chose a location with natural foot traffic. Part of the reason, says Bruce, is that integrators and electricians will schedule meetings with clients there. Since it's a popular shopping center, it's easy to describe the meeting spot. "We intend that until we open additional showrooms this will be sort of our epicenter when it comes to residential lighting," says Bruce. "We have every faith that there will be additional showrooms."



David Bruce will oversee the Square D Clipsal retail center, a venue for its dealers to demonstrate lighting and lighting control.

them look even better."

For Frias, lighting control aesthetics are not so much about using lighting to highlight the room and the things in it but more about reducing the number of light switches in a house. "Wall clutter, wall clutter," he says, "That's the No. 1 wife acceptance factor."

Energy-savings—Bruce, Bartholomew and Frias all say that energy-savings isn't a big motivation for people to invest in lighting control. "We discuss it, but after some quick math the client knows that he is not buying the system to save on electricity," says Frias. "We tell them is they won't have to replace as many bulbs as often and sometimes the bulbs can be \$15

each and there can be 300 of them."

Wiatrak takes the bulb point a bit further and says that he does find energy management to be a key factor. "A lot of people are into holiday lighting and landscape lighting," he says, adding that for some big houses they'll use thousands of bulbs. Through energy-management, Wiatrak says he can extend the the life of those bulbs.

"For somebody who has a lot of money, the cost doesn't really matter," he says, "but it does matter when somebody pulls up to their house and sees all their wonderful lights but three of them are burnt out. It's the first thing that'll catch their eye." **CE Pro**