18 Opportunities for Quality Fixture, Display & Millwork Installations

A Step-By-Step Guide to Installation Improvement

By Ray Bakker, Express ShopFitters Inc.

Here is a simple but powerful rule ... always give people more than they expect to get.

Headquartered in Canada, since 1998 Express ShopFitters Inc. has focused on North American retail fixture, display and millwork installation and related services. Multi-door installs to single location service calls. Doing so through 125+ service partners with over 3,000 qualified local trades including carpenters, professional installers, both union and non-union. ShopFit remains a boutique firm, specializing in providing these and other complimentary valet services through extreme communications to a small set of strategic clients.

We know that an educated consumer is our best customer. This article for them. Enjoy.

Over the past 30 years, we have seen many changes in the way fixtures, displays and kiosks have been designed and fabricated. However, the one thing that has not changed is the care, skill, and attention to detail required in successfully handling and installing such products.

The methods and skills used during installation are no secret, and there are systematic steps before, during and after installation to provide a high-quality service.

By using the following as a check list, you will be able to ensure that the final appearance (and use) of your millwork, fixture, display or kiosk is as intended, free from warranty issues, reflecting the true quality of the product, and ensuring the highest possible level of consumer experience, lending to value-add for all parties involved.

1. Engineering and Design:

Understanding the scope of work, the intent of usage and site conditions will have a dramatic effect whether the project runs smoothly with minimal rework and is capable of being used efficiently and ergonomically for the intended purpose. Working closely with the estimator to see if conditions now exist that were not allowed for in the original scope of work is prudent.

2. Site Preparation:

Before you are asked to deliver your product to the site, you should make sure the site is actually ready to receive the product. Before delivering to the site, as well as during and following installation, the building environment must be stabilized. The degree to which floors are level, and walls and openings are plumb and square should be determined beforehand. It is generally understood in the industry that if an installer decides to accept these conditions without notifying the contractor/client, then they may become accountable for any additional work or costs associated with the out-of-specification item.

3. Logistics:

If the fabricator must ship long distances to the project site, it is very important that the products are well wrapped and protected so that they can absorb the movement of being in a truck/train/plane/ship. It is often better to overprotect finished fixtures with additional wrapping, foam and crating. Sturdier crates and additional packaging are often required the further the millwork is being shipped from the manufacturing plant. Understand that the movement of a road trailer (up and down, and sideways from roads and curbs) vs a rail container (forwards and backwards, from shunt yards) are different, so pack accordingly. This will ensure that the product arrives free of damage, helps avoid insurance claims and that repair costs, if any are minimal. If the product must be exported, then additional logistics are involved such as dealing with customs brokers, bonded warehouses and the related documentation.

4. Onsite Receipt and Inspection:

Make sure all the necessary millwork items and all shop drawings are included so that the installer knows the location of all components. All hardware and fasteners must also be packed and well-marked for quick access. Report any short-shipped items clearly so that the installer can procure them quickly. The installer should also inspect all areas of the intended fixture installation to review that the preparatory work done by others is acceptable, that all areas receiving millwork have the appropriate relative humidity and that the received millwork that is received is compliant with the contract documents.overprotect finished fixtures with additional wrapping, foam and crating. Sturdier crates and additional packaging are often required the further the millwork is being shipped from the manufacturing plant. Understand that the movement of a road trailer (up and down, and sideways from roads and curbs) vs a rail container (forwards and backwards, from shunt yards) are different, so pack accordingly.

5. Product Acclimatizing:

The generally accepted standard for best results is to allow the millwork to acclimatize for 72 hours in field conditions. As an example, installers should avoid unloading and immediately installing finished millwork from a truck that has travelled in sub-zero temperatures or from variant humidity environments.

6. Site Storage:

If due to scheduling or other issues on-site storage is required past the acclimatization period, then the storage environment must meet the same criteria as mentioned in the delivery section above, namely that the humidity and temperature levels fall within the accepted parameters and that preparatory work is complete and dry.

7. Site Safety:

Larger projects usually require that the general contractor has a health and safety program in place. Sub-trades are required to follow the safety protocols which means existing policies must be in place, and that proper Personal Protective Equipment is worn. Even on small jobs the installer must be aware of the conditions behind walls, floors, and ceilings so that fasteners do not puncture items such as existing electrical or plumbing systems. In many regions working at heights certification is mandatory.

8. Site Protection:

Protection of previous work undertaken by other trades should happen before installation begins. Finished and painted walls, flooring, installed furniture and appliances, as well as windows and doors will require protection from potential damage.

9. Special Equipment:

Larger sites and projects including the hanging of signs may require equipment such as scaffolding, scissor lifts, or the pre booking of elevators/loading docks. These are requirements that must be coordinated earlier to avoid costly delays.

10. Field Modifications:

Installers often have their own special expertise and equipment. Sharp tools/blades produce the best results in terms of quality of cut and efficiency. All work that can be completed at the fabricator should be completed there, as site rates are usually higher than shop rates and can also add additional time, and money, to the project. Any finish carpentry or scribing that is done on site may also need additional work to hide visual imperfections.

11. Square, Plumb and Level:

The fixturing trade is often required to address the imperfections of previous construction practices such that in the end, the woodwork has a precise and clean look. This is accomplished through various methods including installing the fixture square, plumb and level. This is the point at which the value of the fixture and how it is installed will greatly enhance the value of the product it will display. If you anticipate poor site conditions ensure you have qualified trades booked, as not all trades are qualified installers.

12. Adhesives and Fasteners:

Using the correct fasteners and adhesives for the structural use they were intended is crucial. For example, cleats used to hang fixtures on the wall not only aids in installation but also, if ever the need arises to replace one or all components, they are easily removed without damaging the woodwork.

13. Other Components:

Other elements such as glass, mirrors, architectural metal, electrical, stone, and fabric/upholstery can be incorporated into the fixture. Sometimes these are installed during manufacturing but on occasion, this needs to be addressed in the field at time of installation. Coordination and communication between the various trades becomes critical for a successful and efficient installation of these components.

14. Touch Ups and Finishes:

Most fixtures today are factory-finished but there are some instances where touch-ups are required. Prepare for this eventuality by supplying additional materials and touch up paints so that site repairs are equal in quality and performance to the original finish. It is important to note which cleaning compounds can, and cannot, be used to remove dirt and greases from the millwork.

15. Site Clean Up:

It is very important to clean up all shipping cardboard and wrapping products, as well as all additional material, off cuts, dust, garbage, adhesives and dispose them in the appropriate dumpster or recycling bin. Ensure these services are booked in advance as not all sites have disposal units available. It may become the sudden responsibility of the trade to remove and dispose of items offsite, which can become problematic if the trade does not have the appropriate vehicle to do so.

16. Deficiency List:

Upon completion of the installation or as close as reasonably possible, the client or their representative will do a walk through to inspect the fixtures. At this time, it cannot be stressed enough that the suppliers representative be present at the walk through, possibly with the retailer or brand. The deficiency list should be part of any handover form, and all noted items on this list will require rectification before any hold backs are released.

17. Maintenance Programs:

The fixture fabricator/supplier is responsible for providing guidelines for product maintenance. Recommendations on the appropriate maintenance regime is useful information for the installer to use and leave with the retailer.

18. Client Satisfaction Follow Up:

Detailed reporting during the process is key to overall success, so ensure that the installer captures all elements of the build ongoing with photos, videos and live communications. These should be part of a shared data base for easy retrieval. After the final handover is complete it is recommended to conduct an honest review with the installer to identify performance and build quality barriers. Implementing a corrective action plan will lead to future continual improvement.

After all, Client Satisfaction is the Key Performance Indicator that drives all business. Hence, this article. Thank you for reading!

Summary

If you are managing a project, be proactive and be the first to visit the site in the morning or follow up daily via DM's and phone calls with your contractor, installer or onsite supervisor to minimize any issues and to provide a timely deliverable. This is especially helpful in identifying potential change orders early.

Honest and open communicating is perceived as respect, whether the message is good news, or bad. Problems don't go away when ignored, so they must be faced head on. Always deal in a professional and courteous manner thinking of how you would like to be treated. Your trades must reciprocate, after all they work for you.