

# BETTER *by Design*

By K. Schipper



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RV DESIGNER

RV Designer President John Tinghitella is pictured in front of one of his company's hardware displays at Dixie RV in Florida. Tinghitella has embraced the challenges and rewards of heading an RV supply business after spending 30 years in the marine market.

*RV Designer finds success taking everyday RV parts and accessories and packaging and merchandising them in ways that grab customers' attention.*

**R**eality television has taught us all about the power of a makeover. Whether it's a home just going on the market, an older model car, or an average man or woman, with the right help, a star is born.

RV Designer's mission in life is much the same as those adding a little extra glitter and sparkle to the dull kitchen or the plain 20-something – but in a much tougher environment. The supplier will come in and take an RV dealership's retail replacement hardware displays and remake them.

RV Designer President John Tinghitella, who will complete his purchase of the business later this year, says the company isn't doing anything particularly revolutionary. "We just try to do it very well," he explains.

In a setting where retailing products is just one of several balls dealerships are trying to keep in the air, RV Designer recognizes that many of them don't invest the time and effort in retail and merchandizing they should. Tinghitella's goal is to be their support.

## **Mutual Attraction**

Both Tinghitella and RV Designer have strong backgrounds in product retailing – although much of Tinghitella's comes from the marine industry, rather than RVs.

"RV Designer is about 22 years old," he says. "It was started in the early 1990s as a continuation of a business my partner and company founder David Shapiro started that supplied the RV OEM market with curtains and fabrics. We still have that, but it's not a big part of what we do. The real meat of the company is RV Designer."



RV Designer offers retailers a variety of tools to help them sell more products, including displays, planograms, special packaging designed to highlight the products, market research and customer service support.

RV Designer is focused specifically on the aftermarket, and while Tinghitella has a background in both original equipment and the aftermarket, he says one of the things that attracted him to the company was that emphasis.

Tinghitella spent more than 30 years working in the marine market. Early in his career, he worked for a company that manufactured hardware, lighting and other accessories for boats for both the OE and aftermarket.

“That’s where I gained my perspective in marketing and sales,” he says.

Later, he went to work for Marincio, managing the recreational market for its electrical division. In 2004, he expanded that market into the RV world under the name ParkPower.

“We rebranded our marine products for the RV world,” Tinghitella says. “We took electrical products and created a concept called ‘detachable power’ primarily for motorhomes, but also for travel trailers.”

Although he left the corporate world in

2009 to consult, Tinghitella says he loved the niche of the marine and RV worlds because of their comparatively small size and the opportunity to develop deep, lasting relationships.

Drawn to buy a business, he began investigating options, and happened to strike up a deal with Shapiro, whom he’d known for more than a dozen years and who was looking to ease himself into retirement.

“In 2008, the RV (industry) had taken a hit, as had marine, but I believe RV has more rebounding power as a market, and I got lucky and was right,” he says. “David was looking for an exit and I wanted an entry, so late in 2010 I bought into the business, and I’m about to become the sole owner.”

#### Solution Provider

On the surface, at least, replacement hardware is hardly the glamorous side of the RV business. Tinghitella says that, for many RV dealerships, it also is something that can easily fall under the radar.

power to explore!  
Customers ask for it.  
We help you deliver,  
**SOLAR POWER**  
Solar Power  
The New Way to RV

**PORTABLE SOLAR**  
The BEST Portable Solar System

**COMPLETE SOLAR KITS**  
We make installation easy.

**Excellent Dealer Support and Training**

Look For Zamp Solar In

Add value to your dealership offering the best solar solutions.

**ZAMPSOLAR.COM**  
**541.728.0924**



**Tinghitella (right) is pictured with George Mills, retail parts manager for Dixie RV in Defuniak Springs, Fla. Dixie RV is one of many dealerships that use RV Designer's services to sell more aftermarket accessories.**

"An RV dealership really has three components to its business," he says. "They sell RV units, they service those units and then they sell parts and accessories. Often times, they abdicate the merchandizing of that section to the supply community and particularly their reps."

It's there that RV Designer sees its niche. Rather than simply placing some items on shelves or hung on pegboards in a corner, Tinghitella says his company is providing a parts and accessories solution.

Just as supermarkets always place the dairy case at the back of the store to compel people to cruise the aisles to get to that necessity, Tinghitella explains that there's a science in how people react in a store. The trick is to develop a good presentation and then position everything based on how shoppers shop.

He notes that the typical RV dealership consumer is a man who tends to be what he calls, "a hands-on, gadget-y kind of guy," who's looking for products that are easy to install and make good practical sense.

And, while its products may be replacements, the company offers a variety of items for inside and outside the RV, including Tri-Mark locks, Pollak trailer connections, seat covers and Klippy Klips.

Along with understanding the shopping experience in a dealership, Tinghitella says RV Designer has a simple formula that it uses when it develops a merchandizing plan

for a dealer to boost what he describes as the stop-gather-and-grab process of buying.

The first step, obviously, is to get a shopper to stop. And, while RV Designer can't help get people to a particular aisle, once there, the first goal of its displays is to get people to stop in front of a particular sub-category section that has interest to them.

From there, Tinghitella says the next step is to get the shopper to recognize there's the widget he's looking for.

The final step is the "grab."

"When a person touches a product and pulls it off the shelf, studies show that they're 50 percent on their way to making a purchase," Tinghitella says. "They've made a connection, so we go to great lengths to get people to grab the right item."

Once that occurs, RV Designer believes there's still more that can be done.

"We want the whole aisle to be so attractive and inviting that they don't leave," he says. "It's not that we think replacement hardware is all that exciting, but if it's well-merchandized, they will also identify two or three other items they should have been buying all along that are broken. They go ahead and increase the purchase."

Of course, that doesn't happen by accident. Along with its studies, the company offers the merchandizing hardware and support to make it happen.

Leading the way are planograms. RV Designer offers 13 different categories of

planograms or displays that help customers' eyes track to the products that contribute most to the dealer's bottom line so they'll be noticed first.

The supplier offers a variety of displays, including six different space-saving sliding panel versions that allow a dealer to double the display area for RV Designer's replacement products without making any changes in an existing floorplan.

"We also utilize color, we utilize symmetry, we utilize signage, we utilize selection tools at the point-of-purchase to make it a pleasant gathering experience," says Tinghitella. "What differentiates us is there's a lot of nice packaging in stores, but it's not always effective and productive. They may have pretty pictures. They may have tons of information, but it doesn't invite someone to stop-gather-and-grab."

### More Than Graphics

Although good graphics are an important part of what Tinghitella sees as the role of good marketing, he believes it goes well beyond that.

"Marketing isn't just great communication and graphics," he says. "That's definitely a part of it, but to me the most significant part of marketing is brand management and that's what we do to make the customer profitable."

For Tinghitella, that goes all the way from the relationships RV Designer forges at the wholesale level, and with the dealers, but it carries right on through to the end customer.

He admits that his forte isn't the nuts and bolts of getting product sourced, delivered, packaged and out the door of the company's 12,000-square-foot facility in Wheeling, Ill., "but I have a good team of people, including Betty Billington, our director of operations, who are, and we're striving to make ourselves as good as we can be while constantly making ourselves better."

The company uses a three-pronged approach to getting its story to dealers. Tinghitella says RV Designer works hard on forming strong relationships with distributors because, "They have a fair amount of sway over the dealers on product selection."

Additionally, Nick Gomez, the com-

pany's dealer sales manager, is on the road more than half the year visiting dealers to talk about the merchandizing solutions RV Designer offers. And, the company has forged a relationship with manufacturer's rep firm ARC Representation & Consulting to further put the company's ideas in front of dealers.

Once a dealer does sign on with RV Designer, "We don't just convince them to make the switch; there's a lot of physical work we have to do for them," Tinghitella says.

Ultimately, the new client is going to receive its displays and planograms fully assembled and retail-ready.

"We package it and wrap it," he says. "We ship it – and it costs a bundle – but when the dealer or distributor opens the container, it can go on the shelf as-is."

However, the support continues once



RV Designer's merchandising systems come in a variety of shapes and sizes to give dealers options on what works best of their business.

# Grow with RV!

Looking to Grow Your Business?  
Looking to see what's new in the RV accessories market?  
Look no further. We're here to help.



Register on-line at [www.marinedistributionevents.com](http://www.marinedistributionevents.com) or see your sales representative for more information.



- Best Deals of the Year
- Exclusive Show Discounts
- Cash Back Incentives
- New Product Introductions
- Vendor Networking Opportunities

## LAND 'N' SEA / BELL RV DEALER TRADE SHOW

January 11-12, 2016  
Kalahari Resort  
Wisconsin Dells, WI

RV Designer's replacement parts are in the dealership. Most notably, after six months to a year, the supplier will do what Tinghitella calls a "refresh," where it will clean up the product section, put up new signs, perhaps change packaging and provide other marketing tools.

"We have a guaranteed commitment to them," he says. "They can also contact us and swap out product so we can make sure they're putting inventory on their shelves that they believe is what they need."

Throughout the year, RV Designer is also in-touch via industry events, including distributor shows, and its website through its strong database.

"Every two or three weeks we send out a short message," he says. "It's usually about a new product or a new idea; we make it graphic and we do our best not to take too much time."

The website also provides dealer con-

tact information. The supplier doesn't sell directly to the public, but is happy to direct RV owners to the nearest dealership carrying the RV Designer products.

However, if an RV owner has bought an RV Designer product and isn't happy with it, the company will handle it directly.

"We call it a lifetime commitment," says Tinghitella. "If they're not satisfied for any reason and they've taken the time to find us, we'll make the leap of faith and address their concern. We'll immediately send a replacement product – no questions asked. It all speaks to our belief in relationships."

Not surprisingly, relationships are what Tinghitella plans to rely on as he continues to grow RV Designer under his sole ownership. The supplier has done some acquisitions in the past, and he says some are under consideration at present.

However, he also sees RV Designer working closely in partnership with com-

panies such as TriMark that focus entirely on the OEM market.

"They've done very well at the OE level, and we've partnered with them to manage the aftermarket," he says. "We can offer their products and bring them to the consumer for the dealer to install. That way we can get into categories without having to develop them ourselves."

At the same time, RV Designer is bringing its own new products to market. While the company has gotten away from curtains, its interest in fabrics has taken it into the seat cover market, and it will be releasing a new cover called Grip Fit made with spandex panels for a near universal fit.

"The important thing is our strong belief in relationship-building and merchandizing," Tinghitella says. "We want to be the best, certainly, but we want to be a great friend to the dealers. We truly want to help them make more money." **PRO**



## LIMITED SPACE? RVD SLIDER!

- 8 ft of hardware in 4 ft of space
- Six assortments to choose from

**GUARANTEED SALE.**

800 938-5883 [www.rvdesigner.com](http://www.rvdesigner.com)

Copyright © 2015, RV Designer. All rights reserved.

**R** Designer®