

ISSN 2835-916X

# RETAIL Business



## Review

Retailbusinessreview.com

RETAIL  
DISPLAY  
MANUFACTURER  
EDITION

Michael Eckert,  
CEO & Founder

REAWAKENING  
**RETAIL**



design phase

# COVER STORY

RETAIL  
Business Review  
**TOP  
RETAIL DISPLAY  
MANUFACTURER - 2024**



Michael Eckert,  
CEO & Founder

**d e s i g n p h a s e**

REAWAKENING RETAIL



**C**an brick-and-mortar stores compete with the ease and convenience of online shopping? At Design Phase, we believe the answer is yes – if online shopping can evolve into a comprehensive and immersive experience. To lure customers away from their screens, brands and retailers must elevate the in-store experience by creating innovative and engaging spaces

**“WE STAND OUT FOR OUR HIGH-QUALITY DESIGN WORK AND THE DETAILS WE BRING INTO OUR DISPLAYS”**

that captivate and excite shoppers. This involves transforming Point-of-Purchase displays into interactive terminals that stimulate the senses, spark curiosity, and turn shopping into an adventure.

Design Phase Inc., a specialist in creating high-end permanent in-store displays, has been on the leading edge of innovation efforts to transform customer experience at the crucial Point-of-Purchase. With over three decades of experience in the retail display space, the company has established a deep understanding of consumer behavior and clients' business objectives. Combined with its creative, strategic design incorporating cutting-edge technology and seamless manufacturing, Design Phase has produced some of the industry's most prominent and successful display programs around the world.

"For us, the product is always the hero. So, we create displays that position products in the best way to increase sales, focusing on ROI," said Michael Eckert, CEO and Founder of Design Phase.

## HOW IT ALL STARTED

A perfect example of starting small but thinking big, Design Phase's growth as a name synonymous with innovation and excellence in the retail industry is fueled by successful partnerships and projects. During the initial years, the company solely focused on designing and engineering in-store displays for companies like The Walt Disney Company.

For instance, Design Phase used to create shelving units to hold Disney's VHS tapes of their movies at retailers like Walmart, Kmart, and Target. This included the design of floor

## INTERIOR ENTRANCE VIEW OF DESIGN PHASE'S HEADQUARTERS FEATURING THEIR DISNEY VHS DISPLAYS FROM THE EARLY 2000S



units, endcaps, and inline displays. All fixtures were custom designed with the use of consistent brand colors, shapes, and logos to effectively highlight Disney's products. A few years into its association with Design Phase, Disney had made a decision that would change the company's future forever.

Eckert said, "Overnight, we went from this little design agency to developing and producing all of Walt Disney's in-store displays for their movies. That really took us into a different area and started us off as a real force in the industry, because we had Disney behind us now, as our number one client. From there, we got into Apple and Microsoft and never looked back." This prestigious partnership went on to further attract brands like LG, Garmin, and Amazon who continue to work with Design Phase today.

"We stand out for our high-quality design work and the details we bring into our displays," explains Eckert. All the parts utilized by Design Phase are procured from across the globe to tailor displays specifically to client needs, considering factors like product type, quantity, budget, and quality requirements. However, most manufacturing occurs in the U.S. at its Waukegan facilities in Illinois. Design Phase uses the "Toyota Way" of manufacturing to emphasize their high level of quality control while also ensuring cost-effectiveness and customization for their clients.

## REINVENTING RETAIL, ONE DISPLAY AT A TIME

Known for its quality and durability, Design Phase specializes in high-end permanent displays that follow the 30-10-2 rule in regard to digital interactive displays. This rule is about how to attract the shopper from afar when they are 30 feet away, 10 feet away, and 2 feet away. It's all about how the display can engage consumers at different stages—catching their attention, generating interest, and educating them—to close them. Based on the rule, Design Phase's team selects materials



LG'S WATERFALL OLED TV DISPLAY IS CURRENTLY AT COSTCO STORES ACROSS THE U.S.  
WINNER OF THE SHOP! OMA GOLD AWARD IN 2021

## GARMIN FENIX 5 SERIES DISPLAY – BEST BUY WINNER OF THE DESIGN OF THE TIMES PLATINUM AWARD IN 2017 AND POPAI OMA SILVER AWARD IN 2018



that complement the products that are set to be launched or highlighted in-store. A notable example of this approach is their long-standing work with LG. Having collaborated with LG for 15 years now, Design Phase has played a crucial role in helping LG build their brand.

The company developed display fixtures for LG's high-end OLED TVs and soundbars in Best Buy, effectively telling the story of why customers should choose OLED technology. The strategy involved using 55-, 65-, and 75-inch TVs to showcase compelling content and demonstrated the product's unique features and why it was worth the extra investment. A

perfect fit for products like TVs, headphones, and other appliances where in-person experiences are crucial, these displays resulted in a remarkable sales lift and awareness for the brand over their competitors. Design Phase continues to retrofit this successful display program even today, updating it with new TVs annually.

Similarly, the company has also taken strides to ensure brand consistency when collaborating with their clients. A prime example is the worldwide launch of XBOX 360. When Microsoft approached Design Phase, they wanted a kiosk that would stand out and allow kids to play different games on their new console. Yet, it needed a unified

## LG SIGNATURE KITCHEN SUITE PROGRAM 2024 WINNER OF THE SHOP! OMA GOLD AWARD IN 2023



design to fit into 33 countries around the world. The company designed the kiosk to mirror the console's hourglass curve for a cohesive and strategic look. The entire project was a massive rollout with Design Phase, ensuring the kiosks' functionality through robust customer service and maintenance, as well as programming them with various languages. The launch also activated sight, hearing, touch, and interaction, leveraging effective sensory engagement in creating compelling retail experiences. Sensory engagement was further extended for certain displays, such as live, powered-on kitchen setups, where the company incorporated taste to increase consumer involvement.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a spur in the market for home and kitchen appliances. Seizing the opportunity, Design Phase ventured into designing and building working kitchen displays for brands like Bosch, Monogram, Café, Thermador, and LG's Signature Kitchen Suite, to name a few. Seen at over 900 appliance showrooms across the country, Design Phase catered to brands wanting to carve out their own footprint of kitchen space where a chef could come in for a live demonstration.

## FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

Along with its myriad of client success stories, Design Phase's constant commitment to excellence is reflected in its impressive array of design awards.

"We've won over 170 design awards, but we enter them mainly for our clients," Eckert shared.

Design Phase doesn't rest on its laurels though. They are poised for future growth and innovation through strategic initiatives

BOSCH DISHWASHER DISPLAY - LOWE'S - 2023



and new partnerships. The company has identified key challenges faced by its clients, particularly the need for enhanced in-store marketing support and project management from start to finish among large Fortune 50 and Fortune 100 companies. Their solution was partnering with Impact Marketing, a tech-integrated marketing firm that aims to streamline project management from initial stages through content development, leveraging advanced technologies such as a virtual production LED wall by Planar for interactive content creation.

Design Phase is also revitalizing its global launch capabilities, citing successful past campaigns such as those for XBOX. To that end, to complement its extensive North American presence and maintain consistent brand recognition worldwide, the company is joining forces with the Valley Group, Europe's top retail marketing display company based in the UK.

Sustainability is another significant priority for Design Phase and its clients. Driven by client demands, including those of partners like Amazon, for eco-friendly solutions, the company uses recycled materials like particle boards, melamine, and more to align with environmental stewardship goals.

The company is also exploring new sectors such as home building and cosmetics, diversifying its portfolio to include a range of exciting new projects.

"It all boils down to effective storytelling and personalized experiences to attract and retain customers in the competitive retail landscape. We want to reinforce the relevance of physical retail by creating engaging in-store environments and tap into its billion-dollar market potential," says Eckert. Despite its growth and success, Design Phase is still a family business at heart. "My daughter Madeline, my son John Michael, my wife Julie, and my sister Mary all work here. It just kind of happened, and I love it," Eckert said.

The family-oriented ethos contributes to the company's close-knit culture and collaborative spirit. It also continues to be the backbone of Design Phase's journey from humble beginnings to a legacy that spans the globe in the retail display space. **RB**