

Progress Lighting: Growing the green market

While the rest of the world talks about energy efficiency, Progress Lighting is working hard to be part of the solution.

The company has taken a leadership role in growing the green market by developing a wide array of energy-efficient fixtures that accommodate new lighting technologies such as light-emitting diodes (LEDs) and compact fluorescent lights. These light sources not only use less energy, but also produce less heat, so reduce air conditioning requirements.

“LED technology is the future for the residential market,” said Jim Decker, vice president of brand management for Progress Lighting. “We’ve focused on developing a solid-state lighting line so consumers can now light an entire house with LEDs.”

The company introduced its first residential LED lighting line, EVERLUME, in 2006. Continuing its pattern of breakthrough products, Progress Lighting recently unveiled a new LED downlight that consumes just 15 watts versus the traditional 65-watt BR30 lamp.

According to Decker, this new downlight is significant because it shows that LED output is able to generate the same power as an incandescent spotlight with the same color quality.

Decker sees energy-efficient products as the largest market opportunity in the near future.

“On the residential side, consumers are asking for green options. A recent survey found that consumers are more likely to spend on green options than on luxury options,” he said. “On the commercial side, it will be reducing watts per square foot as mandated by the ASHRAE rulings. The opportunity will be in achieving fewer watts per square foot while continuing to provide proper visual comfort for occupants.”

Progress Lighting’s pioneering efforts in energy-efficient manufacturing and in education—such as its www.energyefficientlight.com website—have earned the company 2006 and 2007 Lighting for Tomorrow awards, as well as 2007 ENERGY STAR Product Manufacturer Partner of the Year recognition. Progress Lighting is, in fact, a charter partner of the ENERGY STAR program, cosponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy.

Culture of innovation

Progress Lighting has evolved and innovated throughout its 102-year history.

“Progress Lighting is the classic American entrepreneurial story,” Decker said. “Our founder, Frank Rosen, started out creating the cotton mantle for gas lanterns on his front porch in 1906. The business grew quickly as electric lighting became more popular.”

The company’s colorful history includes making small outdoor

lanterns, nicknamed jelly jars—which actually used glass jelly jars as the globe initially—and brass shell casings during WWII, Decker said.

Founded in Philadelphia as Victory Lamp Company, Progress Lighting has grown into the largest manufacturer of residential and light commercial lighting. The company offers products in every area of the residential lighting market, including more than 5,000 lighting fixtures.

The company was bought by Hubbell Lighting in 2002, which is a “natural fit,” according to Decker. It now has four distribution centers located throughout the country that support one of the largest networks of electrical distributors and showrooms in the United States.

Market-driven approach

Progress Lighting’s secret to innovation lies in its extensive research and development programs. The company’s market research includes surveying staff in lighting showrooms and building design centers.

“We ask the people who know our market,” Decker said. “If the product design doesn’t get a 75 percent approval rating, it doesn’t get developed. We only develop about half of the concepts we come up with; the other half are thrown out.”

This rigorous, market-driven approach ensures that the company can maintain its status as the number one decorative lighting line among builders and remodelers.



“The residential market is a fashion-driven business,” said Decker. “We have a company goal that 30 percent of our sales volume should be coming from products introduced in the past three years. We’ve achieved this goal for the past six years. Our development process ensures that we’re creating products that our customers want and need.”

Its Thomasville line, introduced four years ago, has been a great success for Progress Lighting. As one of the top five recognized consumer brand names, the line has leverage in the showroom. It is unique as a consumer-recognized lighting brand, Decker said.

LEEDing the way

In 2007, Progress Lighting moved into a new LEED-certified headquarters in Greenville, S.C. LEED—or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design—is a program of the U.S. Green Building Council, a nonprofit organization working to make green buildings available to everyone within a generation.

“We pursued the LEED silver certification, which is the second-highest level, because we believe the future

of lighting will be very involved with the LEED standard. We’re the only LEED-certified building in the lighting business, and we were named one of the top 10 new buildings in terms of architecture and energy efficiency by *BusinessWeek*,” Decker said.

According to Decker, the building’s LEED certification has an impact on everything from the HVAC system to window coatings to lighting and beyond. The building has centralized printing—no desktop printers—which saves 750,000 sheets of paper a year. It even features different types of lighting on various floors, so visitors can see real-life examples of direct and indirect lighting.

“Groups come to tour the building every day. The building, down to the way it’s lit at night, is a working lab in itself. It’s a very cool place to work,” said Decker.

Star-lite five-light LED chandelier ▼



▲ Greenridge LED wall lantern

Committed to education and partners

In addition to its energy efficiency features, Progress Lighting’s headquarters is also home to the Lighting Solutions Center, a 25,000-square-foot lighting lab dedicated to application-oriented training.

“With our Lighting Solutions Center, we took an educational approach,” said Decker. “We wanted to look at the major issues that specifiers deal with in lighting, including daylighting, dark sky, and emergency lighting.”

The center has a dedicated staff focused on specific solutions for lighting challenges, including maximizing energy efficiency, controlling light pollution, and specifying solid-state lighting products. Decker said that the labs will be frequently updated so returning visitors have new things to see.

Progress Lighting is hosting a dedicated seminar for IMARK members at its Lighting Solutions Center during the week of November 17. This event is one of many seminars Progress offers exclusively to IMARK members on topics such as lighting application, design trends, and merchandising techniques.

“Our partnership with IMARK’s members has been very successful. We have sustained growth with members, and we appreciate IMARK’s many resources,” said Decker.

Progress Lighting has benefited especially from IMARK’s resources in promoting its professional showroom merchandising services.



Tapered bell-shaped LED mini-pendant with painted tortoise glass

Springfield Electric Supply in Springfield, Ill., took advantage of Progress Lighting's services when it moved its showroom back to its headquarters three years ago.

"We had Progress Lighting's Fred Munnell come in and work with our architect to fine-tune our showroom design. He provided the color palette for the walls, fabric for the displays, and helped design where to put our lighting vignettes," said Randy Germeraad, senior vice president of Springfield Electric Supply.

Germeraad recommends Progress Lighting's showroom services to other IMARK members.

"It was an invaluable service for us," he said. "It gave our showroom a fresh look and helped us stand out from our competitors. Plus, Fred taught our staff how to merchandise more effectively."

From pioneering energy-efficient products to designing showrooms,

Progress Lighting is helping to create the future of the electrical industry.

"We're really excited about the future of the industry and our association with IMARK," said Decker. "We look forward to exposing more IMARK members to the resources available through Progress Lighting. We want to continue growing relationships and bringing value to member partners."

Sonia Coleman, A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR TO MARKETFOCUS, CAN BE REACHED AT SCOLEMAN@COLEMANUNLIMITED.COM.