

Changes in how people shop, the growth of online shopping, and the influence of social media are often blamed for the demise of the traditional High Street. Yet, these shifts in retail behaviour are also unlocking new entrepreneurial opportunities, as Reena Khokhar, co-founder of RC Bathrooms, explains.

BATHROOMS BOUTIQUE

Founded by Reena Khokhar and her husband Charanjeet Singh, RC Bathrooms is a boutique showroom on Windmill Street in Gravesend, Kent, specialising in mid-to-high-end bathroom brands. A family-run business with a small, dedicated team, including Reena's father, playing a key role in operations, the company focuses on personalised service.

RC Bathrooms sets itself apart through its service-led, experience-driven approach. Rather than focusing solely on sales, the business prioritises building strong relationships with clients and developers and understanding their unique needs. Curating a bathroom can be complicated, particularly with the requirements of modern day living, requiring electrical installations, non-standard plumbing and creative wall and floor finishings. RC Bathrooms guides clients through this sometimes complex process, from concept to completion.

COMPLEX PURCHASE

"The main challenge for most clients searching for a new bathroom is a lack of awareness of the advancements in the bathroom industry that could improve their day-to-day lives," says Reena. "Many customers simply don't know what's possible in modern bathroom design until they come in and we discuss their requirements."

"The bathroom is the first room you visit in the morning and often the last one at night... How you start and end your day in that space can influence your mood and well-being considerably!"

— Reena Khokhar, Co-founder,
RC Bathrooms



The key to securing a client's business is offering a solution that combines the design and functionality they require for their daily needs whilst combining the element of luxury specific to them. "It's about blending aesthetics with functionality, at a price that works for them," Reena explains. "The products offered need to be not only visually appealing but also designed for everyday use, whilst enhancing the bathroom experience".

Reena points out how international travel influences people's perceptions of their bathrooms. "People travel more and often stay in more luxurious accommodation than at home," she says. "This exposure creates awareness of designs and products they may not have seen or tried before, such as washing with water."

Washing with water toilets, sometimes described as bidets, have evolved into "smart toilets" and one of the brands RC Bathrooms partners with is now the fastest-selling toilet system in mainland Europe.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Cultural differences can create dialogue, particularly when discussing features like smart toilets that incorporate water washing. Growing awareness through social media, access to global travel and more diverse social circles is helping bridge this gap in having conversations on typically awkward topics.

For some people, like Reena, growing up in a household where washing with water is a cultural norm, yet for others, it is a new cultural experience and approach to bathroom use. Interestingly, more and more clients are curious to learn about the benefits of a smart toilet. When launching RC Bathrooms, being conscious of specific cultural requirements, as well as sustainability became a core aspect of the business proposition. Offering smart toilets that allow for washing with water, a feature valued by many from traditional backgrounds, and introducing this concept to others became a key part of the business.



OFFERING SOMETHING DIFFERENT

“Competing on price or with mass retailers is not something we get involved with,” Reena says plainly. “What makes us different is our service and how we truly understand the client and their needs.” She adds, “A client might have just been diagnosed with a condition or experienced a major life event, like having a baby or the children leaving home, prompting a rethink of what they require from their bathroom. We get a lot of walk-ins asking for advice based on life changes.”

REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

A High Street presence allows RC Bathrooms clients to visit the showroom and experience the products first-hand. Once Inside, visitors can access knowledge and expertise.

RC Bathroom does not offer off-the-shelf solutions, it instead provides a tailored service, connecting clients with high-quality brands. More customers are

becoming aware of sustainability and the impact of their purchasing decisions. RC Bathrooms promotes long-lasting and responsibly sourced products focused on durability. Clients; are increasingly knowledgeable about the materials used and how they contribute to the longevity of their investment.

SKILLS GAP

A challenge to the business is the evolution of skills fitting modern bathrooms, a recurring theme in many sectors. Now, the demand for technology-driven products means there is a requirement to understand more than just plumbing, including electrics and the customisation of high-tech features.

Technology and materials are driving innovation within the bathroom sector. Smart products like toilets with integrated washing functions, sound systems, and customisable lighting have made fitting a modern bathroom far more complex than 20 years ago.

WELLBEING

The perception of the role of the bathroom is changing with more people now seeing the bathroom not just as a functional space but as a place for wellness and mindfulness.

Social media, the rise of wellness practitioners, and better education are all driving an evolution in personal care products. Consumers are seeking more luxurious, wellness-focused spaces. “The bathroom is the first room you visit in the morning and often the last one at night,” Reena explains. “How you start and end your day in that space can influence your mood and well-being considerably!” This growing focus on wellness is pushing the bathroom industry forward.

OPPORTUNITY

It was spotting the opportunity that encouraged Reena and Charan “to take the leap”. Her background was in private banking, whilst her husband was in construction and interiors, but their passion for interiors drove them to turn it into a business. Taking the plunge, especially with young children, was daunting but felt right.

Deep family roots in Gravesend with a strong family ethos, and the support of friends in the industry, the next step was finding the right location. “After about a year of planning and searching,” Reena smiles, “we launched the showroom on 23 March 2024.”

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THE FUTURE HIGH STREET

Now, the business goal is to stay at the forefront of innovation in the sector, offering clients access to products and experiences they may not have considered before. Over the next decade, technological advances will make smart systems a standard feature in bathrooms, and prices for tech-driven products will come down, making them more accessible.

Despite the increase in automation, particularly in manufacturing and distribution, people will still want to experience products first-hand before making decisions. A physical showroom helps clients explore options, understand the materials, and see how innovative technologies work in a real-world setting. And this is the reason that types of businesses, like RC Bathrooms, will be the kind that will fill High Streets in the latter half of this century. ■