

## MANAGING

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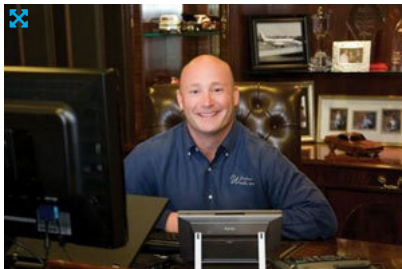
## Biggest Window Company's CEO Steers Clear Path

An interview with Window World CEO Tammy Whitworth.

By [Jim Cory](#)

Tammy Whitworth became CEO of [Window World](#) upon the death of her husband, Todd Whitworth, a little more than two years ago. With sales last year of \$395 million, Window World, headquartered in North Wilkesboro, N.C., is the nation's largest home improvement company.

**Replacement Contractor: You're one of the few women to head a large home improvement company. Does that seem strange?**



**Tammy Whitworth:** This business is all I've ever known. I cut my teeth in it in 1994, shortly after college. Todd and I had a Window World operation in Wilmington, N.C. I ran the office and the installation crews, he did the selling. So I have a tangible understanding of the consumer and what makes our business model successful. I've been fortunate enough to learn the business from the ground up, from answering the phone to helping with installs.

**RC: What have you changed at Window World?**

**TW:** What I have tried to do is continue the fundamentals. New CEOs think they need to come in and demonstrate their value by bringing revolutionary change. For me that wasn't necessary. I followed the vision established by my father-in-law, Leon Whitworth, and my late husband, Todd.

Their vision allows us to build on trends that affect the industry, such as the energy tax credits or lead paint regulations. I think we do a great job of anticipating those changes while remaining nimble enough to adapt to them. But mainly I've tried to bring to fruition some of the initiatives started by Todd.

### Following Through

**RC: What are those initiatives?**

**TW:** The first is Window World University. It's a formal training program for store managers and sales and installation staff. The program begins with the fundamentals of design and energy. And it's about helping homeowners solve their heating/cooling problems. This has raised the bar as we develop new Window World members.

The second is strengthening the leadership team. We've established a Council of Advisors, which consists of a rotating group of eight to 10 franchise owners. I also named long-time employee Dana Deem as president. I've surrounded myself with strong, dedicated individuals to make the best team.

**RC: Window World climbed to the top ranks of home improvement companies six years ago and has stayed there. How have you been able to continue to grow, year after year, during the recession?**

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Formerly the [REPLACEMENT CONTRACTOR](#), Jim Cory is a co-editor to [REMODELING](#) who lives in Philadelphia.

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**TW:** We can't control a lot of things, but we can control our commitment to improving the business model. Our locations are locally owned and nationally supported, so the owner has the support of a national company when it comes to sales and marketing while running that business in his or her own market.

We sell a great product at a great price, and we do what we say we're going to do for each customer each time. Couple that with our [philanthropic activities such as] Window World Cares, and we get a lot of referral business and additional work from existing customers.

## Move to Franchise

**RC:** Last October Window World became a franchise organization. Why?

**TW:** Ultimately, I made the decision to go to the franchise model to maintain consistency throughout the Window World family. The relevant differences between our previous operating model and the franchise model are minor. We haven't seen significant change, and owners have embraced it. Moving to a franchise also allows us to continue our national brand-building across the country.

**RC:** Sales for the window market as a whole dropped about 9% in 2011 after the [tax credit](#) went away. How did that affect Window World?

**TW:** The 2010 tax credit stimulated window demand, but it also pulled the 2011 buyer out of the market to some extent. But I don't think it can be blamed for all the industry's woes. Last year was a challenging one across all product lines. These are challenging times for homeowners.

**RC:** Are sales of non-window products a bigger part of your business today than they were five years ago?

**TW:** Additional products have definitely become increasingly important in the last years. We see it as a natural evolution. If homeowners need windows, they probably also need vinyl siding, shutters, or entry doors. We want to provide a complete exterior remodel, with the curb appeal and energy efficiency that brings.

**RC:** Do you think the industry should be more open to women in executive positions?

**TW:** I am all for it. The vast majority of our operations have women in ownership roles or leadership positions. A lot of owners are husband and wife teams. Right now we have four or five women in leadership positions in our corporate offices.

The fact is that women are the critical decision makers when it comes to our consumer contacts. They decide color, texture, design. Features like low maintenance and high energy efficiency are increasingly important to families today as they juggle all kinds of activities and challenging economics. Low maintenance is high on their wish list. Men want the price. Women want to be sold.

## Making a Difference

**RC:** Window World has been heavily involved in philanthropic activities for much of its history, but especially in the last few years. Why?

**TW:** Todd and I started Window World Cares in 2008, a few years after we bought the business from his parents. Our oldest child was born premature. We spent a lot of time in children's hospitals. So we wanted to do something that would truly make a difference. We had several charities in town we supported. But since we were a national organization, we decided we needed a national partner. We became a corporate partner of [St. Jude Children's Research Hospital](#). We also participate in the [Veterans Airlift Command](#), where we make our planes and pilots available to service members who need them.

**RC:** How is that a bottom-line benefit to Window World?

**TW:** Not only do we get to feel good about giving back to veterans and children, but it helps with our national brand-building. It brings pride to an organization that goes to this level to help. Those are difficult residuals to attach a dollar figure to. But when everything is said and done, it brings our owners and customers together to a common purpose that's greater than anything an individual might be able to do on his or her own. And that is the bottom line.

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