

furniture WORLD

A modern armchair and ottoman with red upholstery and light wood frames. The chair has a high back and a small white cushion. The ottoman is positioned in front of the chair. The background is a plain, light gray.

Special Feature:
Selling The Science of Sleep

PLUS

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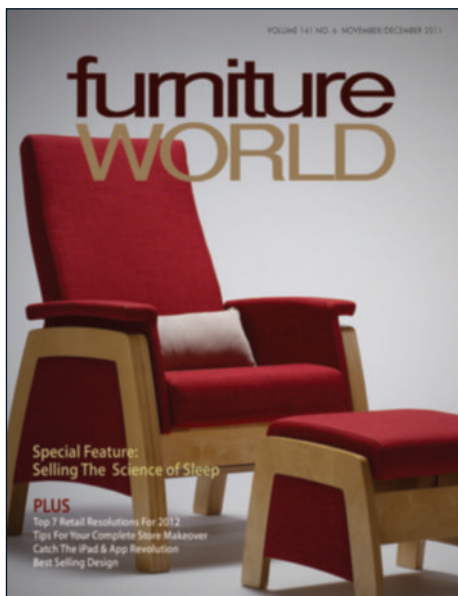
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Charles Wasser, Owner
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Cover: Featured on this month's front cover is Dutilier's new Urban gliding chair. It features an exclusive modern base with optional side panel in exotic wood, regular wood and upholstered options. It is available in several combinations of finishes and fabrics. For more information on Dutilier see the inside front cover of this issue or visit <http://www.dutilier.com>.

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YOUR NEXT BUYER

The one more customer out of ten you need to improve your sales revenue by 50%, is NOT among the next new first-visit shoppers you bring in.

by Joe Capillo

I'm a fan of Steven Covey and his work in two books: Principle Centered Leadership, and The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. The ideas and solutions put forth in these two works from the 1990s have allowed me to think better about what's important, and not dwell on a lot of other things that don't matter all that much. At retail, it's important to deal with reality, not make-believe, and try to understand how people really think about purchasing home furnishings. One critical statement by Covey opened my eyes to why there is so much resistance by business owners to changing the way things are done. Covey said, "Sometimes the way you see the problem is the problem." He also wrote about two habits to cultivate that became the foundation for my thinking in sales strategy development for our industry: "Begin with the end in

mind", and "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."

The way you perceive a business problem and its causes will direct the actions you take to solve that problem. It follows that if you operate under a false premise about a cause, then your solution will either make the problem worse, or fail to improve it. Human nature being what it is, chances are that you will then try harder, using the same tools to make reality fit your world view. As in the study of logic, pure logic applied to a false premise, will always yield false results. For this reason, I decided, long ago, to let the numbers do the talking.

FALSE PREMISE ABOUT FIRST CUSTOMER VISITS

Primary among the false premises furniture store managers believe is that, "If we don't sell them the first time we meet them, they're gone forever." They are certain that when customers say, "I'll be back", it's a subterfuge to get out of the store without hurting the salesperson's feelings. Everything about this thinking is wrong, and when business owners think this way they shoot themselves in their proverbial foot. Even before computer-based Up systems made collecting this type of information automatic, I spent years tracking the number of shoppers who came back to my stores, and those of my consulting clients, by simply marking them as "be-backs" on manual door traffic logs. While many shoppers did not return, those that did purchased a very

high percentage of the time on that second visit.


At this point it will be useful to go through a typical example of how be-backs contribute to sales in most furniture stores, including yours. Note that every shopper is counted every time they come in, because close ratio is NOT calculated on the number of people, but on the number of visits.

Assume you have 100 sales opportunities. Of these, 15 are second timers (be-backs) and 85 are first shoppers on a given project. You close 10% of the first timers, closing 8 sales. On the 15 return opportunities you close 80% for 12 sales. $12 + 8 = 20$. All you have to do is to measure this for yourself to prove or disprove this claim. I wouldn't put it out here for all of you to challenge unless I had verified these percentages many times before.


Here's the big problem for retail managers who believe that it's first time or bust. They undervalue those prime potential buyers who just couldn't get their minds around how this furniture will work for them in their room with their needs, and their family, and their other furnishings. Sometimes customers need to THINK about it. When you undervalue them, you fail to take the right actions and do the right things, to ensure they come back to your store and your salesperson.

If you concentrate all your training and coaching efforts on closing sales:

- You fail to realize that more business is lost to poor opening of a sale than to poor closing.



If you have a 20% close ratio overall, selling only one more customer out of ten, ten out of 100 will improve your sales by 50%!



More business
is lost to poor
opening of a
sale than to
poor closing.

- You don't value the non-buyers.
- You do not have aggressive follow-up systems for non-buyers.
- You don't give your salespeople the right tools – like Room Planners and e-mail – to stay in

"What's the end? It's not the closed sale – it's the finished room! Do the right things in the store, in the selling process by seeking first to understand, then to be understood."

contact with those non-buyers.

- You are willing to spend more money on bringing in NEW shoppers, when the really huge opportunity lies in those who have already responded to your expensive ads. These folks have already visited the store, found things they like, could buy, should buy, but don't. That's because high-ticket purchases of fashion-oriented goods are not made easily by

some women. They have to be sure it's the right decision because mistakes are costly and reflect on them.

If you have a 20% close ratio overall, selling just one more customer out of ten, ten out of 100 will improve your sales by 50%! Where the heck can you get that kind of improvement with little cost?

You may use room planning software to serve customers better on



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Tina

YOUR NEXT BUYER

your website, but why do so few furniture retailers use room planners on the sales floor? Using an instore room planner or design program is your low cost answer to:

- "Will it fit? We have to go home and measure."
- "How will it go with my other stuff?"

The problem isn't with your products, your pricing, your inventory – it's in the room!

Another efficient way to bring first time shoppers back for a second visit, is by staying in contact via email to convey new, pertinent information and follow up with unsold customers.

BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND - THE ROOM

Once you've taken the time to run your sales numbers to verify the importance of be-back sales, I suggest that you consider Steven Covey's prescription to "Begin with the end in mind" – one of the seven habits of highly effective people.

What's the end? It's not the closed sale – it's the finished room! Do the right things in the store, in the selling

process by seeking first to understand, then to be understood – another one of the hallmark habits of effective people. This is what "room talk" is all about – understanding the customer's needs and suggesting well-informed solutions that involve your products and that solve your customer's problems.

The worst mistake furniture retailers make is undervaluing shoppers who do not buy the first time in.

- You already paid with your ad dollars for them to come in.
- You already should know a lot about them and their homes and rooms.
- You have a relationship with them through your great salespeople.

The most important work salespeople can do is to sell those shoppers who did not buy because there are a hell of a lot of them out there and the work has already been done – if you have a selling strategy that makes sense. Remember this one thing: The one more customer out of ten you need to improve your sales revenue by 50% is NOT among the next new first-visit shoppers you bring in.

The worst mistake furniture retailers make is undervaluing shoppers who do not buy the first time in.

Joe Capillo is a furniture industry veteran with 35 years combined experience as a retail consultant and retail industry executive. He is a contributing editor to FURNITURE WORLD Magazine and a frequent speaker at industry functions. Joe makes himself available for private consultations on any aspect of retail sales management and sales education.

His recently published book, "Living On The Top Line", available on Amazon.com, helps home furnishings retailers to create and implement customer-centric selling systems. Joe can be reached by sending an email to joecapillo@furninfo.com. See all of his sales management articles that are posted to the information packed FURNITURE WORLD Magazine website www.furninfo.com in the sales management article archives section.

"I'm so glad I decided to work with Larry Mullins"



"Larry, I would like to extend my thanks for the outstanding help I received during my Retirement/GOB Sale from you at UltraSales. It proved to be just the right amount of guidance for me to run a successful sale during a very tough economy. Not only were you extremely professional, but also very responsive to my phone calls and questions. It was a pleasure to work with someone who returns phone calls promptly, with the information desired on hand. I'm so glad I decided to work with Larry Mullins instead of one of the large liquidation companies. I feel personally, and especially financially, that UltraSales was the best way for me to accomplish my business goals."

Sherri K. Smith, Owner, Comfort Home Furniture, Ocala, Florida

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90 SECONDS TO \$UCCESS SERIES

The Impact of One More Sale Out of 20

by Ray Morefield, Common Goals

ASK FOR THE ORDER

Some suggest the major reason that shoppers do not become buyers is failure to ask for the order.

Of the many additional reasons we see customers leave our premises without making a commitment, three take precedence.

- We give up too quickly.
- We come back with the same sales pitch.
- We rationalize, blame the economy, competition or decisions within our organization.

We're told that when customers say, "I'll think about it," over 70% never return to purchase the product in which they indicated an interest.

One of the most frequent objections voiced is: "Your price is too high." Yet we are persuaded that less

than 10% of the potential customers fail to purchase the product for that reason.

THE VALUE OF INTEREST

Studies have shown the major reason that potential customers fail to make a purchase is failure on the part of the sales associate to indicate interest in the customer.

Showing the proper interest and allowing the customer freedom to feel comfortable is a fine line that is difficult to interpret because of individual differences in personalities and their needs vs. wants.

In many instances our sales personnel are extremely knowledgeable about the products available on the showroom floor. Unfortunately, in most instances, we lack information regarding competitive products. When we have little or no information

regarding other lines and are unable to make a competitive analysis while the customer is in our store, potential buyers frequently leave to shop at a competitor to gain the necessary additional information to make a decision.

BEST SOURCES OF INFO

One of the best sources of information that we tap into to broaden our knowledge are the sales personnel representing the broad base of vendors that contact us on a regular basis.

With greater knowledge and added effort, what's the result of one additional sale out of 20 if the dollar value of each sale was to be consistent?

Assuming revenue = \$ 1,000,000, gross profits of 44% = \$444,444 and net profits of 5% = \$50,000, one additional sale out of 20 will result in

Assuming cost of goods sold is =	\$555,555
With 100% mark-up suggested gross retail is =	\$1,111,111
Since discounts are the norm rather than the exception, assumed 10% discounts are =	\$111,111
Gross Net Revenues are =	\$1,000,000
less Cost of Goods =	\$555,555
Gross Profits at 44% is =	\$444,444
44% is the National norm	
Less S G & A Total Expenses =	\$394,444
NPBT (Net Profit Before Taxes) @ 5% =	\$50,000

Comparative analysis of income with 5% increase in revenues...

Assuming cost of goods is \$555,555 plus 5% increase =	\$583,333
With 100% mark-up, suggested gross retail is =	\$1,166,666
Since discounts are the norm rather than the exception, assumed 10% discounts =	\$116,666
Gross Net Revenues up 5% are =	\$1,050,000
less Cost of Goods up 5% =	\$583,333
Gross profit at 44% =	\$466,666
Assuming S G & A is constant, total expenses =	\$394,444
Net Profit before taxes is 6.9% =	\$72,222

$$\frac{\$72,222}{\$50,000} = 44\%$$

increase in NPBT
with a 5% increase in
Gross Revenues or an
increase of 1 sale in 20

a 5% increase of gross margin.

Albert Einstein said, "The eighth wonder of the world is compound interest."

One of the wonders of business is the increase in profits resulting in the increase in revenues.

The average American spends 4½ hours each day watching television.

Spending 20 minutes each day or less than 2 hours or 5% of their time a week with your retail associates learning one new selling tip or reviewing sales successes can provide huge div-

idends and significant rewards for you, your sales personnel and the bottom line of your income statement.

One of the most profound speeches recorded in history was delivered by the man who saved Western Civilization during World War II.

After the conflict ended, Winston Churchill was requested to deliver a commencement address to the graduating class of Cambridge University.

With little fanfare he offered the succinct advice: "Never give up! Never give up!" and simply returned to his chair.

That sage's advice is as applicable in the realm of business today as it was 65 years ago in the battle for good over evil.

THE RESULT: IMPROVE BOTTOM LINE BY 44%

Making perseverance and constant improvement our daily motto, achieving one more sale out of 20 can improve a bottom line as much as 44%. Few investments in your time, interest and energy will provide you a greater return.

Ray Morefield has been affiliated with leading corporations in the housewares, hardware and coatings industries. He has also served other industries in an advisory capacity through Common Goals, Inc. Questions or comments can be sent to him by emailing editor@furninfo.com.

"A major reason that potential customers fail to make a purchase is failure on the part of the sales associate to indicate interest in the customer."

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DON'T SELL MATTRESSES

Sell "Quality of Life" Through the Science of Sleep.

by Ron Wolinski

A big challenge that sales associates face when working with bedding clients is that many customers view our mattresses as commodities; seeing the bedding purchase as a necessary evil, instead of what it really is, a major decision that affects the quality of their lives.

Changing this mindset requires that furniture stores and sleep shops go beyond pitching mattresses based solely on price and brand. It requires a consultative approach that addresses quality of life concerns. We can accomplish this through the utilization of a process I call the "Science of Sleep".

Stores that use this Science of Sleep approach see significant improvement in sales, closing rate and average unit selling price. Customers exposed to it show more interest in looking at better quality sleep sets and ultimately spend more money. That's because they gain a deeper understanding of why spending more is in their best interest.

In order to help our clients make an informed investment decision we can share the latest research that illustrates the importance of sleep and how it affects every aspect of their daily lives.

We can provide solutions and share the benefits gained from quality sleep. A prerequisite for doing this is to be able to relate to our female customers and their families.

The remainder of this article will look at some of the sleep science you can share with customers. But first let's take a moment to recognize that this process starts with questions you ask them such as how they sleep, how they feel in the morning, and how many hours of sleep they get. From there it's an easy segue to ask them something like, "I would like to share some information with you before we look at any mattresses and it will just take a couple of minutes." Once you've done that, you've set the stage for them to start thinking about the importance of investing in a quality sleep set. You can plant the idea that mattresses are not all the same, they are not a sack of potatoes, they are not a commodity. Buying a mattress is a big deal. That's the mindset you want them to have, and you can create it in just five minutes.

THE SCIENCE

The keys to living a quality life are

exercise, nutrition and a forgotten dimension called Quality Sleep. Sleep is a necessity, not a luxury. Sleep determines our alertness, energy, mood, thinking, productivity, safety, longevity and especially our health. The sleeping brain promotes synaptic growth, a process that enhances memory, problem solving, decision making and creativity during the REM, or rapid eye movement portion of the sleep cycle.

Remember to share with your clients the fact that when we sleep it's not like parking a car in a garage. We sleep in 90 minute segments. In the early segments of the sleep process, our body is healing itself. In the later stages of sleep, called REM, where dreaming is at its height, the brain heals itself which is essential for creativity, decision-making, problem-solving and memory. So if your customers are not getting a full eight hours of sleep they are truly cheating themselves. To accomplish peak performance, we humans must, on average, invest one third of our lives to sleep. Remember, the quality of sleep has an impact on our quality of life and undisturbed sleep is highly correlated with quality sleep. Studies show that every hour of

"Before we look at sleep sets, I'd like to share some information with you on the most recent sleep research. I want you to make an informed investment decision for the right reasons."



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"When you take this approach your salespeople are not just selling mattresses, they are truly selling quality-of-life."

sleep deprivation below 8 hours results in a 25% loss in productivity. Six hours of sleep or less lowers our resistance to viral infections by 50%. Six hours of continuous sleep is more restorative than eight hours of interrupted sleep.

Our clients need to understand the impact of quality sleep loss. Sleep loss results in drowsiness, mood shifts, anxiety, depression, decreased motor skills and decreased cognitive performance such as the ability to concentrate and remember. It affects our communication and decision skills; our ability to handle complicated tasks. It also affects our productivity and creativity.

I mentioned earlier the importance of relating to the female customer and her family. The quality of sleep is especially critical to women. Since women influence over 85% of mattress sales it is important to illustrate that we understand her particular needs. Women have significant sleep quality problems. They sleep less than men and have shorter periods of Deep Sleep. Women are more vulnerable to being disturbed by partner movement and more prone to insomnia (53% more than men). The menstrual cycle, pregnancy and menopause also impacts their quality of sleep.

According to Dr. James B. Maas of Cornell University:

- 51% of women recognized the impact of their sleep problems.
- 46% said it impacts their ability to accomplish household duties.
- 34% said it impacts their marriage.
- 28% said it impacts how they deal with their children.
- 27% said it impacts their job performance.
- 24% said it impacts how they care for and maintain their family relationships.

You can sell more bedding if you make an effort to show your female shoppers that you understand their specific needs and can help them to develop solutions to help them achieve better quality sleep.

One of the major causes of sleep loss is backache. Americans spend at least \$50 billion each year to help them deal with their low back pain. According to the National Institute of Urological Disorders and Stroke, back pain is the biggest cause of job-related disability and a leading contributor to missed work. A new mattress that provides the proper support and comfort for proper spinal alignment has been shown to make a big difference in back health. Dr. Mehmet Oz, of the Dr. Oz Show, states that most cases of back pain are mechanical or are non-organic, meaning they aren't caused by serious conditions as arthritis or injury. Improper posture or lack of spinal support is at fault. Also, Dr. Clayton Dean of the Maryland spine Center says replacing a mattress every five to nine years is a great idea, especially for those who wake up with back stiffness or pain.

New scientific research continues to unmask the effects of chronic sleeplessness, and the results are enough to keep us up at night. Here are four of the most devastating effects, courtesy of the American Heart



"Sleep researchers have developed some simple questions to determine if we're sleep deprived. (Hand the card to the client).
May I share them with you?"

Association.

- Sleep loss can lead to Diabetes. A recent study shows that people who sleep less than six hours a night appeared to have a higher risk of developing impaired fasting glucose, a condition that can precede type 2 Diabetes.
- Sleep loss can raise your blood pressure. Another recent study found that a lost hour of sleep – 1 hour or less than the recommended 8 – increased the odds of developing high blood pressure on an average of 37% over five years: skipping two hours raises the blood pressure risk 86%. This condition can lead to heart attack stroke or kidney failure.
- Sleep loss can make you gain weight. Several recent studies have confirmed that there is a link between the loss of sleep and weight gain. In one study, participants who slept six hours per night were 27% more likely to become obese than those sleeping seven to nine hours: people getting five hours of sleep per night were 73% more likely to become obese: and those with only two to four hours of sleep per night were 76% more likely become obese.
- Sleep loss can make you vulnerable to Cancer. Yet another recent study showed that even when people taking preventive actions that have been proven to lower cancer risks such as exercising and eating right, inadequate sleep seems to counteract those benefits.

This kind of information can be

shared with consumers through the Science of Sleep approach to help them understand the importance of quality sleep and the necessity to invest in premium bedding in order to maximize their opportunity to obtain quality sleep. Stress the fact that a mattress is an investment not an expense. Furthermore, it's an investment that affects their quality of life and everything that they do.

The Science of Sleep approach also has significant relevance to the consumer and to you as a retailer.

- It enhances the importance of the investment.
- It answers the Consumer's request

for information and knowledge.

- It supports your subsequent feature and benefit presentation.
- And it stresses that the investment in bedding is "something for me."
- It enhances the retailer's value to the consumer.
- It removes the commodity product association.
- It facilitates the step-up story to premium bedding.
- It accelerates the purchase cycle.

Today's furniture and bedding retailers have moved aggressively toward promoting the importance of their own store brands. Every store

Are Your Customers Sleep Deprived?

(3 "Yes Answers Means They Are)

Need an Alarm Clock to wake up?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Struggle to get out of bed in the morning?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Hit the snooze button weekday mornings?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Tired, irritable and stressed out at work?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Trouble concentrating and remembering?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Slow critical thinking, problem solving, creativity?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Often fell asleep watching TV?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Fall asleep in boring meetings, lectures, warm rooms?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Fall asleep after heavy meals or low doses of alcohol?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Often fall asleep when relaxing after dinner?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Fall asleep within five minutes of going to bed?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Often feel drowsy when driving?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Sleep extra hours on weekend mornings?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Often need a nap to get through the day?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

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"Stress the fact that a mattress is an investment not an expense. It's an investment that affects their quality of life and everything that they do."

can say that they have great prices and carry major mattress brands. Using the Science of Sleep approach can be a further point of differentiation. It's a way to enhance your brand and become more important to your female customers by showing that you care.

Nora Lee, the author of "The Mom Factor, What Drives Where We Shop, Eat and Play", says 75% of America's 108 million adult women are moms. They do business with companies who care. Women are the key influence in mattress purchases. She purchases not only for herself, but on average three other people. By sharing some of the research through the Science of

Sleep approach with her, you can illustrate that you understand her needs and care about her and her family.

In doing this, your salespeople take a consultative selling approach that illustrates they are not simply salespeople; they are home furnishings consultants focused on establishing long-term trust and solid relationships.

The Science of Sleep process is dedicated to creating a win/win/win situation. Clients win because they truly understand that their investment in a quality sleep set will improve their quality of life. This is the type of information that they have not received in

other stores. Retailers win because they truly provide service, knowledge and value that separates them from the competition. Sales consultants win because they found a way to develop a deeper customer relationship based on knowledge, that allows them to step up customers to sleep sets with features that help to promote a better night's sleep.

Ron Wolinski conducts a full day seminar that takes an in-depth approach Science of Sleep. He is VP Performance Groups for Profitability Consulting. His expertise in management stems from the positions he has held such as Manager of Training for Art Van Furniture, VP of Sales and

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LVM 2012

Science of Sleep in 5 Minutes

(Sample Dialogue)

Sales Consultant: Welcome, have you been in our store before?

Client: No, we thought we'd check you out.

Sales Consultant: Great! We have a large selection of sleep sets available in all sizes and in stock for immediate delivery. Tell me, who's the sleep set for?

Client: For me and my wife.

Sales Consultant: What size bed do you have now?

Client: We have a standard, a full size now.

Sales Consultant: Before we look at sleep sets, I'd like to share some information with you on the most recent sleep research. I want you to make an informed investment decision for the right reasons. Tell me, how long have you had your current sleep set?

Client: We think about 10 years.

Sales Consultant: Since you last purchased a lot has happened. Society is

Continued on next page

Marketing with Contact Interiors, training consultant to Thomasville and architect of Thomasville University, President of Behavioral Dimensions, Director of Sales Education for Simmons, National Director of Education and Development for Value City Furniture and most recently, Director of Education and Retail Services for La-Z-Boy, Inc.

He consults with retail organizations internationally on Consultative Selling, Communications, Leadership Skills, Organizational Development, Interviewing and Recruiting, and Customer Service. Questions relating to this article or to other related topics can be directed to Ron at rwolinski@furninfo.com. Read more of his articles posted to the www.furninfo.com website or call him direct at 734-420-3430.

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Science of Sleep in 5 Minutes

(Sample Dialogue Continued)

faster paced now, more competitive, more demanding on our time and the level of stress has increased dramatically. Because of this, people, especially busy moms; have become more and more interested in finding ways to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families.

Sales Consultant: Research has found that there are three elements that affect our lives. They are nutrition, exercise and quality sleep. Quality sleep has a direct impact on our ability to cope with the stress and pressure of everyday life. This is really magnified by the pressure of raising families.

Sales Consultant: How many hours of sleep would you say you get regularly?

Client: I don't know, probably six hours. I'm sure not enough.

Sales Consultant: Well, you're not alone. With all the things we have to stuff into our days, we often don't consider the importance of quality sleep. This question of sleep has never really been explored until recently. It's been determined, that on average we

need eight hours of quality sleep to rejuvenate and revitalize ourselves so we can achieve peak performance.

Sales Consultant: Recent research has clearly established that proper sleep is not a luxury, it's a necessity. It has also been determined that quality sleep affects our energy, alertness, mood, productivity, health and even our safety.

Sales Consultant: If we're getting 6 hours of sleep or less, our resistance to viral infection is lowered by 50%. We also know that Delta, or deep sleep, is where the body is healing and repairing itself. So, if we're not getting continuous quality sleep, we're like 63 million other Americans, we're sleep deprived and not realizing our full potential quality of life.

Sales Consultant: Sleep researchers have developed some simple questions to determine if we're sleep deprived. (Hand the card to the client). May I share them with you?

- Do you need an alarm clock to wake you up?
- Do you hit the snooze button,

weekday mornings?

- Do you fall asleep watching TV, or relaxing after dinner?
- Do you ever feel drowsy when driving?
- Do you sleep extra hours on weekend mornings?

As you can see, there are more questions, but if you answered "yes" to at least 3 of these you may be sleep deprived and need more and better sleep. If you do, don't feel alone, 64% of Americans get less than 8 hours, experience these conditions, and are sleep deprived.

One of the keys is to obtain uninterrupted sleep. The 2 major reasons for interrupted sleep are the transfer of motion from one partner to the other when one of them turns. The other is back pain, which is caused by the lack of proper spinal alignment and support by the mattress.

Now that we've seen the need and the benefits of quality sleep, let's discuss how we'd provide that quality sleep and improve the quality of life for you and your family.



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RETAIL STORIES

Part 10: Retailers share interesting stories of growth, hardship and their strategies for success.

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

The people of the home furnishings industry have evolved a deservedly enviable reputation over the years. Integrity, respect and empathy for cultures, ethnicities and our environment, recognition and understanding of style, quality and service are hallmarks of successful entrepreneurs.

Add to these qualities determination, focus and the warm family belief that home is "where the heart is". And that's not just a tired cliché for furniture folk, it's a certifiable truism. Especially if one examines the many imaginative methods of reaching out

to the communities around us.

BELFORT FURNITURE

One such story began when two paths converged in the early 1950s at a Washington D.C. restaurant when Peggy, a beautiful dining room manager met George, a handsome waiter.

Peggy was one of eleven children from Sutton, an historic town with a population of around a thousand, known as the geographic centre of West Virginia, noteworthy for its Civil War heritage and rumored UFO visitation! Peggy left home at 17, worked along the way as a telephone opera-

tor, eventually travelling east to the Nation's capital and the hospitality industry.

George was born in Switzerland, the land of legendary innovation, neutrality and economic stability. He sailed west, seasick for two weeks, on the Cunard Cruise Line, seeking greater potential for a better life in the United States. The Korean War was in progress, and George Huber joined the army and ultimately became an American citizen. He was stationed, luckily, in the vicinity of Washington. After the cessation of hostilities, he attended the University of Maryland,

"Our doors first opened in 1987 with one employee. Today we employ more than 160 diverse individuals dedicated to outstanding customer service at all levels."



Photos show: Mike Huber with architects presenting the plan for Belfort Basics; Mike and Kristi Huber at the Belfort Basics construction site; Basics building that houses Basics and the original warehouse; Groundbreaking ceremony for the new warehouse opened in 2007.



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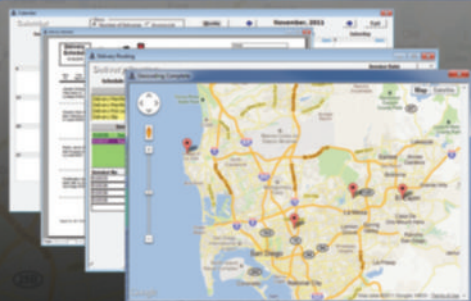
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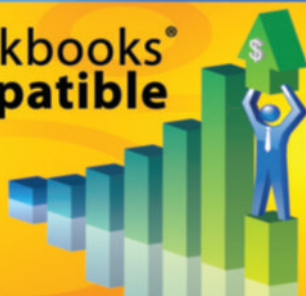


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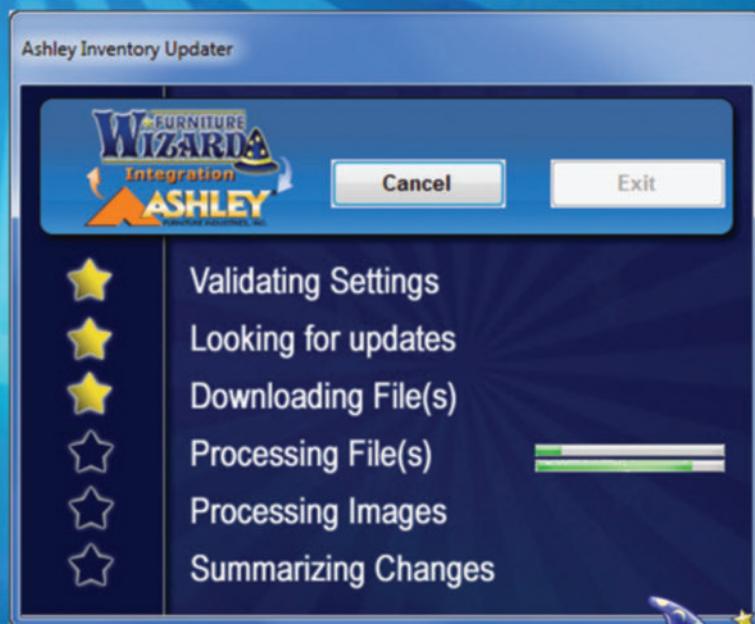
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BELFORT FURNITURE



Pictured at left is the young Huber family. The Fair Oaks store (above), is the showroom Mike's parent's opened at Fair Oaks Mall. Mike and his wife Kristi are second and third from the left.

"We earn our customers' loyalty by creating beautiful homes at a price they can afford."

targeting a degree in Electrical Engineering, supporting himself, soon his wife Peggy and their first three children as an overqualified waiter. The children were all boys, Michael who made his appearance in 1958, then Jeffery and Rodney.

George graduated, and then took a civilian job as an engineer for the U. S.

Navy, as luck would have it, back across the Atlantic at Wiesbaden, Germany. Then a U.S. military base, now home to the U. S. Army Europe Command, Wiesbaden is one of the oldest spa towns in Europe, surrounded by spectacular countryside. Extraverted George loved to play poker in the evening, and his friends joined him in long and frequent sessions at the family dining table. As it happened, his friends very much liked the furniture that George had acquired in Belgium, the birthplace of Art Nouveau and a justly famous furniture centre. His many connections

extended to Belgium; his father had worked in textiles there before George left for the States. George began commuting, buying dining sets to sell to his friends on the base. And that's when he began to conceptualize the future. If his poker friends were so enamored of the furniture, why not sell it to other eager customers?

Peggy borrowed a typewriter and, on the kitchen table, completed the paper work necessary to apply for a furniture concession on the base through the Army and Air Force Exchange Service. Permission was granted and they opened their first

Below is Belfort's main showroom, the first showroom to open at Belfort Furniture Park that now boasts having 5 Great Furniture Stores! One Convenient Location!"



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Mike kicks off the "Be Green" program in 2008; Mike congratulating staff at the annual holiday party in 1994. Herndon Showroom, Kristi Huber selling to a customer, 1990.



"When it was tough to get store traffic in 2009, we decided to train our sales staff to do in-home sales calls. They were able to raise their average ticket, and the company had its best year ever in 2010."

store in 1969, the year young Mike Huber celebrated his eleventh birthday.

The Huber's venture flourished and rapidly snowballed to 13 stores across Germany, one in England and one in Spain. To this day, several family members live and work in Europe, selling under the brand name "United Furniture".

And Mike? He always had a talent for sales and, growing up in and around the business, began selling candles and rugs at age 12. He says now that he always worked for a commission, not an allowance!

In 1982, George and Peggy stretched their reach to Fair Oaks Mall, Fairfax County, Virginia, selling European furniture to the U. S. Market. They had name recognition back in the States since so many American servicemen and women

had been their good customers over the years. Mike, now age 24, returned to the United States to run the store. But, after a few years, his parents decided to focus on their European chain and close the Virginia store, their only U. S. location.

Mike chose to "see what he could do with the small amount of leftover stock in an obscure warehouse in Herndon, Virginia", rather than move back to Europe to work in the family business. Mike's energetic wife, Kristi, was a driving force behind the decision. She wanted to raise their children in Virginia. Mike met the challenge and, in 1987, started his own company. He bought the remaining inventory from the family business, along with the name, for \$10,000. He had grown up with the name, "Belfort Furniture", and liked it. In French, "belle" is "beautiful", and "fort" means "strong", both qualities important for furniture. And it was a neat touch of romance.

But life was by no means easy. The warehouse, with no heating and no air-conditioning, became their 3,000 square foot showroom.

When customers came through the door in the humid summer heat, Mike would quickly shed his dripping apparel and don his crisp white "selling shirt". In winter, the only heat came from a large kerosene space heater strategically positioned in the middle of the showroom. Everyone knew that when the heater began to make a sputtering sound, they should stand clear. Sputtering was the warning signal that the heater was about to shoot flames and smoke into the air, one last dramatic display before running out of fuel!

The cold cement floor was another hazard that could freeze unwary feet. Mike often attempted to thaw his feet by taking off his shoes and putting them by the heater. More than once the heat dissolved his socks, but his feet were so cold he wasn't aware of the meltdown!

With only three people on staff, Mike, Kristi and Mike Parry wore many hats. When a truck arrived to deliver furniture at the dock, boxes would just be stacked, one on top of another by hand, no forklifts, no racking.

And their advertising budget was exceedingly slim. Belfort's first ads were 1" x 1" listings in the classified section of The Washington Post. Mike was shocked when customers actually showed up! Once customers had visited for the first time, they were well aware they should bring flashlights from home since warehouse lighting was less than desirable. The three-some not only sold furniture, they delivered it, too.



Mike and Kristi with two of their three children at an event in front of Belfort Furniture's new shopping center location in Dulles, Loudoun County, Virginia.

Survival of the Fittest

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Mike receives award from Fairfax County Department of Housing for donations, 1993



Pictured is the Huber family (above), and Kevin O'Connor, Samson Marketing, presenting the City of Hope Spirit of Life Award to Michael Huber in High Point, April 2011.



Belfort Donates to Shelter: Mike Huber, president of Belfort Furniture, presents a check to Pam Davis, left, and Susan Curtis from the Loudoun Board of Supervisors.

Herndon's Belfort Furniture aids homeless

By Christy Brown

The new residents have been given a lift during trying economic times. But Belfort's contributions don't stop there. The store provided furniture for community centers in the public housing developments of Falls Church and Reston, where Fairfax County holds classes for residents and their children. And the Christmas spirit has shifted Belfort's giving into high gear. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, Belfort will donate \$20 of every purchase over \$100 to the Entry Locker Shelter for the homeless. People staying at the shelter are encouraged to bring a new, unused Christmas gift for families living at the shelter now. Belfort will deliver the gifts just before Christmas and will present a check to the shelter in January for the donated funds. Belfort will continue to reach out to the public in the new year. Plans are underway to create a furniture donation program, supplying families in need of household furnishings. The program is patterned after the Magic program in Washington, D.C. "By furnishing their homes, I have given them a chance to start over and have a better life," says Mike Huber, president of Belfort Furniture.

In Belfort's first year of business, the company sold "about as much as it now sells on an average Saturday!"

But expansion occurred rapidly at the Herndon warehouse showroom. As sales flourished and more money for rent became available in the budget, so Belfort grew, one loading bay at a time. Everyone took turns with the corporate sledgehammer, knocking out doorways in the cinderblock wall, then hauling the debris away in a wheelbarrow. Tough times. But the Huber's vision stayed firmly focused on the dream of becoming a Top 100 Furniture Store.

Mike was very proud of the first American furniture sold at Belfort, a

\$799 three piece sofa, loveseat and chair set that "sat like a rock but was called 'Super Soft Set'. We wouldn't use a name like that anymore", he noted. He purchased the monumental piece at the Furniture Show in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

A little further down the road, they "were very fortunate, as a new growing business, when Crawford of Jamestown, quality solid wood furniture, sold merchandise to us. They were the first manufacturer willing to work with us. Carl Cappa, then President of Crawford, believed in Belfort, and he extended our credit line when needed. Many other manufacturers wouldn't do that. We worked really hard to build our business 'one customer' at a time."

Eventually, Belfort expanded to take over the entire original warehouse building, about 20,000 square feet, a real mark of success. Their vision remained strong and, during Belfort's first few years, it just happened that Mike drove home each night past an alluring empty shopping centre in Loudoun County, Virginia. He couldn't help thinking what a great location it would be. It was actually possible to see the stores from the road! Wasn't that great?! But funding stood in the way of this tantalizing new location.

"We worked with the Small Business

"Belfort grew, one loading bay at a time. Everyone took turns with the corporate sledgehammer, knocking out doorways in the cinderblock wall, then hauling the debris away in a wheelbarrow."

Bureau, tirelessly trying to borrow large sums of money. After real, continued persistence, our efforts finally paid off. We got the loans needed to buy the building!"

In 1993, Belfort opened its first 35,000 square foot showroom where it still stands today in the Dulles Square complex. It consisted of three buildings with two 35,000 square foot and one 10,000 square foot showrooms. Over the years, two of the buildings were leased out to other businesses. "But as Belfort grew we took over occupancy of the buildings, expanding our merchandise line up.

"In 2003, we experienced dramatic growth with the opening of our Belfort Basics showroom, and the new warehouse facility located directly across the street from the flagship store.

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LVM 2012

RETAIL STORIES

Basics offered an additional 20,000 square feet of lifestyle furniture at specially priced values. We coordinated room settings for customers, taking the guesswork out of decorating for them. This unprecedented expansion fulfilled part of our vision to build on a single store philosophy, and allowed us to offer consumers a more complete shopping experience by creating a full-featured furniture complex. Then, in 2005, we opened an additional 35,000 square foot showroom featuring American casual styles.

"As we grew, our knowledge of our customers' needs broadened. We identified new ways to improve their overall shopping experience, and that translated into moving furniture categories into new showrooms. In 2008, we transferred youth furniture from the original showroom to the 10,000 square foot store that originally housed motion furniture. Then motion furniture was moved to the Interiors showroom to create a gallery focused on destination categories such as home entertainment, leather, motion, entertainment units, home office and casual dining. In addition, it's home to the area's largest Nourison Rug Gallery."

Belfort was expanding at a phenomenally rapid pace, setting record sales, and warehouse space became stretched from an operational and capacity standpoint. "We bought land at Ocean Court in Sterling, Virginia, about five miles from the retail showrooms and offices. In 2006, we opened our new 83,000 square foot state-of-the-art distribution centre. Today, it features the most advanced technology including radio frequency inventory control systems that have increased productivity and ensured inventory accuracy, and also

de-mountable trucking systems.

It was in 2008 that an "open book" management format was created for managers, establishing goals, reviewing results and forecasting together once each month. The group uses the opportunity to brainstorm to help everyone achieve their goals.

"When it was tough to get store traffic in 2009, we decided to train our sales staff to do in-home sales calls. They were able to raise their average ticket, and the company had its best year ever in 2010.

"We've always empowered our people to make their decisions based on fairness. Is it fair to the customer, is it fair to the employee, is it fair to the company, in that order. The philosophy of fairness, combined with the belief that 'satisfied customers sign our pay checks', has been the fuel to drive us forward.

"All our stores are situated at one convenient location, making Belfort Washington's largest furniture store. By creating this campus-like environment, we provide customers with a unique furniture shopping experience. The showrooms are within walking distance of each other and feature over 100,000 square feet of retail space with over 500 room settings. Our latest services include in-home design appointments, custom window treatments and custom closets. Belfort has become a one-stop destination for all decorating needs." A vision realized!

"At Belfort Furniture, we earn our

customers' loyalty by creating beautiful homes at a price they can afford. But the driving force behind our growth centers is our talented staff. Our doors first opened in 1987 with one employee. Today we employ more than 160 diverse individuals dedicated to outstanding customer service at all levels, sales, merchandising, customer service, accounting, information technology and delivery. Our employees are the heart and energy of Belfort, the secret of our success. As a result of our efforts, we have now earned the coveted rank of 'Top 100 Furniture Retailer', setting trends in home furnishings and retail marketing in the Washington, D.C. area."

The warmth and close family values that helped build Belfort are shared every day with the community that supports their philosophy. As corporate sponsor for the annual YMCA

"It was in 2008 that an 'open book' management format was created for managers, establishing goals, reviewing results and forecasting together once each month."

Grand Opening of the Belfort's Interiors 35,000 square foot Showroom in 2005.



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RESTRICTIONS:



NO CAMERAS | NO INFORMAL CLOTHES | NO KIDS | NO PETS



Photo of Arrow Furniture's first store taken about 1970 and Arrow Furniture today. The company has stores in Toronto, Scarborough, Brampton and Mississauga.



ARROW FURNITURE

Loudoun County Charity Golf Tournament, dedicated to raising funds to send less fortunate children to camp, Belfort helped raise over \$300,000 for the YMCA's Building Bridges campaign.

In April, 2011, Belfort was local sponsor of the "Walk for Hope", the City of Hope's first Washington, D.C. walk. Mike Huber matched funds, dollar for dollar, for "Walk for Hope". Staff and friends raised \$25,000, and Mike matched funds for a total of over \$50,000.

Also generously supported targets are the American Cancer Society, Susan G. Komen for the Cure, Doctors Without Borders, and Future Leaders of Loudoun County. Throughout the year, donations are made to local schools, the Loudoun Education Foundation, ECHO (Every Citizen Has Opportunities), Loudoun Abused Women's Shelter and many others.

Belfort's commitment to the environment is truly outstanding with their "Be Green" programme. "Simply stated, 'Be Green' means that we

plant a tree for every delivery we make. Our efforts help to restore our forests in our local communities and beautify our landscape. Most importantly, 'Be Green' plays an important role in offsetting carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. Since 2008, over 1,000,000 tree seedlings have been planted in Virginia."

And, in turn, Belfort has received widespread recognition: "Best Furniture Store" in Loudoun County since 1995, 17 straight years! voted by Leesburg Today readers; "Best Furniture Store in Northern Virginia, 2009". voted by Northern Virginia Magazine readers; 2008 Corporate Sponsor of the Year, YMCA Loudoun County, and the 2010 YMCA of Metropolitan Washington's Corporate Partnership Award.

Industry awards include "1994 Retailer of the Year", recognition from the Maryland-DC-Virginia Home Furnishings Representatives' Association; "1995 Retailer of the Year"; the Lane Diamond Award, 2006, 2007 and 2008; and, in 2011, Mike Huber was honored with

the "Spirit of Life Award" by the City of Hope's National Home Furnishings Industry Group.

And, predictably, there's a new venture in Mike's world. As an entrepreneur and visionary, he's set his sights on fresh business opportunities. In 2010 he took on the winemaking world. Stone Tower Winery is situated on more than 100 acres in picturesque Leesburg, Virginia. With over 20 acres of grapes planted, he will produce approximately 150 cases of wine this year, his ultimate target 10,000 cases of premium wine annually. By 2013, his plans include wine tastings at Belfort Furniture events!

Dream no small dreams. Peace Pilgrim said, "If you realized how powerful your thoughts are, you would never think a negative thought". That's one of Mike Huber's favourite quotes!

ARROW FURNITURE

Back in the '50s in the City of Toronto, Harry Michaels was thinking his own positive thoughts. Toronto, provincial capital of Ontario and now the largest city in Canada, is at the heart of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). And it's part of the densely populated area known as the Golden Horseshoe, home to more than 8.1 million people, approximately 25 per cent of Canada's population. Of these citizens, about 49 per cent were born outside Canada, making Toronto one of the world's most diverse cities by percentage of non-native born residents. International, cosmopolitan and exciting!

Two of Harry's grandsons, Jeff and Jason, and grandson-in-law, Israel



Don Olson, Owner

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- ***That's an inventory turn of 7.5 per year, and those sales are achieved with normal margins.***
- ***The ROI is dramatic!***

That's pretty remarkable! Particularly when you consider that his store is in a town of 7,500, 100 miles north of Seattle.

You don't have to be a big guy in a big town to win with Wallbeds, as Don can tell you.

Wallbeds has slowly and carefully developed a network of retail partners. There are still markets open, so, if you are interested in looking at this high performing category, please give us a call. We would like to share a few more success stories with you, and explore the possibility of your company becoming another one!



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Current interior photos of Arrow Furniture stores.



“In 1969, Leon’s went public and the company bought Harry out. He then founded another business, Arrow Furniture. Why Arrow? Because the building was on Arrow Road.”

Adud, the Millennium generation, run the business now. They all acknowledge Harry’s and their father, Albert’s, foresight, integrity, hard work and all-encompassing philosophy. Harry did very well over the years with his store, Times Furniture. Well enough that he attracted the attention of Leon’s, another family business, now, in 2011, a chain of more than 70 home furnishings stores and franchises in every one of Canada’s 10 provinces. In fact, Harry became very close friends with one of the Leon brothers and was made a partner in the business. But in 1969, Leon’s went public and the company bought Harry out.

Harry was not deterred. It was not in his nature to be deterred. Bought out, he founded another business, Arrow Furniture. Why Arrow? Because the building was on Arrow Road, Albert explained, laughing. “Actually, we only had half the building. It was in the late 1970s that they took over the whole building, 64,000 square feet. It combines both showroom and warehouse space and now,

in 2011, it provides central warehousing for all four Arrow stores.”

Four stores? “Well, we felt compelled in the industry to have more buying power and, with the City of Toronto growing so rapidly, we needed multiple outlets. And money is always a motive.

“The second business was established in 1972, on Kennedy Road in Scarborough, to the near east of the City. The third store’s opening was based on increasing success, and that occurred in the late ‘70s in Mississauga, to the near west of Toronto.”

Harry believed in the power of focusing on value and service, so he wasn’t alarmed when, 25 years ago, a company called The Brick became part of the retail mix. The Brick had built their company “out west” in Edmonton, Alberta. They concentrated on small showrooms and aggressive price points and, said Albert, “They almost wiped out the furniture industry in Alberta. Then they decided to move in the direction of Toronto, and that made me very nervous. They planned to open four stores all at once, they were advertising voluminously and were coming in like a

powerhouse! I was really very concerned, afraid, because of their previous reputation, and what might happen in this City.

“But my dad, Harry, said, ‘We have been in business in Toronto for many years. I have seen them come, and I have seen them go, and we’re still here. Don’t worry what The Brick is doing; focus on what we should do!’” Of course that’s exactly what the Michaels family did. They survived, thrived, and they opened their fourth store in Brampton in 1996.

Jeff said, “We did have a tough period in the early ‘90s, and we worked at keeping our overheads down. What kept us going was the great customer base we had built since 1969, our loyal repeat customers. We believe that you go out and find the best value for your customers, and then give them the best value you can.

“We were one of the few independents that had a real service department. We discovered that many people appreciated that, and they would call us to say thank you for the good and prompt service. Repeat business is key. Satisfied customers give references to extended families and friends

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Ad from a 1997 issue of the Toronto Sun to commemorate the opening of Arrow Furniture's fourth store. The photo is of one of Arrow's stores, taken in 1978. Albert Michaels is pictured standing in the middle wearing a black tie, alongside his staff.

"We were one of the few independents that had a real service department. We discovered that many people appreciated that, and they would call us to say thank you for the good and prompt service. Repeat business is key."

over the years. We have concentrated on not just getting customers in, but keeping them!"

There's a pervasive geniality and warmth, a sense of whimsy, in the Michaels family. It permeates their business lives, too, and has reached on occasion into advertising and promotions. "We've dabbled in humor once in a while. In the late '90s, for example, we created a television commercial centered in a car wash. We went right into a car wash and came out the other end smiling, wearing a tux, sitting on a nice leather sofa. I don't really know if it helped sales or not, but it was fun!" he grinned.

Albert added, "The one issue that stands out that remains a constant and helps to build success, is giving the customer the best value we can and then servicing them. The consumer is much more educated today

with the Internet, the design shows on television, lifestyle publications, etc. So, we buy the best we can, service the best we can. Value, quality, service. Maintain those factors and it will make your success a much easier climb."

The Michaels are heavily involved in community work. They are particularly devoted to the DCMF, the David Cornfield Melanoma Foundation, and the Reena Foundation that supports the Reena Community Residence, a home that helps to deal with developmental disabilities. Then there's Mount Sinai Cancer Research, and the Shabta Levi, a home in Israel for children two to seven years of age, who have been mentally or physically abused, and their mothers. And Baycrest, Canada's leader in developing and providing innovations in aging and brain health.

"Grandfather Harry always taught us that in good times it's easy to do business, but in the tough times, make sure you have control of your expenses, save!"

"The future? My dad is very content now. He's worked extremely hard for many decades and doesn't need the headache of the business any more. He is satisfied the business will grow in the care of his children.

"We will capture more market share. We will continue to provide value, quality and service." Harry

would be proud.

Meanwhile, deep in the heart of Texas, **Hermann Furniture** is celebrating its 135th anniversary! It's the oldest family owned and operated furniture store in the State, and we'll bring you their inspiring story in Part Eleven of our series.

HAVE A STORY TO TELL?

Do you have a story to tell about an important home furnishings retail operations? If so, **FURNITURE WORLD Magazine** would like to document your history and your success. For more information, email editor@furninfo.com or call Russell Bienenstock at 914-235-3095.

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RETAIL RESOLUTIONS!

The top 7 New Year's resolutions for 2012 that can help to build your business.

by Gordon Hecht

As unbelievable as it seems, there are just a few weeks left in 2011. While most of us have had triumphs and victories this year, I haven't talked to too many people who aren't looking forward to turning the page to 2012 with the hope of better times for our business.

For the last 15 years I have committed to a New Year's resolution, and for most of those years I have valiantly persevered all the way to January 15th with those resolutions. For 2011 I made an easy resolution; I wanted to lose 70 pounds during the year. Luckily, I can still reach that goal, however I will have to cut off my left leg to do it.

So in these last few days of December, those of us who make resolutions will have to decide what we want to accomplish in the following twelve months. As this is the "Information Age" I looked toward the

Internet for some guidance and found the top 7 New Years' Resolutions that people make. They are:

- Lose Weight
- Improve my looks
- Make new Friends
- Go Back to School
- Find Someone to Love
- Be more popular
- Give something back to the community

I may choose one of the Top 7 or may decide on something completely different. But if you are like me, you may find this a good time to choose one or more of these as a Furniture Retailer Resolution. If you write it down, plan it out and get a little help from your Sales and Operations team you should be able to get way past the January 15th wall that I hit this year.

Lose Weight: I'll bet that your store has some weight to lose, and you won't even have to go on Atkins! This is a great time to look at all of the baggage you have hanging around the middle that is weighing you down. For many of you it may be the \$10,000 to \$100,000 in Damaged, Discontinued, and Downright worthless merchandise on your books. What a great time to wipe the slate clean and maybe pick up some cash flow. Take Q1 2012 to aggressively

price all of the things that are not selling in your store. You are losing 3% of their value every month on those old accents, discontinued dining chairs, odd lamps, along with odd end tables, ottomans, and footboards that are clogging up your DC. The \$10-\$99-\$199 you can get for them today can be used to invest in merchandise that will really turn.

And... speaking of not selling, take a hard look at the bottom 2 or 3 people on your sales staff. Drawing in traffic these days is darned expensive! If you have people working with your shoppers and converting less than 20% you are losing money with every door swing. Be sure they have the training, knowledge, and coaching, but set a firm timeline for achievement and stick to it.

Improve my looks: I tried "Just For Men" and it just wasn't for me! And besides, my wife thinks grey hair makes me look distinguished (or did she say extinguished?). So maybe I will buy some new shoes or shirts. For you in Ground Level Retail, look at one of your biggest investments... the four walls around you. Your customers judge your store within 20 feet of your entrance. Start by standing in your parking lot. Are there potholes in the asphalt, rust on the sign, or is the facade old and tired looking? Remove the scotch taped signs and yellowed Visa stickers from your front doors.

"I'll bet that your store has some weight to lose, and you won't even have to go on Atkins!"



Then check your walls for nails with no pictures, holes with no nails, and dented, faded, or torn wallpaper. It may be time for a color refresh, a few buckets of paint go a long way in improving your store's appeal. How is that carpet looking? Don't wait for Spring to have it cleaned... it will only

"You are losing 3% every month on those old accents, discontinued dining chairs, odd lamps, along with odd end tables, ottomans, and footboard that are clogging up your DC."

get worse. Most of all, check out your floor samples. After your January Sales Events it may be time to switch some of those out.

Then look at your customer service area. Does it inspire or detract from a customer's confidence in your operation? Remove all those signs that are taped to the counter or wall. They are ugly and unprofessional. And those hidden areas behind the counter that you think customers never see... well, shoppers see those too!

We are selling style and fashion, clean and new! Does your sales,

office, and delivery staff appearance make that statement? Whether you believe in Khakis and polos, shirts and ties, or jackets and sweaters, they have to be bright, clean, and pressed. Oh, and by the way, successful sales people wear shined shoes.

Make new friends: A great way to make new friends is to throw the best parties! Promote a Free Furniture Give-away where your customers can win a \$5,000 Furniture Makeover. Be sure that everyone gets a special offer coupon and your business will be great.

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Another good way to make friends is to have other friends who are influential or famous. You would be amazed how many people will stand in line to meet a Celebrity, Sports Star, or even a local TV or Radio Personality! Better yet, charge a few bucks for a photo or autograph and donate the money to charity. The result will be crowds of people in your store and good work for your community all rolled in one! It's a Public Relations dream!

I even heard of a store in Springfield, IL that is parking a Harley Davidson inside their store throughout the month of December. Tons of people are coming by to see it. And every Saturday they bring in Santa Claus, who for \$10, poses for a photo with shoppers on a Harley. The Store includes two really nice frames and all of that money is going to a community service organization. You may want to know that they don't mind sharing their big toys... at the end of the promotion; they will give the Harley Davidson away to one of their new friends.

These are just a few examples. Right now, today, we need to bring as many people as possible into our stores. Think like a retailer, don't think like a furniture guy! Not everyone is going to buy today, tomorrow, or ever. But fill a store with 400 shoppers; treat them like friends and guests, and something good is going to happen.

Go Back to School: That doesn't mean buying a new "Happy Days" lunchbox and sitting behind one of those desks. And I don't think my knuckles could take one more rap with a yardstick. What it does mean is

**LOSE
WEIGHT**

**IMPROVE
MY LOOK**

*"Remove the
scotch taped signs
and yellowed Visa
stickers from your front
doors. Then check your
walls for nails with no
pictures, holes with no
nails, and dented, faded,
or torn wallpaper."*

to improve your skills. For some of us it may mean improving computer skills (I heard computers are here to stay). Or you may want to read a book on Salesmanship, Efficiency, Customer Service, Coaching, or Design.

Start a Store Library for Business and People Skill books. Add a section on furniture styles and interior design. Have a monthly sales meeting that involves watching some of those great design shows so many of your customers are watching. You can even bring in a local speaker or share selling insights with another (non-furniture) retailer. Imagine what you could learn about customer care from a restaurant manager!



Find Someone to Love: It happened to me at home 20 years ago, so that resolution is off my list. But in my retail life I was always looking for someone to love... and by that I mean RECRUITING. It truly is an everyday thing. The average furniture sales consultant produces \$550,000 to \$650,000 in retail sales every year. It's about \$50K a month. So, if you have a vacant spot in your schedule, you can figure on losing close to that amount every month until you fill it. You might think that the balance of your staff makes up the difference, but it simply isn't true. I have never seen a retail furniture store add well-trained sales staff and have a drop in total sales in the following month. You may have noticed that the AVERAGE consultant sells \$50,000 a month. Logic says if you have someone producing less... they are below average. And while I like average people, I am heavily attracted to above average producers, but I can only truly love a STAR. Wouldn't you love to have a \$1 million dollar writer on your staff? If you have one already, wouldn't you love to have two? Here is a hint... if they are not on your staff today, they are outside of your doors. Recruit, and you may find that special someone to love!

Be More Popular: Operating or managing a business is not a "Popularity Contest", nor should it be. You have to make the hard decisions and choices, and be "fair" and responsible every day. Keep in mind though that the Number #1 reason someone decides to leave or stay on the job is their relationship with their immediate supervisor. If they believe that you treat them with respect and are fair with them, your staff will stay with you forever. Even if the other guy pays more, makes fewer demands, asks them to work shorter hours, or is closer to their home. This doesn't mean that you kowtow to their every whim. Mostly it means doing the most important part of your job. Be a leader.

You don't have to be Mr. or Mrs. Sunshine, or be fair 100%

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2012 RETAIL RESOLUTIONS!

of the time. What you do need to be is consistent. Your people need to know what to expect from you and what your expectations are of them. Flying off the handle, cursing, kicking, and not explaining what you want (or how to get there) will not win you any popularity contests!

A little fun once in a while helps. The company summer picnic and holiday party should not be a thing of the past. Or move into the 21st Century and host a Wii or Xbox party in your warehouse. Heavy traffic and Big

Promotion days are more fun when served up with a "covered dish" buffet. You don't need to spend a lot, but you will get a lot.

I suggest the "covered dish" buffet. Let me know when you are having yours!

Give Back to the Community: One of our friends told us that her new boyfriend was very civic minded. In fact, he just completed 200 hours of Community Service!

You probably want to give back to



"Charge a few bucks for a photo or autograph and donate the money to charity. The result will be crowds of people in your store and good work for your community all rolled in one!"

your community in a different way. You don't have to be big, bold, and splashy, because every little bit helps. Choose a cause or project that you believe in, and give your time as well as your money. Anybody can write a check, but to be involved, you have to be on site. It's also a great team builder for your staff (refer to previous section). You will feel great, you'll be helping someone, and you will soon build a strong network of community leaders who will know that your store is a great place to shop. If you need ideas on how to get involved, just contact the organization that supports your cause, and they will be willing to get you started!

The journey of 10,000 miles starts with a single step. We have a fresh new year ahead of us! The top 7 resolutions give us a lot to do, and it is a



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MAY 6 & 7

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JUNE 10 & 11

20TH ORLANDO FURNITURE & ACCESSORY MARKET
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RETAIL RESOLUTIONS

tall order. Take the one or two you like, commit to them, plan it out and let me know about your successes. May your resolutions make it past January and cross the finish line next December. And when we go to lunch... order me a salad!

Gordon Hecht is Director of Sales for Ashley Sleep division of Ashley Furniture Industries. He started his 30+ years experience in the Home Furnishings industry as a delivery helper and driver; switching over to furniture industry sales while in college.

Gordon has been recognized for outstanding sales and management

achievement with several organizations including Drexel-Heritage, RB Furniture, Reliable Stores, and Sofa Express. He has served as Store Manager, Multi-unit manager and Director of Training.

Joining Ashley Furniture HomeStores in 2007, Gordon managed a 44 store district covering 11 states and 4 time zones. He joined the Ashley Sleep team in 2009 and has worked to make it one of the fastest growing bedding lines in the country.

Gordon has been a frequent contributor to Ashley Furniture company newsletters, and contributing writer for industry magazines. He is based in Columbus, OH and is married with

"Move into the 21st Century and host a Wii or Xbox party in your warehouse. Heavy traffic and Big Promotion days are more fun when served up with a covered dish buffet."

one adult son. He can be reached care of editor@furninfo.com

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Contact information on index page 68.



Perri Fine Furniture

This contemporary three cushion sofa has showwood legs and is trimmed with nailheads. Available in a variety of fabrics and leathers. Furniture can be customized to individual tastes.

Contact information on index page 68.

Durham Furniture

The Vinyard Creek Collection is handcrafted in Cherry and Maple solids. The collection features physical distressing and is available in two finishes: Antique Rye and Aged Wheat. Destined to be a family heirloom, the collection's classic lines are at home in a formal or casual setting.

Contact information on index page 68.



BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Jaipur Rugs

The transitional designs and palettes of the Narratives Collection reinterpret the classics in a way that's both contemporary and highly functional. Hand-tufted of plush 100% wool, these beautiful designs can make a statement on any floor.

Contact information on index page 68.



Donco

820E Stairway bunk system, with a 4 drawer chest, built in, and easy stairs, instead of ladder. Shown with optional trundle bed. Available in light espresso, as shown, and dark Cappuccino. Retailers for \$659.

Contact information on index page 68.

Country View Woodworking

This Casual Dining Collection satisfies the needs of the modern lifestyle. Customers can mix and match from 26 styles among table top edge profiles & shapes, leg or pedestal styles, overall heights and more.

Contact information on index page 68.



Dutailier

The Bordeaux chair blends transitional and modern style. It has multiple mechanism options, such as gliding, reclining, swivel and adjustable headrest and footrest. Available in a wide selection of fabrics and leathers.

Contact information on index page 68.



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Contact information on index page 68.



Couture International

The sensual flowing shape of Evasion, redefines masterfully, the concept of modularity without compromising comfort and elegance. It was originally conceived as a sectional, however, every single piece is nice on its own. Features include eight way hand tied coil suspension, high density foam seating with layers of feathers and down blend back cushions.

Contact information on index page 68.



BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Shaw Living

The Murri Suzanni is machine woven in the U.S.A. with Shaw's EverTouch® recyclable nylon. Each rug is remarkably soft, luxurious and durable. The 27 new rugs are available in popular sizes ranging from 1'10" x 2'9" to 9'6" x 12'10".

Contact information on index page 68.



Jaymar by BDM Furniture

Maggy is part of the Platinum collection. Features include adjustable back rest, and many sectional possibilities in both leather and fabric. 26 new leathers were recently introduced.

Contact information on index page 68.

Agio

Pictured is the Ashmost Deep Seating collection. It's cast aluminum frames feature graceful, artisan inspired design touches. Deep seating cushions in fabrics by Sunbrella invite relaxation with unsurpassed wearability.

Contact information on index page 68.



Elran

Lennon is a new addition to the high leg collection. This model features contemporary, urban chic styling with box seating and a sleek key hole arm. It is shown here in a light beige leather with dark stained legs. Available in 3 different wood stains. The chair has a 3 position push back reclining mechanism. The available loveseat and sofa have an inside release handle to recline.

Contact information on index page 68.



Linea Vincenza Division of Bugatti Design

Genova is the ultimate mix of luxurious European style and ergonomic design for the perfect marriage of elegance and functionality.

Contact information on index page 68.



Shermag by BDM Furniture

Made of natural walnut, the Pacific dining set offers original curves that will spice up any décor. The oval table fits perfectly with the 2 door, 2 drawer, buffet. The stylish upholstered chairs complete this soft contemporary ensemble.

Contact information on index page 68.



iPAD & APP REVOLUTION

99% of furniture retailers will have their own app within 5 years.

by David McMahon

I bet that 99% of you reading this article either have an iPad, an iPhone, or will have an iPad or iPhone in the next year. I also bet that your customers are like you.

This is what I've noticed happening in the past year: small business owners started appearing at trade shows and in their businesses with iPads. I realized that these were the same people who couldn't be tied to their PC's for more than 15 minutes at a time. They were the first in line to sign up! It's really amazing how a group of people who were arguably the most technically challenged and data phobic became the embracers of innovation.

This is what the Internet was like 15 years ago. Everyone at that time was talking about getting a website (and every 3 years they still talk about getting a new website). What is happening now is that apps are becoming similar to websites.

Let's think about this for a moment. What are websites? They are gateways to your business.

They are gateways that run on the Internet platform. My belief is that the Internet platform is metamorphosing. It is changing because of the devices that consumers and business owners are now using: mobile devices, iPads, iPhones, Android devices. People have made it loud and clear that they don't want to be tied down and wired in. They want to be free, wireless, and connected through the cloud. Apple and Google have led the way and it's not stopping. iPad and Android

devices are the new platforms. The Internet is just their invisible platform - their cloud.

I'm going to make another prediction. Within 5 years, 99% of you reading this will have your own app. I think that you can see what I'm seeing now, right? If you and your customers are using these new devices and platforms, you will want your customers to be able to reach you on them. You will want their iPad to connect to your business instead of your competitor's business.

APPS:THE NEW GATEWAYS

But apps aren't web sites. Apps are simpler. They are faster. They are more focused on tasks and results. Amazing. To me that sounds like what a website could only dream of being. You may ask, "People can go to my website now on their iPad just by using a browser; why will I need an app?" That is true; they can. And it is also true that people prefer apps. For news, someone could just go to CNN.com on their iPad, right? Well, they don't. They download the app for CNN and interact with that. When furniture or kitchen shopping, people could go to ikea.com on their iPad but instead they are downloading the Ikea catalogue app and interacting with that. americanleather.com is still on the Internet, however, the app is beautiful and functionally superior on the iPad. Why navigate a site when you could interact with an app?

Now, I'm not asking you all to run out and spend thousands of dollars

on creating your own app today (well at least not until you are educated about what you need). What I do suggest is that you invest in an iPad if you don't have one. And then, learn about the various apps that are currently available to you. Think about how you can make your business better for everyone involved - for you, for your customers, and for your employees.

So, to get your creative juices flowing, here is a sampling of business productivity apps that my consulting clients and I are using:

Pages - word processing by apple. MS Word compatible. Cloud storage.

2X Client or Jump Desktop RDP - control your PC on your iPad and access your Macintosh or Windows-based software system from anywhere. There is no longer a need to ever leave your customer.

PDF Reader - easy to read and present PDF based documents. Cloud storage.

Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter - the leaders in social media.

Yelp - customer reviews. By the way, encourage your customers to post here.

Sketchpad - sketching is proven to increase average sales; iPads are proven to grab consumers' attention. Combine the two.

Icovia - room planning on the go. Free your salespeople. Empower your customers.

Pandora - if you control the music,



"People could go to ikea.com on their iPad but instead they are downloading the Ikea catalogue app and interacting with that."

FaceTime - free video and teleconferencing between iPad and iPhone devices.

Note: This article was written and submitted on an iPad at 40,000 feet. No wires.

There are too many others to mention. The speed of app download is like a rocket. Apple sells over 30 million apps per day. Consumers have spoken. The iPad has changed the way business is done. All aboard?

David McMahon is a business consultant for PROFITconsulting, a division of PROFITsystems; writer; and innovator. If you wish his help improving your business, he can be reached at davidm@profitsystems.com.

you control the mood of the room.

Measures - take a picture of a room, note the measurements, and send an email.

Calculator - when you need this app a sale is just around the corner.

The Brick by ImagiU - take a picture of a room and place furniture in that room. Browse inventory items. See the latest promo.

Maps - don't get lost.

Roambi - this is a business intelligence (BI) app that I use to help clients view their critical metrics from anywhere. This puts your key sales, inventory, and financial figures literally in the palm of your hands.

BSC - balanced score carding is an app that I use to help clients set strategic objectives and smaller goals to help them achieve their objectives.

InFlowchart - ever wonder if there was a more efficient process? This is an app that I use to create and display custom business operation charts for clients.

American Leather - see what innovative manufacturers are doing.

Square - take a credit card payment anywhere any time.



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MEDIA MIX MAGIC

Part 2: Consider a Total Makeover. Start with zero assumptions about media and about your store.

by Larry Mullins

Many furniture stores are facing odds that seem impossible to overcome.

One furniture dealer from Southern California told me recently that he felt lost in the wilderness with no way out.

I was reminded of the movie, "The Edge." Three men were lost in the virtually uninhabited high country of Alaska after their plane crashed. No one had a clue where they were, there was almost no hope of being rescued. They had no gear, weapons, food or equipment. Cold, hungry, and desperate, they were being stalked by a man-eating grizzly bear. One of the men was a hotshot advertising agency man, one was his young assistant, and one was a highly successful businessman.

Contemplating their situation, the adman and his assistant were terrified, and deteriorating into a panic mode. The assistant blurts out: "We are going to die!" The businessman remains cool. He asks his companions, "Do you know why most people who are lost in the wilderness die?" The two panicky men are puzzled, they have no answer.

"They die of shame," the businessman says. "They wonder how they got into this predicament, they ponder the mistakes they made. They presume the situation was avoidable. They are filled with vain regrets: 'If only I had done' this or that," or 'if only I had not done' this or that." They fail to do the one thing that could save them."

"What is that?" the ad man asked. "They fail to think."

So it is with many home furnishings dealers. Sales are slow. Nothing they are used to doing seems to be working. The "grizzly bear" of low cash flow seems to be lurking in the shadows, moving ever closer. These furniture men want to think out of the box, but they usually begin with too many preconceived ideas.

Don't let this happen to you. I have seen creative retail solutions achieve miracles. To begin the process of the mind game that could change your destiny, wipe the slate clean. Start with zero assumptions about media and about your store.

MEDIA IS THE MESSENGER, YOUR BRAND, THE MESSAGE

In my last article I listed seven major media categories for the home fur-

Although his building was old it was highly visible from a main freeway. The old Johnson Bros. Furniture store is shown below along with front and side views of the new, bold signage for Furniture & Mattresses 4 Less.



nishings marketer:

1. Newspaper preprinted inserts.
2. ROP newspaper advertising.
3. Direct Mail.
4. Radio.
5. Television.
6. Websites and Internet.
7. People media.

"I also stated that the media are the messengers, and your content is the message." If you wipe the slate clean, that includes your brand.

Imagine you are beginning from scratch. You have a store full of furniture but no customers. How do you begin to attract customers? Even if the customer has been attracted to visit your store by traditional media, they will arrive with certain expectations. Your success as a brand will be determined by whether their expectations are met, exceeded, or disappointed. The process of the shopping experience is set into motion by the curb appeal of your building, parking lot and grounds. It continues

"Sales are slow. Nothing seems to be working. The "grizzly bear" of low cash flow seems to be lurking in the shadows."

with the appearance of the showroom, your sales consultants, and your other personnel. It usually concludes with your delivery people, and hopefully a follow-up telephone call.

THINK, THINK, THINK.

A friend and client of mine, Larry Johnson, was facing a seemingly



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FURNITURE AND MATTRESSES 4 LESS

Instead of Some Cute Agency Name...

he chose a brand that identifies and positioned itself immediately: Furniture and Mattresses 4 Less. He used the number "4" rather than "for" in order to acquire a unique URL address for his website.

impossible situation this year. After being in business in Duluth, Minnesota since 1917, Johnson Bros. Furniture was confronted by a downtown business environment that had severely deteriorated. Few people were interested in shopping in downtown Duluth anymore. The bulk of the business was going to the Big Box stores in the outlying areas. Larry Johnson decided to do a store closing event.

I encouraged him to conduct the event himself, but Johnson believed he needed outside sales help, so he brought in an outside company. The

GOB was expensive, and not nearly as successful or profitable as he had hoped. Now Larry Johnson was in a real pickle. He still owned an old building in downtown Duluth and he still owned a large inventory of furniture. His original brand was gone, and could not be revived. Moreover, he was not ready to retire, being relatively young and an experienced furniture man with good vendor relationships.

Larry Johnson wiped the slate clean and began to think. What do people want? What retail niche is not being filled in Duluth? He deduced that, although there was fierce Big Box competition, there was no authentic outlet store selling good furniture brands at discounted prices. He thought about the possibility of a strong discount operation, perhaps one that was open only four days a week. His location was a problem, but not insurmountable. Although his building was old it was very visible from a main freeway. Although the sign ordinances in Duluth are stringent, he thought there may be a way to do something dramatic.

But first he needed a name. Some of the Big Box stores had outlets fairly close, but they had esoteric names.

Johnson wanted a brand that projected what his store is and what it does. Successful new brands often do this. So instead of some cute agency name, he chose a brand that identifies and positioned itself immediately: Furniture and Mattresses 4 Less. He used the number "4" rather than "for" in order to acquire a unique URL address for his website. The logo was fresh and snappy and also communicated a new U.S.P. (Unique Selling Proposition): "We are only open four, that's how we save you more."

Johnson naturally chose to be open the most productive days of the week for a furniture store: Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. This idea would save money on media, requiring only one ad or flyer a week, some direct mail, and some radio. These plus the internet would be more than ample media coverage.

The next issue was the old, drab building. It would need some kind of a dramatic transformation that would not cost a fortune. Only a relatively small sign could legally be used for each face of the building. The solution was awesome.

A COMPELLING WEBSITE

Johnson learned that a website is

"The logo was fresh and snappy and also communicated a new Unique Selling Proposition: "We are only open four, that's how we save you more."

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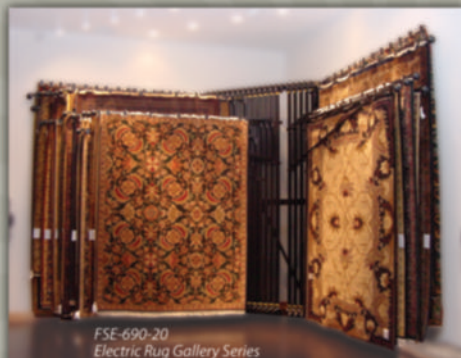
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Most companies make the mistake of having a tab on their landing page stating: "About Us."

Few people select this tab and fewer read the information presented. Usually there is quite a bit of copy, and none of it is written as a compelling story written in the consumer's interest. In place of this, Larry Johnson made a personal video telling consumers the story of his new kind of furniture store with home town, salaried personnel who are trained to look out for their customers and help them solve their home furnishings problems.

an absolute essential for a furniture store, but it does not need to be expensive. The basic landing page needs to communicate immediately to the potential retail customer the essential six elements of Journalism 101: WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? HOW? And WHY?

WHO? Most companies make the mistake of having a tab on their landing page stating: "About Us." Few people select this tab and fewer read the information presented. Usually there is quite a bit of copy, and none of it is written as a compelling story written in the consumer's interest. In place of this, Larry Johnson made a personal video telling consumers the

story of his new kind of furniture store with home town, salaried personnel who are trained to look out for their customers and help them solve their home furnishings problems. The balance of the landing page answers these questions:

WHAT? Furniture and Mattresses 4 Less. Larry says "Our name is our brand. It states what we are and what we do. We are a furniture store with authentic name brands at prices guaranteed to be the lowest." Special offers change each week on the web-site.

WHEN? Open only four days a week, and hours are clearly exhibited.

WHERE? A tab leads to a clear, professional map.

HOW? Credit terms are described in the special offers section.

WHY? This is a key factor that is not fully utilized by most furniture retailers. A few, like Ethan Allen, communicate value, comfort, style, pride and other benefits. However, for most middle-end stores price is virtually the only driving factor. Admittedly, the Furniture and Mattresses 4 Less brand is obviously a price appeal. However, the mantra of the Johnson advertising and in-store selling strategy is: Do not mention price without mentioning value, style and other benefits. Most stores rely solely on claims for lower prices rather than enhancing the value of their products.



MEDIA MIX MAGIC

NO STONE UNTURNED

Larry Johnson now had a unique USP. He was well aware that it takes a great deal of effort to maintain a unique USP. So he added several elements to the marketing tools he would use:

- A prospective customer must never leave the store empty-handed. When shoppers shop for furniture it becomes very hard to remember what they saw and where they saw it. A flyer was developed with all the benefits and advantages of shopping at Furniture and Mattresses 4 Less.
- Sales Consultants should have name tags. These are most effective when they also feature a sales message. The name of the store is not necessary. Inexpensive name tags can be created and printed on glossy paper. The sales message could be a unique credit offer, or an event name.
- The greeting process should be augmented by a handout. Customers appreciate getting something of perceived value. The sales consultant approaches and says something like: "Hi folks. Thanks for coming to Furniture and Mattresses 4 Less. Here is a list of unadvertised items that are in limited stock and drastically reduced.
- These items sell very quickly. If you are looking for anything special let me know and I can help you find it." This or a similar statement allows the sales consultant to enter into a conversation and begin developing a relationship.
- Price tags and other point of purchase materials should be developed and kept fresh and interesting. These should be considered "silent salespersons" that tastefully remind customers that they are in a different kind of store.
- Window Signs should be developed for special events.
- A well-written press release should

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"Hi folks. Thanks for coming to Furniture and Mattresses 4 Less. Here is a list of unadvertised items that are in limited stock and drastically reduced. These items sell very quickly..."

be developed.

- A soft opening of two or three weeks should be planned to iron out any bugs before the grand opening sale.

GAME-CHANGING INNOVATION

Painting was soon in progress and suddenly people were asking what was going on. There was a different atmosphere, and a sense of progress. The feeling of impending doom was replaced by positive anticipation of success.

I don't need to remind anyone that times are difficult. Yet, we are all capable of game-changing innovation. Regardless of your situation, there is a better, more innovative way of selling furniture. The one thing that can solve problems like tough economic conditions and too few customers is thinking. Brush away all the assumptions and ask the critical questions. "What do the customers want? What do they need? How can you deliver what they want and need with a killer U.S.P. in a niche that everyone else has overlooked and neglected?"

The greatest innovations and breakthroughs have often occurred because severe challenges confronted an indi-

vidual who simply would not give up. As Shakespeare once put it: "Men are sometimes masters of their fate. The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in the stars, but in ourselves..."

In Part Three of this series, we will examine Direct Mail, Radio, Television, Websites and the Internet, and see how these media can be used to contribute to your success. Then we will show how to create a killer mix of media that will leverage maximum sales and profits.

Larry Mullins is a contributing editor for Furniture World and has 30+ years experience on the front lines of furniture marketing. Larry's mainstream executive experience, his creative work with promotion specialists, and mastery of advertising principles have established him as one of the foremost experts in furniture marketing. His turnkey High-Impact programs produce legendary results for everything from cash raising events to profitable exit strategies. His newest books, *THE METAVALUES BREAKTHROUGH* and *IMMATURE PEOPLE WITH POWER ... How to Handle Them* have recently been released by Morgan James Publishing. Joe Girard, "The World's Greatest Salesman" said of this book: "If I had read Larry Mullins' book when I started out, I would have reached the top much sooner than I did." Larry is founder and CEO of UltraSales, Inc. and can be reached for a free, no-obligation consultation directly at 904.794.9212, or email him at Larry@LarryMullins.com. See more articles by Larry at www.furnitureinfo.com or www.ultrasales.com.

At left: All salespeople have a name tags with a sales message. The greeting process is augmented with a handout. Price tags and other point of purchase materials are kept fresh.



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FURNITURE TALES

When I was sipping a Pepsi at the High Point Market...

by Michael Greene a.k.a Grandpa Mike-e-e! at 90.

It's the stories of our industry that this installment from Grandpa Mike-e-e! at 90 is all about. Every furniture rep, manufacturer and retailer has a few really good ones... and there is now an official effort by our industry's historical society to record these stories, before all of us industry elders forget them! More about this later.

Which inexplicably brings me to my Bubbila. You probably remember reading about her if you've seen my weekly column online in Furniture World's weekly e-newsmagazine. She's sharp as a tack at ninety, and just found a source of ancient music on the internet that's so "new" that she's glued to the sound for twelve hours a day. Yes, she is listening to music uninterrupted by those annoying repetitive commercials that are always advising us to please visit a doctor to get a new "miracle" drug that incidentally may cause headache,

red eye, wheezing, boils and rarely, sudden death! Now what has this girl of mine found for the two of us to see and hear? YouTube videos featuring "Singers and Swing" - singing guys and gals like Lena Horne, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Doris Day, Mel Torme and Tony Bennett who left his Heart in San Francisco because Frank Sinatra had already left his in "Chicago! Chicago! and New York, New York" which is "A Wonderful Town."

So what does all this musical nostalgic goulash have to do with the furniture industry or remembering stories? Well, I'll tell you.

Years ago when I was sipping a Pepsi at the High Point Market, I, Grandpa Mike e-e! saw t-h-e Tony Bennett in the Furniture Exposition Building, all by himself. Yep! All by his pleasant self without the usual star, personality entourage! Just plain Tony. Wow-e-e!

It seems he was invited to sing at a private dinner in the building for the guests of a well-known manufacturer. A-n-d, when I introduced myself, he

invited me to visit with him during his performance break. When I showed up that evening, the guard posted at the door told me that Mr. Bennett had left word that I was to be expected. Gee! Whiz!

Well, I stayed for my Pepsi drink and when we met the following day, by appointment, I spent a few very unique, pleasant hours showing Tony around the show.

I discovered that Mr. Bennett was a well-known name in Arts circles since he was a talented, recognized, oil painting, artist... at \$3,000 a canvas. Wow-e-e! again! We did the tour and he was visibly pleased with what he saw us do at a Market.

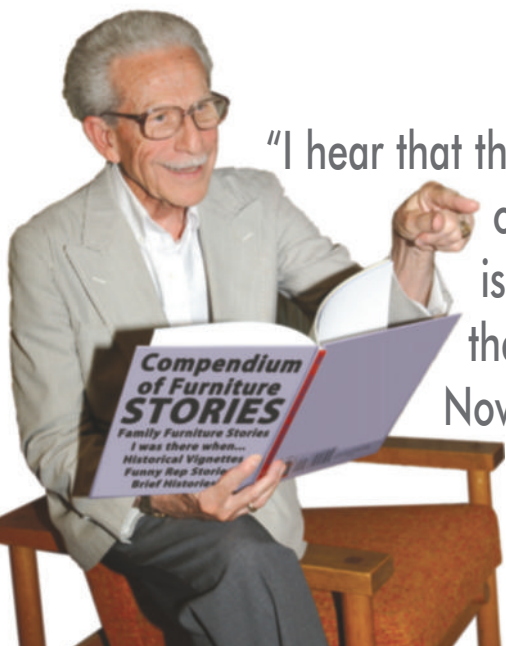
I always knew that Tony Bennett was a talented personality, but then I learned that the reason why his singing is so meaningful is because his voice is the voice of a mensch. A mensch with heart. He never needed the hullabaloo of a paid entourage.

That's just one story, but like I said before, there are so many good ones about our industry that are much more interesting, historically significant, maybe a bit off-color and certainly funny. We've all heard them... about deals that were made, the proverbial skeletons in the furniture family closets, plus stories of first meetings, misunderstandings, fantastic collaborative ideas and things that used to happen in our industry that seem incredible when we look back.

HAVE A FURNITURE STORY TO TELL?

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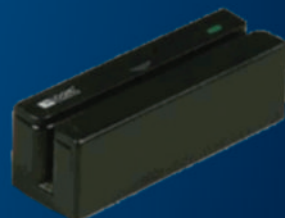
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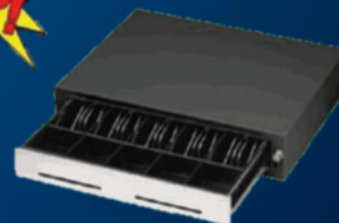
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If so, check out the website of the American Furniture Hall of Fame Foundation at http://www.furniture-halloffame.com/furniture_history_stories.asp. I hear that the Foundation is collecting and cataloging the stories of our industry. Or maybe your favorite rep, mother, father or grandfather in the business would like to

submit their furniture stories to the Foundation website for the next generation to enjoy. Or for those of you that are better at talking than writing, send a recording to the Foundation at 202 Neal Place, High Point, North Carolina 27262 or call Karen McNeill the CEO of the Foundation at 336.882.5900 for more information.

And -- if you think of it, please send a copy to me. My email address is listed below. Thanks, again, for listening.

Michael Green a.k.a. Grandpa

Mike-e-e! at 90 is a former furniture retailer, author, playwright and past contributor to a well known furniture news publication. He currently writes a weekly column for Furniture World's e-newsmagazine (subscribe by going to www.furninfo.com). Got a question? Got a comment? Great!! E-mail: grandpamike-e-e!@furninfo.com

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*Thank you very much,
Marvin Sherman, President & Owner*



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