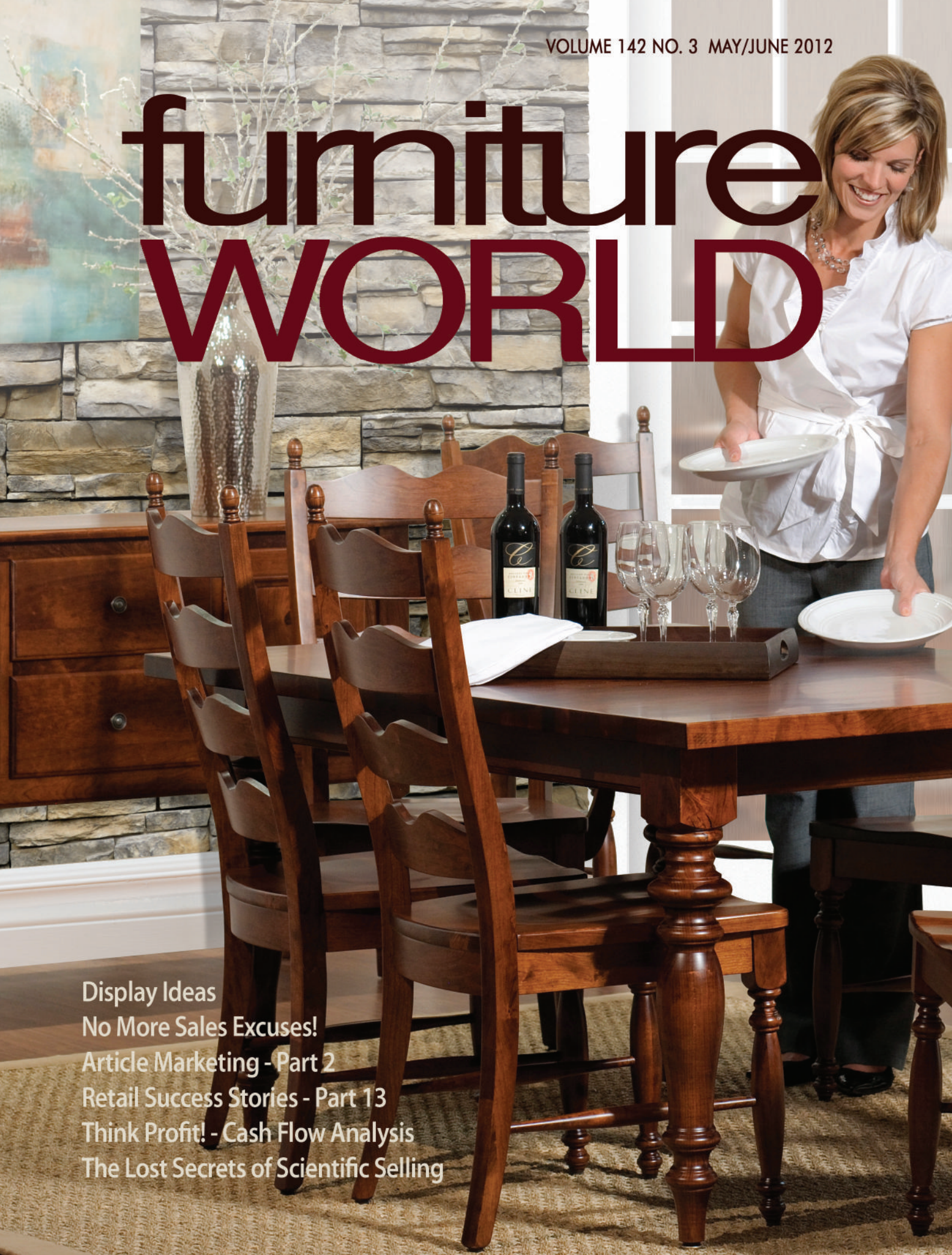


VOLUME 142 NO. 3 MAY/JUNE 2012

furniture WORLD



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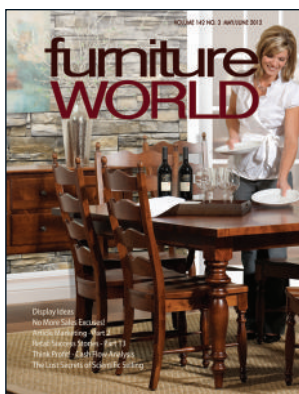
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EDITOR'S CORNER

Every dark chemical cloud has...
a silver lining?

By now, most Furniture World readers have heard about the Chicago Tribune investigative report that brought back to the forefront the issue of fire retardant chemical use in upholstered furniture. These are substances added to polyurethane foams to ensure compliance with the California flammability standard. About 80% of upholstered furniture sold in the US contains these chemicals, which have been detected in household dust and may pose a health risk, especially to small children. This part is old news. The new angle brought to light in the article dealt with the influence of chemical companies and false testimony by "experts" during legislative hearings.

What interests me is that, in spite of this dark media coverage, average consumers don't seem to be compelled to ask questions about what's in their furniture. That doesn't mean, however, that non-average customers -- those who naturally worry, are health conscious or have small children, will not be searching for alternatives. And maybe even buy them if chemical free alternatives aren't too difficult to find, expensive or ugly.

So, is there an opportunity for mainstream furniture retailers to ask their suppliers to provide information, train their salespeople to handle inquiries and make other options available? Can retailers reach out via targeted marketing such as Google AdWords to bring in inquiries and traffic from consumers who have concerns? Is there a silver lining to this dark cloud?

Please email your thoughts and experiences regarding this question to russ@furninfo.com for future coverage. Thanks.

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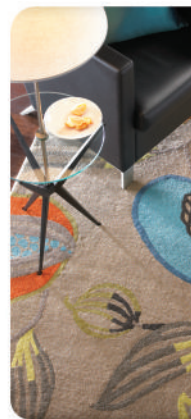


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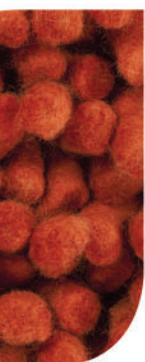
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THE LOST SECRETS OF SCIENTIFIC SELLING

Part 1: Want to be the greatest home furnishings salesperson in the world?

by Larry Mullins

It has been said, by those who know, that about 15% of your sales success is the result of your professional skills. However, it is your proficiency in establishing mutually productive relationships with prospects that produces 85% of your selling success.

The great master salespersons of this world are remarkably careful in their day-to-day human relationships. As a matter of fact, one critical difference between you and any great salesperson may well be this single factor: Great sellers take precautions in their human relationships that other people fail to bother with.

This article will illuminate the basic principles of a technique that is based upon behavioral science. (Don't worry, I will not offer you a lot of theories or formulas to study.) Salespersons with average IQ's can quickly master these methods. I have taught this technique of mastering relationships to graduate classes at several universities. The U.S. Air force included this method in a training manual for officers. Joe Girard, noted in the Guinness Book of Records as "The Greatest Salesperson in the World" said that if he learned this method when he started out, "I would have reached the top much sooner than I did." People completely new to the system pick it up in an hour or so, and if they have good moxie, they can begin to put it to immediate use.

Want to reach the top much sooner? Want to serve customers better? Is

your mind open? Good! The code to human behavior has been cracked. Get ready for some revolutionary ideas!

A THOUGHT-GAME CHALLENGE

Theoretical physicists such as Einstein and Heisenberg often used thought games to help people visualize their ideas. Here is a thought game I developed to help people understand the value of "reading" other people, especially difficult individuals:

Imagine this situation: You are driving down the highway on a pleasant Sunday afternoon. In the rearview mirror you suddenly notice a car moving up fast on the road behind you. Although you are going just over the

RED 82!" and immediately you ease up on the throttle and become very cautious. Without warning or a signal, the car suddenly cuts in front of you and zooms on at a very high speed. Relaxed again, you settle back and continue to enjoy your ride.

This imaginary story is based upon an impractical (but intriguing) theory of mine: If drivers were required to post their IQ scores on their cars, it would eliminate many accidents. Obviously, if you spotted an "82" IQ sign on a car, you would anticipate the possibility of the driver making a less than intelligent move.

In addition, if the driver in question did do something dangerous and stupid, you'd be much more likely to take it philosophically. After all, what can you expect from an 82 IQ? But—you might ask—what about the immature driver, the one with a high IQ who is still emotionally a child? We'd simply give mature people GREEN signs, and those, of emotional incompetence RED signs! So, if you should see a car, with a RED "141"; on it, you'd exercise keen caution.

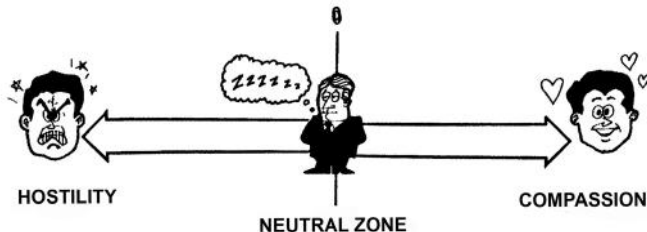
Of course, as I said, the idea is not practical, and neither is the one that follows: Imagine if immature, hostile and aggressive customers were required to wear RED armbands! Be simple to spot them then, wouldn't it?

The fact is: immature people do give off unmistakable signals that clearly reveal their natures and their secret inner needs!



speed limit, this car goes quickly by you on the right lane. As the car goes by, you observe a red sign above the license plate with numerals "82" on it. You murmur to yourself "Oh-oh... a

Illustration 2



"The fact is: immature people do give off unmistakable signals that clearly reveal their natures and their secret inner needs!"

It is true that no two people are alike. It is equally true, however, that people tend to act in patterns. We acknowledge this when we say something like: "Jane is a sweet, considerate person," or "Jim just isn't himself today!" Important developments in Behavioral Science have given us the keys to "read" the signals of other people and actually predict, in a general way, their behavior.

Let's learn the system now, and you can put it to the acid test tomorrow. I promise you, you will never look at people in quite the same way again!

HOW TO READ PEOPLE

Before you can read people, it is necessary to "rate" them. The rating system we shall use has two scales: hostility/compassion and assertiveness/timidity. You might ask: "How

can we measure such intangibles? How compassionate is compassionate? And how hostile is hostile?"

Behavioral Scientists tell us that there are no absolutes in human behavior... that there is really no ultimate degree of hostility or compassion. However, like musical scales, which theoretically can go on forever in each direction (higher or lower), hostility and compassion can be mea-

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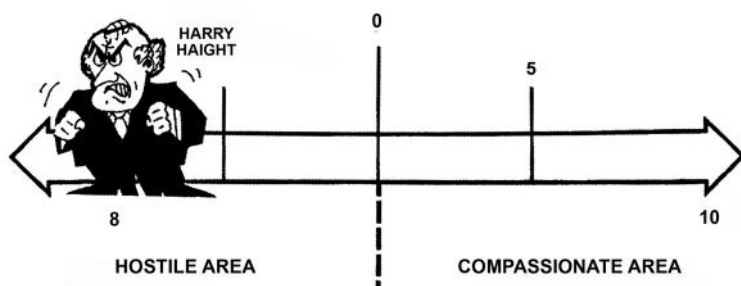
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Illustration 3



sured in relative terms.

To illustrate this, let's imagine a completely indifferent individual, no hostility and no compassion. (Impossible for a normal person, but imagine it anyway.) Let's place this individual at zero, in the theoretical center of the hostility/compassion scale.

Now imagine the scale going off in either direction, one side toward hostility, and the other toward compassion (illustration 2).

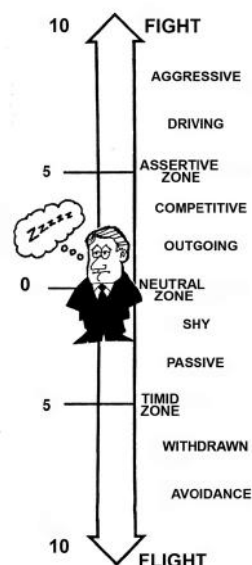
You recall that we said that there are no absolutes in human behavior, or final "stopping places" at either end of the scale. But for the sake of clarity, let's establish arbitrary designations of 1 to 10 on each side of the scale. (We agree, even when we do this, that no human being could reach the absolute degree of "10" on either side of the scale.) Now, think of a very difficult person you have dealt with. It could be a customer, or possibly a boss. Anyone who had the ability or power to make your life difficult. Then, decide which side of the scale this individual should be rated. This

should not be difficult. To help you determine upon which side your difficult person belongs, imagine which descriptive words would be most appropriate to describe him.

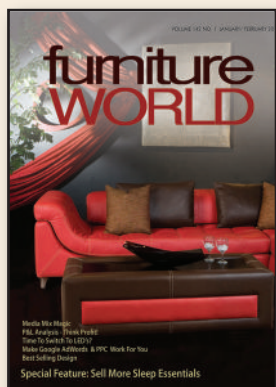
Words that best describe a compassionate nature are warmth, trust, sensitivity, sincerity, kindness, openness, sympathy, helpfulness, consideration, tact, graciousness, and benevolence. Would these apply? More likely, this difficult personality would be placed on the hostile side of the scale. In this case, he would be more appropriately described by words like scornful, indifferent, arrogant, insensitive, brutal, cold, aloof, and hostile. The actual degree of hostility or warmth with which you "credit" this person is less significant than the side of the scale upon which you place him. This should not be difficult for you to decide.

For purposes of illustration, let's suppose your choice is a difficult customer we will name Harry Haight. Let's place Harry on the hostile side of the scale, ranging almost to eight (illustration 3). Now let's go on to the

Illustration 4



second part of our system and rate this difficult customer on Assertiveness/Timidness. How would you score this individual's courage, drive and ambition? As we did with Hostility/Compassion, we need to establish an imaginary scale with a



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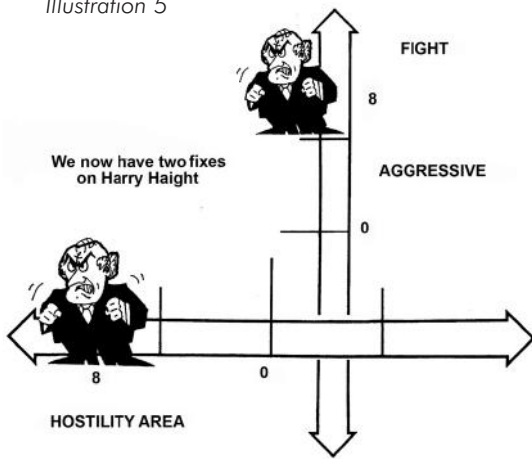


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Illustration 5



"When you apply this concept to customers, you will discover that they fall into one of four distinct categories. For clarity we have chosen all male gender characters. The same principles apply to female personalities."

neutral point in the middle. In this neutral point we place a completely passive individual; he neither retreats timidly nor advances aggressively in his life situations.

Now, let's place extremely aggressive behavior at the top of the scale, and very timid behavior at the bottom (illustration 4). For the sake of clarity, we will again establish our arbitrary designations of 1-10 at each end of the scale. Using the same approach as before, where would you rate this individual on this scale?

Descriptive words for the aggressive top part of the scale would be: leadership, confidence, authoritative manner, initiative, a drive to control, ambition, and so on. Aggressive people like to get in the mainstream of life and affect things. They desire to have impact on the world, to put their stamp on things, to establish evidence that "they've been here." On the opposite pole of our scale is timidness. Timidness is more than simple passiveness; it can be a fearful retreat from life. A timid person has the tendency to avoid the limelight and responsibility, to be compliant (or at least pretend to be compliant!), and to be self-defeating. Timid people believe safety and security are more important than the risk of proving their own value or worth. There is a propensity to strive to maintain the status quo of situations. Passive people believe that facing a known evil is better than facing the unknown, because they fear it might be even worse.

Harry Haight is not passive or timid. He is driving and ambitious. Using Harry again as an example, we would place him on an eight or so on the

aggressive side of the scale. Now we have two fixes on Harry. He is extremely hostile and extremely aggressive. We are now ready to put Harry "together." When we combine the two characteristics of Hostility and Aggressiveness, here is what we come up with as a profile, or "model" of Harry Haight (Illustration 5).

You have now rated your difficult person on each scale: Hostility/Compassion and Assertiveness/Timidness. You are ready for the next step, putting him together. You recall

that we rated Harry as an "8" Hostile and as an "8" Aggressive. If we extend lines from each scale until they meet (as in the diagram) we get an idea how extreme a Hostile/Aggressive person can be! When you apply this concept to customers, you will discover that they fall into one of four distinct categories. For clarity we have chosen all male gender characters. The same principles apply to female personalities.

If you rate a customer as both aggressive and hostile, he is a



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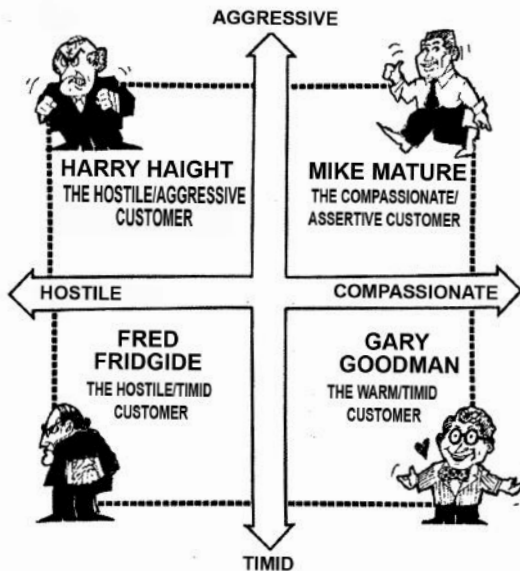
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"By embracing the principle that all good selling is serving, how is it possible to develop mutually beneficial relationships with well-intended, but immature and difficult customers?"

Hostile/Aggressive type, similar to Harry Haight (Illustration 6). If your customer is hostile, but on the withdrawn side, you have a Hostile/Timid individual, a man we call Fred Fridgide. If your customer is compassionate and sensitive, yet at the same time is passive and timid, you have a Gary Goodman person, or a Warm/Timid type. The final possibility is that you have a relatively mature prospect, who is driving and assertive but also manifests a healthy concern about others and respects their feelings. In this case he is a Compassionate/Assertive person, and we'll call him Mike Mature.

These are the four types of personalities in our system. These are extreme "models," and such extreme

types rarely exist in real life. If a psychologist wrote a personality profile on your customer, it would probably be complex and difficult to understand. And, after you read it, it would be hard for you to apply the knowledge you gained. There would simply be too much data to be of much value. For this reason we are using the conceptualized model approach in dealing with your prospective customers.

The essentials of an individual's behavior can be boiled down and conceptualized in a character like Harry Haight. Even though these examples are imaginary models of extremes in behavior types, they are very valuable as reference points from which to read other people.

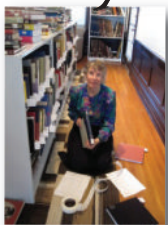
COUNTLESS VARIATIONS

Keep in mind also that within each of the four areas there exists an infinite number of variations. The Hostile/Aggressive customer you encounter may be very hostile, but only moderately aggressive. Or the other way around, he could be only moderately hostile yet extremely aggressive. Any of the personalities shown in illustration 7 may be accurately designated as H/A types, or Hostile/Aggressive. Yet, as you can see, each is entirely unique in personality and temperament.

THE LIMITATIONS TO "TYPECASTING"

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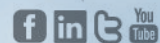
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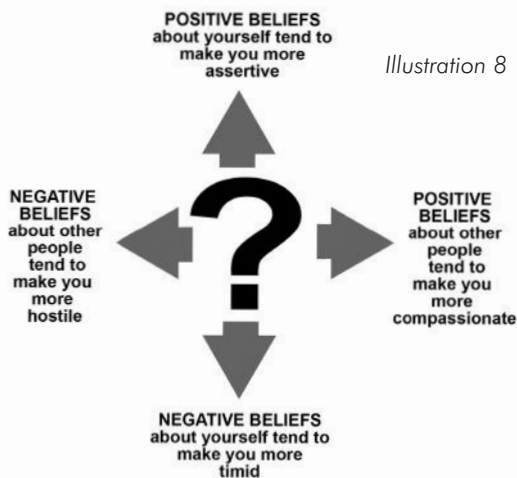
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"People also vary in their roles. Harry Haight may be the most hostile and aggressive of customers, and yet may be a docile Gary Goodman around his family."

fortably pigeon-holed. Each person will show flashes of uncharacteristic behavior at times. People also vary in their roles. Harry Haight may be the most hostile and aggressive of customers, and yet may be a docile Gary Goodman around his family. He may, if he is a boss, be utterly hostile with men employees and wishy-washy with women employees.

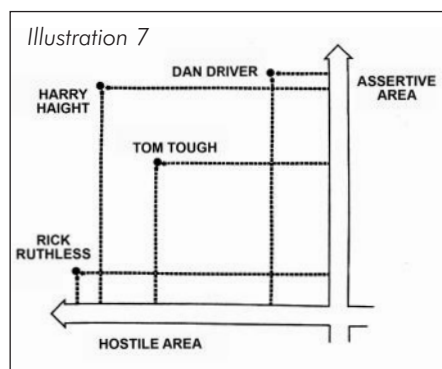
People can put up a front. This is called a "mask tactic," and is used to disguise the real attitudes of the person using it. We will learn how to detect these deceptive behaviors. Under extreme stress, people can act differently. This is called a "frustration behavior." Push a Gary Goodman too far, and even he can act like Harry Haight, for a short period.

TIME TO PAUSE WHAT TYPE ARE YOU?

If you are like most people, you grasped the idea about personality types quickly. You may surprise yourself as you are quickly able to determine the general personality type of your customers, your spouse, and your friends.

It is also important to know what type of personality you possess. This is because your customers' behavior is greatly affected by your own. For example, Harry Haight acts differently with another aggressive person than he does with a timid type of person. So the attitude that you project will cause him to act differently. How do you develop into a Compassionate/Assertive type of person? How do you become more assertive and yet retain your warmth and compassion for oth-

ers? We know that your behavior and attitudes do not just "happen:" Your own personality type is based upon your beliefs about yourself and other people. The more positive these beliefs are, the better off you are.



How would you rate yourself, using the same methods you rated Harry Haight? We know we cannot change Harry Haight, so a key objective of this article is to help you begin to develop the poise and assertiveness you need to deal with Harry Haight, Fred Fridgide, Gary Goodman and yes, even Mike Mature. The positive qualities you need stem from the desire to achieve, which is predicated upon the belief that you can achieve. Harry Haight believes he can achieve, and he is driven to prove it. To deal successfully with him, you must acquire a strong self-image, and a positive faith in yourself. This is the prerequisite to all positive motivation.

NOW THAT YOU KNOW, WHAT DO YOU DO?

By embracing the principle that all good selling is serving, how is it possible to develop mutually beneficial

relationships with well-intended, but immature and difficult customers? How do you defuse and handle a Harry Haight? Is it possible to penetrate the barriers of a Fred Fridgide? What measures are necessary to induce a Gary Goodman to sign on the dotted line? And, how does one work with maximum productivity with a Mike Mature? These questions are all answered in depth in the next installment of the Lost Secrets of Scientific Selling. In Part II you will learn the methods that will help you establish productive relationships with prospects of every type, and these skills will produce 85% of your progress toward becoming the greatest home furnishings sales person in the world.

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 book is *THE METAVALUES BREAK-THROUGH*. This article is based on the book, *IMMATURE PEOPLE WITH POWER ... How to Handle Them*. Larry is founder and CEO of UltraSales, Inc. and can be reached directly at 904.794.9212, or at Larry@LarryMullins.com. See more articles by Larry at www.furninfo.com or www.ultrasales.com.

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ARTICLE MARKETING

Part 2: Guidelines for writing and using your articles.

by Margo DeGange

Article marketing is a power-packed way to gain online visibility for you and your business. It can be a game-changer in terms of establishing you as an expert in your field. It is free for the most part, and for all of these reasons it should be considered a highly beneficial form of marketing.

In the last article published in the March/April edition of Furniture World and posted to www.furninfo.com ("Magazine Articles" pull down menu/ "Finance Articles"), we discussed what article marketing is, what its benefits are, and how it fairs in light of some of online activity and search engines.

Now that you are savvy concerning all of that, let's move on to more

detail so you can get going with this valuable marketing activity.

RE-PURPOSE CONTENT THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Live articles help you gain visibility. Having live articles means they are available online to be read by the general public. This happens easily by submitting them to article directories.

When your articles are live through most directories, readers can share them through social media icons at the bottom of each article. They can Tweet, Post, Stumble, Feed, Dig, and act Delicious, all at the click of a virtual button. They can Google you to stardom! There's nothing sweeter or quicker! You can even get your team on board, and you can take a shot at it yourself, too. You can repost your articles to your social media sites over and over again, using a different intro post each time.

Re-purposing your content is a money-wise and time-saving move. One article can become 5 or more Facebook posts! One "10 Tips" article transforms into 10 days worth of blog posts. How about ten articles becoming hundreds of 120 character tweets that your social media manager posts and reposts throughout the week, month and year (120 instead of

140 characters allows the tweet to be re-tweeted by others)?

Just think how much social media activity you can get from 10 short articles that you chop up. You could have a regular presence on your main social media channels just from a few articles! Who would have thought?

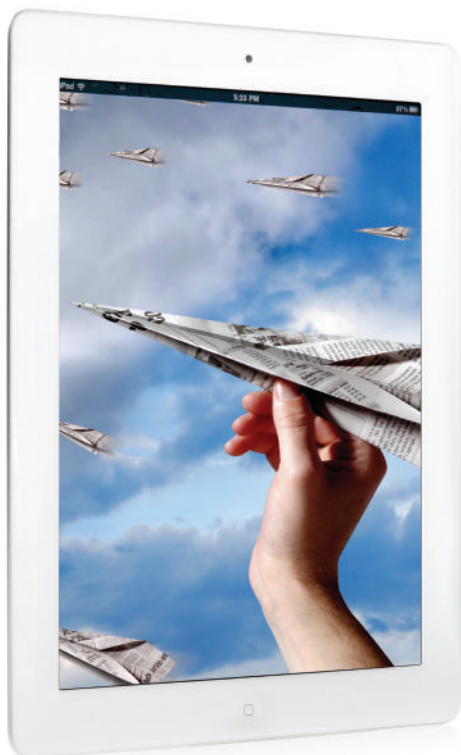
OTHER SAVVY WAYS TO USE YOUR ARTICLES

Besides submitting to Directories, there are a lot of other things you can do with your articles. Since you wrote them, you may as well use them. Go ahead and wear them out while you're at it!

Put each full version article on your blog, and if your website homepage is separate from your blog roll, add links there to all your articles.

Make hard copies of each article and hand them out at your seminars that cover the same or related topics. Give them away at networking events when a colleague shows interest or shares a problem you can solve. How special someone would feel if after telling you their dilemma you said, "You know, I recently wrote an article on that very issue. I have a copy in my laptop bag". Or, you can mail it to them to make that important second connection to build even greater trust.

"Stick to one main idea, such as how to add personality to your home through color, or how to care for a sofa so it lasts many years..."



Articles like this one on, “How to Take Care of Your Leather Furniture” posted to (<http://ezinearticles.com>) can be re-purposed to great advantage on social networking platforms and can be used in many other useful ways to build your store brand.



Why not go all out and get article repurpose crazy? Put several articles together to make a valuable booklet—your Amazing Free Offer—that you give away in digital form to your website visitors, or create a hardcopy version to give away free to visitors at your store.

A “GREAT” ARTICLE

The thought of creating an article from “nothing” can bring a certain amount of anxiety to a business owner. A lot of people get stumped on the writing. They wonder how to write an interesting article, and how to make it “great”. Getting to “great” simply means you include the right ingredients to make it “yummy”, and then you use some writing guidelines to make it well-written.

I like to use a writing strategy I call the 5 by 5! This includes 5 ingredients for making the article interesting, and 5 tips for ensuring it is well-written.

5 INGREDIENTS FOR AN INTERESTING ARTICLE

1. An interesting article is “delicious” and often has a “secret sauce”. It wets the reader’s appetite for more of you! It triggers the reader to feel you are letting them in on some big secret or some hard to find information, because YOU are the expert. You are allowing them to be privy to your “secret sauce”!

2. A delicious article is flavored in YOUR own voice, not someone else’s. This helps the reader to con-

nect with you emotionally.

3. An interesting article is made of quality content that is original (your content, in your own words, not swiped or “borrowed” directly from someone else). Quality content is also reliable, fact-based, on point, and not bogged down with a lot of “fluff”.

4. An interesting article is beneficial, offering a way to solve a problem or dilemma, or offering new information to the reader that they can easily apply to their life or work.

5. An interesting and delicious article is easily shared. There is something in the content so important, so clever, so useful, or so yummy that the reader wants to share it with others, making your articles work double duty for you and helping you gain valuable visibility.

HOW TO WRITE A GREAT ARTICLE

If you keep the above ingredients in mind as you whip up your article, you will be off to a fabulous start. Now, let’s look at the “how”. Here are 5 quick tips for actually writing that deliciously tasty article:

- First of all, know your audience of readers. Who (as a group) are you writing to and why are you writing to them? What is the MAIN message you want to get across in your article? Keep it simple at first. Also, stick to one main idea, such as how to add personality to your home through color, or how to

care for a sofa so it lasts many years, or ideas on how to arrange living room furniture for entertaining.

- Be yourself as you write, and don’t think too hard about it. Relax as you approach it. As we touched on in “ingredients”, use your own voice. Write as if you are in the room with the reader, as if you know them, so they feel as though they know you. Leave the overly formal “voice” for the college professors! If you have a charming sense of humor, factor that in, but don’t let that take center stage. Keep the content as the star. Don’t try to be funny if you are not, and don’t try to be formal if that is not your style. You will do your best writing if it is driven by the essence of “you”. That way, writing becomes easier.
- Get your thoughts down as they come to your mind, and organize them later. If you try to write “perfectly” or if you seek to create a final draft the first time around, you will get “stuck”. The best way to write is to throw your thoughts

"Hand them out at your seminars... give them away at networking events... put several articles together to make a valuable booklet... post each full version article on your blog..."



down on paper, and then neaten them up and organize them into "groups" of like content as you go. This way you will not miss an important thought.

- Your article should have a title, an introduction paragraph, a body of several paragraphs, and a conclusion paragraph. This is a good formula for you to start with. As you become more skilled at writing, you can add more paragraphs where appropriate. Have one main point for each paragraph. These points will be sub-points of your overall theme or title. Choose a

title that captures your main idea and that will guide the article writing. I'll share more on titles in the third part of this series.

- Catch the reader's attention from the onset and follow through with more great content. Make the first two sentences of your article powerful, punchy, and directly tied to your main point. Then make the remainder of your content useful and beneficial enough so that the reader would actually be willing to pay for it! When you can, you may

also want to season your writing with a unique way of looking at the topic. If possible, come at it from a new or unique vantage point. This adds interest and makes your article more "sharable". An example of this would be, "7 ways to Ensure No One Wants to Come Visit Your Home", an article title that allows for a different way of teaching people how to have a home others want to come to.

Well let's end part two of our series here. In part three I will share with you how to submit your articles to article directories, when and where to post your original content, popular article directory sites, how many articles to write and how often, article size, using quotes, your author's bio, your article resource box, your article summary, evergreen content, using keywords, tips for overcoming your writing aversion, and a few other very useful tips. Once again, stay tuned!

Margo DeGange, M.Ed. is a Business Empowerment Coach and creator of the 12 Step Go Build a Biz Marketing Program GoBuildABiz.com for a Thriving & Profitable Business Fast! Margo is totally committed to your wild success. She'll mentor & coach you to get crystal clear on your most ideal target client, connect to them with a magnetic marketing message, establish your unique (and empowering) value position, build trust through amazing offers and information, and close the sale almost effortlessly. Send questions about this article to editor@furninfo.com or Visit www.MargoDeGange.com for products, programs and coaching to put YOU on the map!

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KEM'S 2013 WINTER / SPRING MARKET SCHEDULE

<p>62ND EDISON FURNITURE & ACCESSORY MARKET, EDISON, NJ FEBRUARY 3-4-5 * BUYERS FROM NY, NJ & PA *</p> <p>4TH TEXAS FURNITURE & ACCESSORY MARKET, IRVING, TX MAY 5 & 6 * MINUTES FROM DALLAS *</p> <p>34TH LONG BEACH FURNITURE & ACCESSORY MARKET, LONG BEACH, CA MAY 15 & 16</p>	<p>COMING IN 2013 AUGUST 11 & 12 20TH ORLANDO FURNITURE & ACCESSORY MARKET, ORLANDO, FL</p>
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90 SECONDS TO \$UCCESS SERIES

The Merits Of Questions & Answers

by Ray Morefield, *Common Goals*

Personalities factor into the furniture purchasing process. So do customers' needs, income, age and the state of the economy. Yet, it is a rare occurrence when retail salespeople are able to gather enough of this valuable information so that they can determine how all of these variables factor into a potential buying decision.

Retail salespeople are often taught to make declarative statements about features and benefits. Declarative statements, however, offer little insight into the needs and wants of potential buyers unless we first ask questions.

LISTENING: A CRITICAL SKILL

Just as it is imperative that we become skilled communicators in the selling situation, it is also a fact that we learn little while we're talking. Listening is an important and critical communication skill. The Greek Sage Diogenes advised: "We have 2 ears and 1 mouth – would that we listen more and talk less". It's amazing how we often talk twice as much as we listen.

Late night talk show hosts are masters at preparing to ask the next question while the previous question is being answered by their guests. It is an art form that we could benefit from if we would master it during the time we are exercising our persuasive power in the selling situation.

28% ASK FOR THE ORDER

Recent research suggests that retail furniture salespeople only regularly ask questions 38% of the time, and only ask for the order 28% of the time.

When, instead of waiting for an opportunity to present our memorized declarative statements, salespeople involve the customer by asking questions, they achieve the following five critical steps in managing the thought process toward a successful conclusion.

- They encourage our customers to focus on the decision at hand.
- They help them crystallize their thought process.
- They manage our tendency to talk too much.
- They avoid differences of opinion.
- They elevate the person with whom they converse.

TALK LESS BUT SELL MORE

Rationalization is one of the 3 major reasons salespeople fail to close the sale. They may blame the economy, the competition, price or the customer.

If other than "blame-placing", they ask questions, offer choices, and make a comparative analysis, they may find that their closing rate for 2012 and 2013 will dramati-

cally increase.

The Socratic philosophy of encouraging people to arrive at logical conclusions by asking questions and offering choices was espoused 3,000 years ago.

Plan to upgrade your selling skills. The more questions you ask, the more answers you are provided.

As long as you are in conversation, you are in contention. The more answers you receive, the closer you move toward closing the sale.

PERSISTENCE PAYS DIVIDENDS

Research has shown that the major reason salespeople fail to close the sale is that they give up too easily.

Persistence pays dividends. Every "no" brings you closer to a "yes."

That's important because when we analyze frequency of word usage, the word "no" ranks 87th. The word "yes" ranks in frequency at 366th.

In conversation with family, friends and customers there is a tendency to use the word "no" 4 times more fre-

"Other than placing blame, ask questions, offer choices, and make a comparative analysis"

**"Salespeople only regularly ask questions 38% of the time,
and only ask for the order 28% of the time."**

quently than we use the word "yes."

Yet customers have a need or a want that begs for satisfaction, or they would not be engaging you in conversation.

Plan your questions. Sales personnel that talk less may actually sell more. Expand your ability to gather information to close that sale by keying off of customer's answers as you make additional inquiries.

Notable leaders are persuaded that the second major reason that most businesses fail is failure to plan. Planning your presentation by carefully conceiving your questions may dramatically increase your closing ratio as the economy rebounds and responds to the pent up demand for the products you represent during the next 12 months.

To quote a famous principle: "Ask

and ye shall receive."

Ray Morefield has been affiliated with leading corporations in the furniture, housewares, hardware and coatings industries. He has also served other industries in an advisory capacity through his company Common Goals, Inc. Questions on any management topic, can be directed to him in care of editor@furninfo.com.

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THINK CASH FLOW!

It's the most important asset in any furniture business

by David McMahon

Proper cash levels enable businesses to continue operations. With adequate cash, inventories can be kept at the correct levels, employees can be hired and paid properly, and capital reinvestment becomes possible. Without cash, extra financing is required through delayed vendor payments or loans, and interest is incurred. If levels get too low, vendor shipments are slowed and the businesses may eventually become insolvent.

Cash comes from profit. How the funds are used, ultimately determines the level of liquidity and the ending cash available in your retail business. Well run operations have consistently adequate net income levels. They also

have proper budgets to control the levels of major usage accounts: inventory, accounts payable, deposits, and receivables. Well-run firms exhibit high levels of stability - in ALL economies. That allows for self-investment, which leads to growth and even greater levels of prosperity.

Alternatively, those operations that don't understand how cash is REALLY accumulated, often experience cash shortages and have higher loan levels. Coincidentally, these operations are often the ones that have very tight expense controls and loose balance sheet controls at the same time. Well run operations can afford to spend money BECAUSE they are well run. Poorly managed retailers just can't afford it. Many that are profitable on their P&L's due to being excruciatingly frugal, are unguided when it comes to inventory, payables, and deposits/receivables. This is a situation that can lead some profitable companies to become insolvent and be forced ultimately into bankruptcy.

If you feel in the dark at times as to why your cash is at the level it is, this article is for you. Here, I build upon a case scenario that was featured in the previous 2 issues of Furniture World. You can read those online at www.furninfo.com.

To start, here is a simplified equation for cash:

Beginning cash plus profits, minus increase in assets, minus decrease in

liabilities financing = ending cash.

So what would happen to cash if: net income was \$100,000 and inventory went up by \$50,000 and AP went up by \$75,000?

Profit brings in \$100k cash, inventory uses \$50K, and there was a supplier loan increase of \$75k. Cash would have gone up by \$125,000.

Wouldn't it be great if you could see this information clearly every month and even project into the future? Well, if you have proper financial statements and know how to use them, you already have this information. It is your most important management report. It is your Statement of Cash Flow.

I'm often curious. Why do many business owners avoid their most important management report? The only answers that I can come up with are that either they don't have the proper monthly financial reporting procedures or that they simply don't understand it. And, if they don't understand it, they can't have a properly functioning financial system. The third, kind of scary answer, is that they don't believe the Statement of Cash Flow is important.

If you are reading this article, you care. You can become a cash flow expert.

In an effort to increase knowledge of how to use a Statement of Cash Flow, let's consider the following scenario:

"Some retailers that are profitable on their P&L's due to being excruciatingly frugal, are unguided when it comes to inventory, payables, and deposits/receivables... ultimately leading to insolvency."

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Statement of Cash Flow

Year Ended December 31st 2011

Cash Flow From Operations

Net Earnings (loss)	<u>\$52,000</u>	1
Additions (subtractions) to Cash:		
Depreciation	\$10,000	2
Changes in Accounts Receivable	-\$25,000	3
Changes in Inventory	-\$50,000	4
Changes in Accounts Payable	\$10,000	5
Changes in Salaries Payable	\$5,000	6
Changes in Customer Deposits	-\$50,000	7
Changes in Lines of Credit	\$13,000	8
Total Cash From Operating Activities	<u>-\$87,000</u>	9
Cash Flow From Investing Activities:		10
Capital Expenditures	0	
Total Cash Flows from Investing Activities	0	
Cash Flow From Financing Activities:		11
Dividends Paid	0	
Sale, Purchase of Stock	0	
Net Borrowings, LT Notes	-\$25,000	
Total Cash Flow From Financing	<u>-\$25,000</u>	
Total Cash Flow & Cash Equivalents	<u>-\$60,000</u>	12
Add Beginning Cash Flow	<u>\$275,000</u>	13
Cash Ending Balance Dec. 31st	<u>\$215,000</u>	14

lion in sales, 44% Gross Margin, approximately 42% in operating costs, and the net income after tax as a percent of sales was 1.04% (For more detail, refer to the first part in this series, "In-Depth P&L Analysis" published in the January /February 2012 issue of Furniture World, posted to www.furninfo.com under "Magazine Articles". This retailer only has \$52,000 going into cash flow from profit. This alone does not determine the ending cash flow. Transactions that are not sales and expense related now come into play.

2 Depreciation: In addition to profit and loss activity, other regular business operating activities affect whether cash goes up or down. These non P&L activities occur on the balance sheet (Refer to the second part in this series, "Think Profit- Your Balance Sheet," published in the March/April 2012 issue of Furniture World, posted to www.furninfo.com under "Magazine Articles". They affect cash flow just the same. The first one, depreciation, is listed as an addition to cash purely because it was already recorded as a reduction against net income (and it really did not affect cash as it is a non-cash expense). In this example, a \$10,000 addition to cash is recorded due to depreciation. A side note here: it is a better practice to keep up with your depreciation schedule on a monthly basis rather than in one chunk at the end of the year to get a better idea of your profitability throughout the year.

3 Changes in receivables: Outflow \$25,000 cash. Cash went down because receivables increased during the year. In other words, they lent cus-

CAST STUDY COMPANY BACKGROUND

- Family owned and operated.
- Full line furniture, no electronics, or appliances.
- One store operation with one detached warehouse.
- Family owns buildings separately and business pays rent.
- 25,000 square foot showroom.
- Eight salespeople, one sales manager.
- Average sale = \$1,350; traffic count for 2011 = 18,519; close rate = 20%.
- \$1,000,000 average inventory at cost.
- Vendor merchandising – mid to upper end.
- Special order percentage = 50%.
- Budgeted sales for 2011 = \$5.26 Million.
- 2011 Sales = \$5,000,000.
- 2011 Cost of Goods Sold = \$2,800,000 @ 56%.
- 2011 Gross Margin = \$2,200,000 @ 44%.
- 2011 Net Income After Interest and Tax = \$52,000 @ 1.04%.

CASH FLOW CHART NOTES

Refer to Statement of Cash Flow Table Example Above.

1 Net income: Inflow of cash for this retailer is \$52,000. It had \$5 mil-

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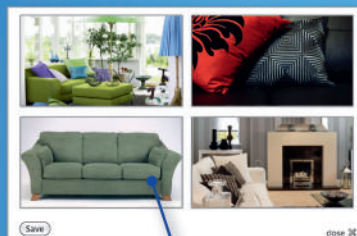
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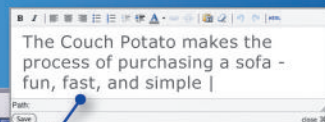
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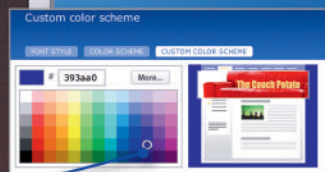
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“This retailer took in fewer deposits on special order sales. Was it due to a sales decrease, salespeople not getting 50% deposits, or a decline in special orders?”

tomers a net of \$25,000 rather than collecting at the time of the delivered sale.

4 Changes in inventory: Outflow \$50,000 cash. They ended up carrying \$50,000 more in inventory during the period. Inventory has important effects on cash, seen on both the balance sheet in terms of purchases, and on the income statement in terms of carrying costs. You can't live with it and you can't live without it. This firm has a 20% inventory to sales ratio.

This is too much considering they were short of their sales plan. Highly profitable firms in their industry sector have 15% inventory to sales.

5 Changes to accounts payable: Inflow of cash \$10,000. Consider payables as a short term (often interest free) trade loan. If you hold more payables, you have a larger loan since you have paid out less cash. The trick here is to find your balance between getting this interest free loan, considering the value of taking any trade dis-

counts, and avoiding becoming late on accounts that could affect your services, credit rating, or inventory flow. (There is a system for that, but that is another article).

6 Changes in Salaries payable: Inflow of cash \$5,000. This company brought on a couple of new employees at the end of the year causing salaries owing to increase for the prior year final period. In other words - they have a temporary employee loan.

7 Changes in Customer deposits: Outflow \$50,000 cash. They took in fewer deposits on special order sales. This figure is a concern and should be investigated. Was the decrease in deposits due to a decrease in written sales? Was it due to salespeople not following the policy of asking for full payment and getting a 50% deposit minimum? Or, was it from a decline in special order sales vs. sales from stock. Whatever the reasons, wouldn't you want to know why, if it were your business?

8 Changes in Line of Credit: Inflow of cash \$13,000. Ok, I'll throw this out there now: not all reasons for additions to cash are good reasons. Store management decided to dig into their LOC at the end of the year to fund a new container shipment. Their LOC loan went up resulting in a cash increase. It could be good or it could not be good depending on the situation and the reason. Since this retailer is over-inventoried, it clearly should not have invested in new, untested merchandise shipments which could result in ongoing cash flow shortfalls.



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- 3) Outdoor Room**
- 4) Formal Living Room
- 5) Guest Bedroom
- 6) Kitchen
- 7) Home Office
- 8) Home Theater Room

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**Furniture Today*, December 7, 2009.

"So here we have the case of a profitable company actually losing money! By looking only at the P&L, an uninformed analyst could draw the conclusion that they are breaking even so, no worries on the cash side."

9 Total cash flows from operating activities: Outflow \$87,000 cash. So here we have the case of a profitable company actually losing money! By looking only at the P&L, an uninformed analyst could draw the conclusion that they are breaking even so - no worries on the cash side. By looking only at the balance sheet, an uninformed analyst may conclude that they have a decent cash balance so - they are good. But by looking at the statement of cash flow, where both the results of the P&L and the Balance Sheet are reflected, the informed ana-

lyst can provide the proper advice - they have a cash burn rather than earn. It's a situation that can be of concern or not, depending on the reasons.

10 Cash flow from investing activities: No cash flow effect. Investing activities are different than operating activities as they typically take the form of capital expenditures and longer term fixed asset purchases. For example, if the company were to purchase new equipment or machinery for its distribution center, the value of that equipment purchase would cause

a cash decrease. If the reinvestment is for business improvements, the goal is to gain a greater return on the investment and a subsequent increase in cash flow in regular operating income. So, reinvestments are key to developing innovations for new revenue streams or increases in efficiencies. This company did not engage in any investing activities during 2011.

11 Cash flow from financing activities: The outflow is \$25,000 cash. Financing activities are the last category, after operating and investing activities, in the cash flow statement.

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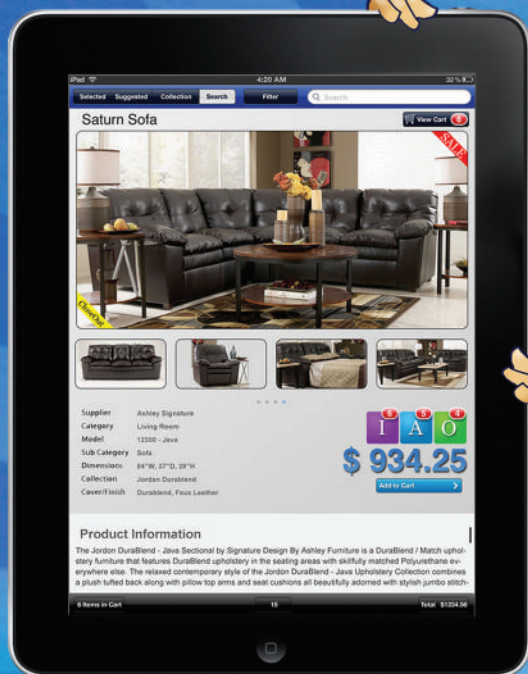
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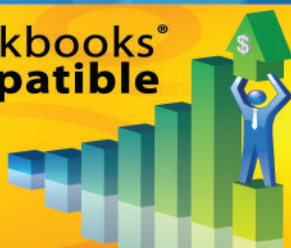
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THINK CASH FLOW!

In this section we can observe cash effects due to activities that support the long term funding of a business, as well as any effects of the sale of company stock or payment of dividends. In this scenario, the only effect was due to a decrease in the long term note on the business.

"Not all reasons for additions to cash are good reasons."

12 Change in cash flow: Outflow of \$60,000. This is the net cash flow result for 2011. Again, even though this retailer made \$52,000 from sales and expenses, it lost \$60,000 in cash. That's a \$112,000 difference. If the cash had been spent as an appropriate reinvestment with a plan, that might be ok. But here in this scenario, presented in this three article series, I fear that this operation did not have the knowledge or pay adequate attention to developing strategies based on a careful review of its balance sheet

and key performance indicators (KPI).

13 Beginning cash: Cash at the start of the period was \$275,000.

14 Ending cash: Cash at the end of the period is \$215,000. (\$275,000 - \$60,000).

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

This detailed case study is based on a retail furniture company I worked with closely. This operation was in fairly rough shape, but was able to refocus on improving their business. Today they are approaching double digit net income, are hitting their sales goals, and are managing their inventory supply chain professionally.

Here are three core observation points and a few key recommendations that were given to them prior to their turn around.

- Sales goals were missed due to a variety of sales management issues.
- Inventory levels were too high for the sales volume.
- Gross margin was underperforming.

Recommendations:

- Establish a professional financial budget and pro forma to act as the business plan and strategy guide (pro formas and budgets are basically projected financial statements with set actions to achieve desired results).
- Hire and properly train 2 or 3 new salespeople.
- Improve the effectiveness of the customer relationship management system (CRM). Manage it.

- Focus on better customer follow up. Track it.
- Increase average sale through fabric protection programs. Track it.
- Improve inventory management systems and closely watch key performance indicators.
- Establish open to buy guidelines for purchases of new merchandise.
- Make sure to price special orders and best sellers appropriately.
- Proper price pointing.
- Religious execution of mark down strategy to identify and sell dead merchandise.

FINAL RESULT

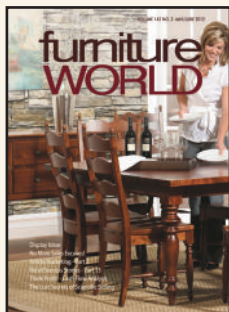
Oh - you might ask how much this company's profits and cash flow increased as a result of these changes.

Great question. The projected results for 2012 are a 477% increase in profitability. They are on target for an after tax net income increase of \$248,000. Cash flow is forecasted to increase by 137% to \$513,000 from \$215,000 by Dec. 31, 2012. And that is why it is essential to take action based on a careful review of your three major financial statements.

David McMahon is a Certified Management Accountant (CMA) for PROFITconsulting. They provide CFO services and CFO consulting for a wide range of businesses. Businesses become better operators and achieve greater levels of cash flow. Questions about this article, or to request a similar analysis on your financial statements, contact him at Davidm@profitsystems.com or call 800-888-5565.

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The screenshots show the 'Delivery Schedule' and 'Delivery Routing' screens. The 'Delivery Routing' screen displays a Google Map of San Diego with delivery points marked. A delivery slip for 'Unreal Interiors' is also shown, listing items and a total amount due of \$1,789.12.

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SALES EXCUSES

Replace your sales associate's sagging excuses and you will replace more of your shoppers sagging beds with brand new bedding!

by Gordon Hecht

2012 promises to be another good year for the bedding segment. However, as always, ground-level retail sales associates (RSAs) are leaving opportunities and dollars on the table by not converting shoppers to buyers. In my travels over the past several weeks, I have made it a practice to ask RSAs how their bedding business is doing.

I can tell you that every RSA is selling something. Some are selling mattresses, and others are selling excuses for their lack of success. It happens quite often that our RSAs and even our managers believe that there are more reasons why we can't sell mattresses

instead of reasons that we should sell mattresses.

Here are some of the most common explanations for substandard mattress sales production. See if you have heard any of these before.

We don't get many mattress customers shopping here!

Chances are, if your full service furniture store faces significant competition from large bedding chains, most of your customers will be asking to see items other than mattresses. Even so, it is important to remember that almost every shopper that walks in or calls you needs a new mattress. New bedding is one of the most delayed purchases in households across the nation. RSAs who make it a point to ask every customer about their bedding needs will show and sell more bedding. Even to their dining room customers! Even to their living room customers! And especially to their recliner customers, who prize comfort above all else! Create and train your team on a transitional phrase that helps your shopper become aware of their bedding needs.

Our store is surrounded by mattress specialty stores!


Nobody wants to have a store out in the desert, or in an empty shopping center. Having mattress stores in your area will bring mattress

shoppers into your store. And when they are ignored, abused, misinformed, and otherwise hoodwinked elsewhere, chances are that they may wander into one of your stores looking for a mattress. Make it a practice to shop your neighbors, and shop 'em often. Know what they are doing well and where they are failing. You will learn the many ways you can beat them, and then sell with confidence.

Our store's spiffs aren't big enough!

If you saw a \$100 bill on the street and picked it up, you would feel like it was YOUR LUCKY DAY! Here is what I found in three different stores that I visited in Q4-2011. There was a Full-Line Furniture Store that offered a \$100 extra spiffs on bedding sales, and only three RSAs bothered to fill out the form to receive it. In one area, over \$10,000 worth of prizes from an ongoing contest were left unclaimed.

"RSAs who make it a point to ask every customer about their bedding needs will show and sell more bedding."



My customer just bought a mattress two years ago!

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The spiffs aren't big enough!

"Smart RSAs determine the shopper's time frame early in the sales presentation so they don't lose the sale at the counter."

Another store increased its bedding compensation and experienced a drop in bedding sales. We like to think that BIG SPIFFS motivate RSAs to sell bedding-but it is not a global truth. Make the decision today to be customer focused and not commission focused. Encourage your team to help the customer select the bed that's best for the customer, not the bed with the highest

spiff. You and they will see sales (and earnings) soar!

**If I had FREE DELIVERY,
I would sell more mattresses!**

The fact is that no delivery is cost free. Today's customer understands that the price of the delivery is hidden somewhere. However, chances are that your store delivers mattresses at no addi-

tional cost. If your delivery charge is a "Stop" Charge, or Flat Rate Charge, it costs the customer no additional funds to get a mattress set delivered with their dining or living room order. If your customer is paying \$59-109 for a delivery, no matter how many pieces, doesn't it make sense for them to get as many items on one sales order as possible?

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SALES EXCUSES

If we had mattresses in stock I would sell more mattresses!

Some shoppers need a new mattress tomorrow, but most shoppers are not prepared to take delivery of a mattress right away. Smart RSAs determine the shopper's time frame early in the sales presentation so they don't lose the sale at the counter. And if your customer needs the mattress now, concentrate on those clearance models that nobody seems to sell. I suggest that you ask your customer "If we found the perfect mattress for you, with the comfort, support, and price that you love, could you wait 5 or 7 days for it?" You'll be surprised how many customer will wait the extra time.

My customer just bought a mattress two years ago!

The day your shopper buys a new TV, they think about buying the next bigger size. The day they drive home in a new car, they think about buying that next SUV. When your customer says they just bought a mattress two years ago, ask them "Do you still LOVE IT?" If they don't love it, if they aren't sleeping great, it's time for a new one.

My customer's credit limit wasn't high enough for the mattress!

Your RSA closes a sales order for \$2,200. Your customer applies for credit and is approved for \$2,000. What are your options. Ask your sales team that question and be prepared to hear "I'd just take one item off the order." It is still very acceptable to ask for money down! People who shop and buy are expecting to spend money. It's ok to ask the customer to pay the difference up front. Don't give

up that hard earned extra item!

This isn't the mattress selling season!

I have heard of Baseball Season, Football Season, Ski Season, Boating Season, Duck Season, and Rabbit Season. Mattresses go bad and need replacement every day of the year. Even Christmas, Easter, and New Year's Day. Every Day is selling season. Change the mindset and count the money.

Our prices are too high!

There are no winners in the race to zero. I don't want to be the store with the cheapest mattress in town. If you are getting this excuse from your sales team, it sounds like it's time for a thorough Bedding Comp Shop. Develop a designated process for shopping bedding competitors and require your RSAs to conduct one shopping trip a month. Don't allow your store to be beat on any product, and always compare offers and terms straight up. If the grass looks better on the other side of the street, they probably are just using more fertilizer!

"If you are getting this excuse from your sales team, it sounds like it's time for a thorough Bedding Comp Shop. Develop a designated process for shopping bedding competitors."

My customer already has a mattress!

The most common reason for not adding the new mattress to a bedroom sale is, "My customer already has a mattress". Retail experience tells me that 85% of all furniture shoppers sleep on a worn-out, non-supportive, substandard mattress. That same experience tells me that 99% of your customers already have a mattress. Just because they have one, doesn't mean they don't need a new one! 99% of TV buyers have a TV that plays, 98% of Car Buyers have a car that drives, and 97% of smart phone buyers have a phone that communicates. Those retailers expect their shoppers to trade up. You should expect the same!

You need your sales team to sell! But don't let them sell you on a bill of goods. Replace those sagging excuses with plans for results and you will be replacing your shoppers sagging beds with Brand New Bedding from your store!

Gordon Hecht is a 35+ year veteran of the Furniture Business, starting as a delivery helper in Las Vegas, NV. He has been recognized for outstanding achievement in sales, sales and store management, and in multi-store management with Drexel-Heritage, RB Furniture, and Sofa Express. As Director of Sales for the Ashley Sleep division of Ashley Furniture Industries, Gordon travels the East, Midwest, and Canada training retail sales teams on selling bedding and works with store owners to maximize sales. Gordon resides in Columbus, OH with his wife, Michelle, and has one adult son. You can contact Gordon at Ghecht@ashleyfurniture.com.



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BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Surya

The Storm Collection of hand hooked all weather rugs are manufactured to withstand the rigors of outdoor use. No need to worry about spilling or dropping food, just hose off and it's clean! The colors and designs are sure to wow any space. Hand Hooked and Made in India of 100% Polypropylene. Suggested Retail for a 5'x8' is \$330.

Contact information on index page 70.

Omnia

The Rodney Swivel is motion seating at its sleekest, featuring sharp geometric lines. Shown here in electrifying yellow leather.

Contact information on index page 70.



Council

While petite in size, the Laila is a striking piece. Minimally designed and intricately crafted with interlaced X legs below a traditional top with discrete drawer space. Available in many bold hues, the Laila measures 34w x 32h x 18d.

Contact information on index page 70.



Home Trends & Design

Manufactures upscale home furnishings, specializing in solid wood case goods, accent furniture, dining tables, leather upholstery and accessories. A founding member of the nationally respected Sustainable Furnishings Council, this company is recognized for its emphasis on environmentally sustainable manufacturing processes and eco-friendly business practices.

Contact information on index page 70.

Copeland

The double 'X' formation of the Audrey Dining Table trestle creates a state of dynamic tension giving the design a rigid base that provides diners with plenty of unobstructed leg room. Tables and Buffets are available in a number of sizes and configurations to meet the needs of almost any dining space. Crafted in solid American black walnut hardwood.

Contact information on index page 70.



LR Furniture

The Newport Executive Office Suite features full extension drawer slides, letter file, raised panel back, Delgado pulls and knobs, black painted top with rubbed edges and 3-step Newport finish on brown Maple. Options include soft close side mount slides, soft close undermount slides, Legal/Letter adjustable file and soft close hinges.

Contact information on index page 70.



Country View Woodworking

The Franklin Park Bedroom Collection is a blend of handcrafted quality with a modern look. Choices include an array of case goods including bedside nightstands, dressers, and chests. American made.

Contact information on index page 70.



BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Jaipur Rugs

Petal Pusher in White Ice from the Blue Collection is Hand-Tufted in Wool & Art Silk in India. \$440 for 5x8.

Contact information on index page 70.



Best Home Furnishings

This Retro Contemporary chair has a slightly contoured back, accented with pleats and a sharp flare at the top. Its back is accented with two buttons and its smooth, reversible seat cushion is banded and corded. Flared legs come in Driftwood & Espresso finishes. Available in hundreds of fabrics as well as bonded leather.

Contact information on index page 70.

Braxton Culler

The Andrews sofa in the soft gray fabric with cream contrast welt is paired with the Jermain Chair in a gray and tan key geometric fabric pattern and the Dresden Chair in a light heathered gray solid fabric with a darker gray contrasting welt. The Preston Bench is in a java wood finish with a charcoal gray fabric.

Contact information on index page 70.



Huppé

The Cubic collection is constructed of birch veneer and solid birch. Shown here in a charcoal finish, this collection is available in a variety of Huppé colors.

Contact information on index page 70.



Decor-Rest

This transitional classic rolled arm sectional with semi-attached back cushions is super comfortable. Versatile choice of configurations available.

Contact information on index page 70.



Greenington

The Currant Collection, reminiscent of vintage Mid-Century Danish Modern styling, includes a full dining collection with a 72" leaf table that extends to 92", dining chairs, bench seating and sideboard. Available in a rich honey-toned caramelized finish or new dark walnut. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 70.



BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Rizzy Home

The Highland collection is hand-tufted of 100% Wool, made in India. Sizes available are 2'x3', 3'x5', 5'x8', 8'x10', 9'x12', 8'RD, 2'6"x8'. Sugg. Retail for a 5'x8' is \$699.

Contact information on index page 70.



Capel

New for Spring is the Moor collection. These lattice patterned flat woven rugs are made in India of 100% wool. 5'x8' \$629.

Contact information on index page 70.

Horizon Home

The new Bombay bedroom group features a heavily distressed hand painted finish making each piece unique. Solid wood construction.

Contact information on index page 70.





Rowe

Sectionals are a new addition to the RXO Program. Customers can choose from several design options in the "Rowe Extra Options" program to personalize furniture for different tastes. Options include nailhead detailing, leg style and multiple cushion configurations.

Contact information on index page 70.

Donco Trading

Hardwood twin/twin bunk bed in white finish is also offered in Burnished Brown. \$359 Retail. Can convert to Twin/Full bunk with the option of adding a trundle or dual storage drawers.

Contact information on index page 70.



Elran

Dante, contemporary high leg reclining sofa group, features a box seat, key hole arm and a channel back. The sofa (loveseat) has an inside release handle to recline. The chair features a push back mechanism.

Contact information on index page 70.



GIVE WITHOUT BORDERS

Jenny & Dennis Jones offer advice to fellow retailers based on their experience helping rug weavers in India through the Alternative Education Program.

Interview with Jenny Jones

Editor's note: This is the second in a series of articles that profile furniture industry charitable initiatives. Its purpose is to provide models for furniture retailers who have an interest in supporting existing programs, or in launching meaningful charitable initiatives of their own.

Our interview with Australian retailer and designer Jenny Jones followed the introduction by Jaipur Rugs of 'Connexion by Jenny Jones' at the recent High Point Market. Jenny is donating her US royalties from the collection to benefit the Jenny Jones Trust, an organization charged with promoting women weavers' literacy, numeracy and life skills in rural India. This program works in conjunction with the Alternative Education Program, sponsored by the Jaipur Rugs Foundation.

Jenny Jones and her husband Dennis are the owners of retailer Jenny Jones Rugs & Home based in Perth,

Australia. Furniture World Magazine spoke to Jenny about how AEP got started, and why the decision was made to create a charity that supports people who live well beyond her store's local trading area.

Question: Most retailers do business locally and like to support local charities that resonate with their customers. Why did you look beyond your own retail operation and customer base?

Answer: We also support a number of local charities, however, being involved in purchasing rugs from India which is a big part of our business, we felt that there was a need to give back.

We don't think there is a downside to supporting international causes as the dollar goes so much further in the less developed world.

Question: How did your program

begin and evolve?

Answer: We travelled to India for a number of years seeking a company

"It is extremely important that the process be formally structured as it allows for total transparency. The greater the partners in the project involve themselves in a hands-on mode, the greater the rewards."



Pictured lower left is retailer/designer Jenny Jones holding the 2012 Carpet Design Award in the category Best Modern Design for 'Ruby Room Aqua' by Jaipur Rugs at Domotex, Hannover, Germany.

The program recognizes graduates and holds prize ceremonies to reward top village teachers and weavers who graduate at the top of their class (right).



that we felt comfortable working with for the betterment of the weavers. Our discussions with industry workers in the rural areas of Rajasthan led us to Jaipur Rugs. The Alternative Education Program (AEP) evolved after we approached Jaipur Rugs about ways in which we "could put back" into the industry that provides us with our

livelihood, giving us the opportunity to purchase beautiful hand made rugs that really are "individual pieces of art on the floor".

From these initial discussions, it soon became evident that the vehicle to use was the Jaipur Rugs Foundation (JRF) as established by Mr. N.K. Chaudhary. Discussions continued,

and we put our efforts behind the AEP as a worthwhile and cost effective way to deliver important life skills to the female weaving population. A Project manager was appointed and a budget drawn up with regular evaluation procedures and reports. Village teachers were trained and villages selected to participate. Modules of 25

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At left is the front entrance of Jenny Jones Rugs & Home, a leading Australian retailer of handmade rugs, marketed as, "Art on the floor".

weavers were offered the opportunity to receive literacy, numeracy and life skills. The project was launched at the beginning of Jan 2011 and after 6 months evaluated.

Question: What motivated you to begin this project?

Answer: In India it is estimated that some 350 million people are illiterate. A nice round figure that rolls off the tongue if said quickly! In one way, it is a meaningless and daunting figure, but in another it shows the enormity of the need to make a start working for change. The majority of these people are women living in rural villages, who were never offered the opportunity to go to school.

So, our motivation centered on the premise that weavers are artisans. By recognizing that fact, we concluded that it is important to give them increased status and opportunity so that they can fully participate in what we regard as a basic human right. It was thought that an educational pro-

gram would also motivate them to stay in their villages and continue their work as weavers.

Question: What was the process you went through?

Answer: The process involved a good deal of research that was undertaken by JRF. We all felt that the request for any program had to come from the grassroots up, otherwise it would be of no benefit to the weavers at the village level. I travelled into the village areas and met weavers to gauge their response to our offer. The response was overwhelming, although most displayed a degree of skepticism given that assistance is often offered but then not delivered to the village level.

It must be said that the rural areas of Rajasthan have a beauty that is dotted with village clusters, truly calm, peaceful and naturally beautiful with the slow gait of the camel and the prolific bird life. Pollution free and rich soils compliment the scene.

Question: Why did you set up your own program rather than supporting an existing organization?

Answer: Mainly because we wanted

to control and monitor the program. Jaipur Rugs had already set up its own charity that was the best vehicle to use to deliver the program. They already had an established network of 40,000 weavers spread over Northern India. So, logistics channels were in place and the AEP could piggyback on this extensive network.

Question: What kind of resources, talent and organizational structure were required?

Answer: Human resources and financial resources need to combine effectively to ensure accurate delivery of a program such as ours. We have three partners who all contribute equal funds. The program is delivered through an audited foundation, which in turn, has a formal structure. All partners receive quarterly updates on expenditures and delivery of services. It is extremely important that the process be formally structured to allow for total transparency. It also should be said that the greater the partners in the project involve themselves in a "hands-on" mode, the greater the rewards, and the closer they get to see the project in action. The partners visit the project annually and travel into the rural areas to meet and greet the graduates of the AEP in their villages. Prize ceremonies are held to reward those weavers who have topped their class. We also award prizes to the top village teachers.



"We also support a number of local charities, however being involved in purchasing rugs from India which is a big part of our business, we felt that there was a need to give back."

Question: What are your suggestions for retailers that choose not to create their own charity?

Answer: They can join an existing program like ours or select an established registered charity that works in the less developed world. The charity they choose should maximize its resources to ensure that the greatest percentage of the donated dollar reaches its intended target. They should be independently audited. Every dollar can change a life! There

is nothing more rewarding than seeing a lady weaver gain so much self esteem and sense of achievement when she gets up in front of her peer group and reads aloud to them. Beaming smiles and lots of laughter ripple out across the village from the classroom. It's priceless!

For example, other furniture retailers can join our program by either donating directly or by taking ownership of a village. A retailer might commit to helping 25 weavers for \$30 each. This would give them a direct

involvement in improving and changing lives. It would also ensure that the supporting retail organization gets feedback and maintains contact with a village in rural India. Individual retailers can also speak to our partner Jaipur Rugs to ensure that a certain agreed sum is directed to the AEP as a result of their purchase of Jenny Jones Connexion rugs. Our hope is to get the ball rolling with a substantial cash injection by funding the education of one weaver for every rug purchased.

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A little bit of whimsy can make the sale!

Retail Trends by Janet Holt-Johnstone

This year, TCHFM (The Canadian Home Furnishings Market) celebrated its 40th anniversary. And in a perceived down-beat economy that on both sides of the U.S./Canadian border has been cautiously sneaking back up again, looking over its shoulder all the way! The Quebec Furniture Manufacturers' Association (QFMA) hosted an unexpectedly optimistic gathering of buyers at Mississauga's International Centre.

As has been the case for the past 12 years, a popular feature of the Market was the Quality Canadian Furniture Trends Display, orchestrated by world class designers Pierre D'Anjou and Andre Carron with their usual deft touches of magic. Everything was just a little bit brighter, a little bit more buoyant, a little bit more in sync with what retailers everywhere can do to attract consumers

with that little bit of extra money in their pockets. It was a mini-survey telling us about "pent-up demand for home furnishings that will make everyday environments reflect great times coming". OK!

And there really were smiles all 'round, especially noticeable as groups and independents strolled amongst the Trends Display's 12 vignettes, talking about where they could advantageously put that vividly chic purple sofa or those eco-friendly casegoods in their showrooms. "And how about those trees, real trees, for heaven's sake, in that first display?!"

But there was an over-riding theme that couldn't help but capture everyone's attention, the focus on "Made in Canada". Made in USA and Made in Canada are a big trend, so if you didn't see the extensive section in the March/April issue of Furniture World

on how retailers can position themselves to do a great job with this category, go to www.furninfo.com and read it. Remember the slogan, "Don't let just anyone into your home"? And, "Buying Canadian furniture is ethical, trendy and eco-friendly". Consider the designation, "Quality Canadian Furniture Trends Display". Tags, proudly emblazoned with the Canadian scarlet maple leaf, were everywhere.

Pierre and Andre and Jeanette Ewan, too, back again this year with her new and dramatic Pop-Ups scattered throughout the Market, point to multiple ways and means to sell "quality Canadian" home furnishings, visually, intellectually, emotionally and even patriotically! All "designed and created to stimulate the imagination of retailers and provide them with inspiring merchandising and product



GIVE WITHOUT BORDERS

Question: Please list pitfalls that Furniture World Magazine readers should try to avoid.

Answer: Lack of research, lack of accountability, budget transparency, lack of trained staff. Our family spent 4 years in Africa on aid programs in the 1980s and 1990s and witnessed how a number of charities delivered services to local populations. Many were successful and well run but others were not. So, due diligence is vital.

Ask questions and demand answers. Ask for testimonials. It's the percentage of the donated dollar that reaches the grassroots that is a most important criteria.

Question: Do you have any other

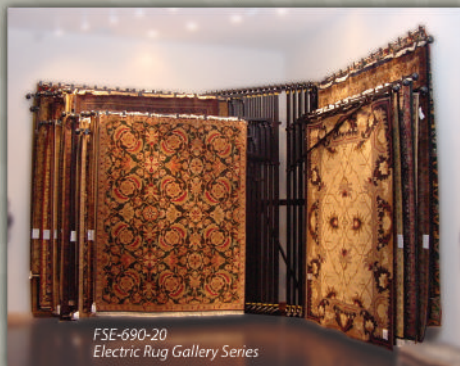
advice for our readers?

Answer: Get involved! It's a most rewarding experience, although it's a world away from your everyday life. Furniture stores and specialty rug retailers that get involved in a program like this are actually giving back to the industry that provides their livelihood. The number of weavers involved in the handmade rug industry is declining rapidly in India. This is due to government work programs and the movement of people from rural areas to the cities. Women are the backbone of village family life. Anything that encourages weavers to stay in their villages, gain respect and elevated status as artisans should be a priority and strongly encouraged.

One further initiative we are exploring is the provision of small affordable cost effective solar lanterns that will provide lighting in rural villages. Electricity is turned off at night in rural India and this is evident when you travel at night and look into the distance - it is pitch black! We want to reward the female weavers with lights that the Ikea Foundation provides on a one to one donation. They cost \$20 each and the batteries last 2 years. These lanterns will also enable weavers to work at night in the heat of summer if so desired. I have personally tested them and they work very well. We are putting out a proposal to Ikea.

Questions about this program can be directed to editor@furninfo.com.

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ideas”.

Pierre walked us through four themed groupings, each with its own sparkle. “The starting point of this concept for us was architectural,” said Pierre. Twelve vignettes, four sets of three, each under its own roof.

ECO THEME

“Eco expresses comfort and eco-friendliness, as you would expect. The pointy roof lines could remind you of a hunting lodge in the forest?! And what do you immediately see? Trees! Of course!” The eco style focuses on simple, raw materials including white wood, wicker, wool, felt, raw cotton, handmade textiles (woven, quilted, knitted or macramé). It showcases local and recycled products, wood furniture with polished surfaces as well as reused objects. The natural colour palette focuses on earth, beige, sand, brown, brick red and soft green tones. The three vignettes pull this into focus.

“Display One is powerfully green, ‘Iguana Green’, no less.” (A creation of Benjamin Moore, like all paints used throughout the Display.) High style, yet relatively small scale, the Cove Collection, designed by Rick

Lovegrove for G. Romano, is built in Montreal using sustainable materials and practices. Good entertaining pieces for urbanites. The Tapis Waves Carpet, actually outdoor, was used for its style and colour. And those trees! By Colibri Art Design, actual old trees from the forest, cleaned, specially treated, all unique, individual works of art. The accent table is fabricated from the same wood with a glass top. And a neat touch, the huge green felt leaves attached to the trees and the table are placemats. Pierre can’t resist a touch of whimsy! Neither can customers. And so quick and easy (and inexpensive!) to add to your showroom display.

No, it’s not a depiction of the Northern Lights as Display Two’s dining room backdrop, or is it? This piece of nature-inspired decorative art was created from two, three, and sometimes five layers of one meter wide transparent mesh, overlapped in geometric formations and softly illuminated by the huge, natural wood central chandelier. The Viebois table is of solid birch in natura finish, the sideboard in opaque white and natura, is birch veneer with solid birch legs

as are the chairs. The wood sculptures are fresh from Colibri’s forests!

Display Three continues the green



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theme in a striking bedroom, the attention-getting linens from Textiles Gauvin reaching out to ensnare customers with a predominant leaf print on pillows and counterpane. Huppé, designer, Joel Dupras, mixes the woodland with architectural elegance, tall, delicate and angular. The Moment Collection uses specially selected American walnut veneer and solid walnut components. (We understand that Joel's mother is also a renowned designer, inherited talent!)

Eco-friendliness is part and parcel of the Alize gel mattress made from memory-foam infused with gel crystals, chosen for this and one other vignette.

If you are wondering how to put the backdrop together, find yourself a nicely shaped art frame at Winners, on sale, preferably, advises Pierre. The design is created with strips of green tape. Just follow your natural instincts.

GETTING COZY

"Now we get cozy!", laughs Pierre. Three more vignettes, these dubbed "Cozy", boast another roof line, a modified pyramid; think of a child's castle's crenellations. "This style features candy-colored pastels that highlight a relaxed look, ideal for a family with young kids. Décor and accessories include light wood furniture, sofas with lots of puffy cushions, indirect lighting, mixed fabrics with small or large patterns. And consider floral prints in your showcasing, stripes and

"Eco expresses comfort and eco-friendliness, as you would expect."

polka dots. The star product, the trend-savvy rocking chair."

Display Four is a refreshing concept for the ultimate juvenile bedroom, the crib, dresser, and Russian birch rocking chair and ottoman created by Dutailier's talented young designer, Melissa Veronneau. Take note of Pierre's eye-catching wall design; it will delight shopping parents. And retailers will be pleased with its ease of application, a series of pink circles standing an eighth of an inch away from a south seas' indigo wall, each pinned in place.

And in Display Five, Pierre and Andre have cleverly picked up on the casually stylish warm-and-fuzzy feel with Jaymar's Todd loveseats. Imagine a comfy pair of blue jeans and translate that thought into an even more comfy navy leather, adorned with huge stitching in a very hip bright orange. The essential backdrop is in Festive Orange, dramatized by a spectacular Casa Luca room divider mounted on the wall. There's a matching table. Dinec is responsible for the entertainment centre with its floating base. The orange highlight is picked up with toss cush-

ions and, in case of sports' night, more cushions boasting team numbers!

Our designers dining room, Display Six, perpetuates the warmth with Bertanie's solid birch table and chairs (the latter structured for good back support and comfort), gathered for a family feast in front of an attractive and well-positioned Dimplex electric fireplace. The rosy backdrop reflects the fire's glow. "Amazing how mood can be evoked with a simple coat of paint," said Pierre. And the Zoe chandelier adds its own glow.

Pierre talked of the strong trend to knitting, hooking and all crafty hobbies, respected Canadian occupations for the past four hundred years during the long northern winters. Woolies are showing up in all fashion arenas, home furnishings as well as apparel. He used woolen scarves to drape the decorative vases on the dining table; how cozy can you get? A conversation starter in your showroom. And a subtle reminder of "Made in Canada", a tradition to treasure.

LOFT CONCEPT

The roof style of the Loft concept vignettes is appropriately pitched at an industrial angle. Old factory buildings in many big cities have been transformed into ultra-trendy homes over the past decade or two. Pierre says his "look" is based on a "domesticated industrial style" and he's geared it appropriately towards

DISPLAY IDEAS

"trend-setting couples. Colours are faded, washed out shades and they include smoky-greys and grey-greens. Accent colours are vibrant cherry red, sun yellow, anise green and fluorescent orange. And for décor and accessories, the look showcases metal objects, extra-large pendant lighting, long tables and quilted fabrics. (Again, the quilting reflects Canadian tradition, both French and English.)

Lofts' first vignette (Display Seven) is another dining room but with an entirely different temperament, expansive, plenty of elbow room. The Cubo table is large and in a black powder-coated finish with a natural zebra wood veneer top and a brushed steel base. Tops can be starphire glass, white quartz or wood veneer. The chairs this Market are giving thought to consumers' comfort and Wave's

adapts instantly to any body shape in brushed steel or powder-coated, and 100 fabrics to choose from.

The accessories here are also large, vases four feet tall with huge flowers, the highly visible chandelier again by Zoe. (Pierre strongly suggests visiting Winners for their sales; he picks up so many items like the monumental vases that lend themselves to making statements of whatever sort you might envi-

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The bamboo floor is particularly interesting. Pierre chose it for its colour (many available!) as well as the eco-friendly sustainability factor.

Display Eight shows Palliser's serene but enormous white sectional sofa, placed to view city or harbor lights from our Loft's floor to ceiling windows. Fluid ultra-modern lines are backed by Surf Blue and Venezuelan Sea paint colours. This sectional can be configured any which way to suit consumers' spaces, and your showroom space. Also, Canadian Le Present constructed the decorative shadow boxes that lend depth to the vignette; use them over and over again in many future displays, an infinite number of possible moods!

The ninth display is restful as all get out, yet there are industrial overtones in the geometric design Pierre conceived, using two gold tones, buttercup and dash of curry. Imagine the play of light and shade through those loft skylights! (Easy to do with a couple of cans of paint and spot lights!) The sleek symmetrical lines of the Mobican bed and chest define the laid back ambience. Thick white fiberglass sticks pick up more light, and the floor is bamboo, eco-friendly, beautiful, durable and available in a multitude of finishes.

THE CHIC LOOK

"Chic's" look is very continental, no-frills yet sophisticated style, ideal for mature couples, and it features contemporary furniture with easy-on-the-eye curves. Colour values are dominated by blends of white and beiges, the space can also be paired with light and dark grays or even a black and white duo, but, never fear, backdrops and accents are far from bland and boring. Draw your customers in with festive orange, rosy blush and dive-into water-drop blue, a spring garden, maybe, or a Caribbean festival! Lighting is diffused, there are small accent tables

"Look for bedding in interesting aboriginal prints rather than dark jewel tones. Have fun with colours, particularly the oranges, the neons."

-Janette Ewan, lifestyle & décor expert

and long cotton or linen veil curtains soften the atmosphere.

In Display 10, Cobi Ladner really spreads her visionary wings with butterfly mauve shades in both sleek sofa and chair. Refreshingly clean lines, elegant nail studs and again, the colours! Gibson plum and Corsica grape, backed by Pierre's chartreuse backdrop. His use of a series of small shaped metallic mirrors (bought on sale, of course!) and a shag carpet for additional texture, round out the "chic" statement. Cobi, with her "cobistyle", is one of Décor-Rest's associate designers and a new talent at the design board in the home furnishings marketplace. For 15 memorable years, she was Editor-in-Chief of Canadian House and Home magazine prior to her decision just three years ago to fully utilize her design skills and develop her own line of furniture and accessories. And she, too, is an enthusiastic supporter of Canadian Quality marketing.

Pierre and Andre concocted a different, more interesting approach to the conventional arrangement of casegoods in a bedroom setting, magnifying the appeal of Durham Furniture's "Made in Canada" Summerset Signature collection, Display 11. Plenty of glowing floral glamour against the "begonia" back-

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drop will draw customers into the display, to then become ensnared by the handcrafted artistry of solid maple, fluted pilasters, rope twist molding, turned feet and the soft shimmer of antique brass hardware. One utterly 'chic' and functional idea was that of placing a small desk beside the bed. Spaces these days sometimes demand unusual but convenient and still attractive solutions to customers' needs, i.e. office space within the home that meets all criteria for aesthetic pleasure as well as work efficiency. A round solid cherry table lamp occupies the partner's bedside table, topped by, guess what, a pleasing Gen-Lite lamp.

Display 12 uses the appeal of Passion Plum in painterly fashion, leaning on the 2012 trend to royal purples of all tones and shades. A

"With display, well you all know that I create most of my own props. And you too can hunt for that perfect object to complete your perfect presentation. Go to sales, transform objects, repaint them, use strong colour when it's right to do so."

tasty choice for a dining room that showcases Meubles Canadel's flexible round table, chairs and sideboard, creations of Claude Lamarche. Against that dominant wall, the designers have arranged a treasure trove of dishes of various sizes and patterns, all classic. The plates and the vase were discovered at Winners, "a veritable Aladdin's cave!" all on sale at \$3 a piece! (Overheard, two retailers in conversation: "Look at that dish, it's Wedgwood and my grandmother had that same pattern!" The answer, "Wonder if that sale's still running?")

After 12 years conceptualizing, researching, "the joy of the puzzle", Pierre sees some changes in our volatile marketplace. "Finding interesting, innovative furniture for the Trends Display is easier now than it

has ever been. All the manufacturers are doing something new, and it's really nice, really pleasing. People are working harder to sell to the United States because of the bad economy and the currency fluctuations, and they are also working harder to sell to the Canadian market!

"I believe that eventually the economy and the currency idiosyncrasies will improve. An amazing sign of gathering optimism and confidence is the huge surge in condo construction in the City of Toronto, cranes dotting the sky everywhere! All those thousands of condos will need good quality, stylish furniture!

"With display, well you all know that I create most of my own props. And you too can hunt for that perfect object to complete your perfect presentation. Go to sales, transform objects, repaint them, use strong colour when it's right to do so. And particularly look for the sales at the Winners stores, really nice accessories and paintings!"

Last year, Janette Ewen, Canada's own lifestyle and décor expert, joined forces with TCHFM and became the first ambassador for the then newly named "Quality Canadian Furniture Trends Display", as well as carrying a full load of print and television appearances. For 2012, she introduced her Pop-Up Vignettes, labeled as "A sneak peek at the hottest furniture and décor trends", scattered throughout the Market's Halls. They were designed, she said, "to stimulate the imagination and inspire new design ideas".

"I'm still making appearances on CityLine (an hour-long morning television programme devoted to lifestyle), and also working both in the U.S. and

Canada on various projects."

Janette gave a popular workshop during Market, discussing merchandising, window display, point of sale purchases and other topics important to Market-attending retailers.

Her Pop-Ups, 12 of them, were all highly visible and provocative. "Back to Black" was a standout. To quote Janette, "Slightly mysterious with touches of masculinity, this look is rich, luxurious, well-crafted and very dark. Imagine a 1920's Park Avenue apartment with classic lines, full of dark wood, leather, velvet, intricately carved furnishings finished by culturally rich accessories . . . timeless appeal and for those confident in their sense of style." The fun of the Pop-Ups was in their singularity. Another, "Birds of a Feather", was "Fresh, floating and feminine, taken from couture runways. A spirit of youth and softness. The feather motif brings a whimsical touch to the home. It's a look that allows space to simply exhale!" And "Faded Chinoiserie", another surprising and delightful reach, was "Taken from an era that embraced a sense of fun, excitement and wanderlust, simply a softer version of this now classic style of design. Muted pastels with muted patina, crystal, and gold and mercury glass complement the overall feel of the vignette."

Janette recreated the Pop-Ups for the National Home Show. This time directed to the consumer audience, the vignettes provided them with a preview of furnishings they'll see in stores later this year. And a very nice plus factor, Janette hosted a Cash and Carry Charity Sale. All the furniture and accessories in the Pop-Ups were donated by TCHFM exhibitors and

Quality Canadian Furniture manufacturers. And all proceeds went to Food Banks Canada.

Her thoughts on trends in general? "Look for bedding in interesting aboriginal prints rather than dark jewel tones. Have fun with colours, particularly the oranges, the neons."

A comment too, from colour maven Cobi Ladner after the Market. "I believe we are completely right about the consumers' enthusiastic attitude towards the use of colour and interest

in the home. Everyone's fed up with a neutral world!"

A point made by the QFMA: "Furniture made in Canada is local. So it hasn't travelled thousands of miles to reach your front door. Going green really can make a difference." It's part of the pretty universal "going green" message. And, it would seem from many sources, this is becoming increasingly important to the North American consumer as each year passes.



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YOUR STORIES

Part 13: After almost 25 years of business in an expanding economy, Alberta-based retailer re-brands to express its vision, and attract new customers.

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

Edmonton, Alberta is the Gateway to the North, an entrepreneurial Mecca, with more than a million citizens, and home to North America's largest shopping mall. It's the fastest growing city beyond the 49th parallel, and just 140 miles southwest of the Canadian Rockies. Perched strategically at Edmonton's north end, within geographic shouting distance of the oil sands' frontier towns of Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray, Debbie Crepeau's re-branded 10,000 square foot UpperWoods Furniture Company is as effervescent as the economy.

Note the word "re-branded". Why would a retailer whose store is going like gangbusters in an environment that's soaring stratospherically decide to change anything? Anything at all!

"It was in October, 2009, even in Edmonton a time that could only be described as a tough, or at least a difficult economy, when it occurred to us. It was the right time to reflect upon who and what we were in an arena of

worldwide recession but on the edge, in the west, of anticipated intense growth and opportunity! After more than two decades in business our loyal customer base was comprised of people who loved our Royal Oak home furnishings. We knew, however, that there were many more customers out there who had no real idea what we had to offer. A lot of people thought we were a traditional oak store. We needed to change our name, our image, to reflect our product lines of Canadian made solid wood furniture in styles ranging from urban casual to rustic country.

"The name 'UpperWoods' expresses our vision as precisely as you can get. We like having 'woods' as part of our name. Plural, instead of singular conveys the array of woods we carry –

maple, birch, oak, cherry and pine, as well as exotics. The word 'upper' is connected with our Canadian roots and Canadian product lines. Upper Canada, now southern Ontario, was first established as a British colony in 1763. In later years, it became known as 'Canada West'. OK, we're a lot further west, but the sentiment is the same. Canadian, and proud of it.

"Has anything else changed? No. Same Canadian craftsmanship. Same excellent value. Same nice people. That's it. Our task is to communicate the 'message'".

The history of UpperWoods, properly speaking, goes back almost 25 years. And if you consider Debbie's parents' entry into the world of home furnishings, all the way to the '60s when Pioneer Furniture Store made its

"An alliterative slogan was developed for UpperWoods to reiterate and reinforce Debbie's core conviction, 'Passionate Purveyors of Canadian Made Furniture'."



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Shots of UpperWoods' current upstairs showroom, the soon to be Edison Gallery, plus a photo of Deb Crepeau (right) and Trudy Callaghan, Odrod Media.



debut. "Pioneers" they were. The Buryniuk family is of Ukrainian descent. Violet and Ernie believed, presciently, that Alberta offered "better opportunities" than the province of Saskatchewan, their original Canadian home. One of seven children, Debbie and her siblings were deeply involved from the get go with the enterprise.

"My mother was creative, hardworking, energetic," said Debbie. "My

father was a truck driver and travelled constantly. Mother had this great idea to buy and sell used furniture. And she was doing very well with it. One day my father came home unexpectedly, earlier than usual, and discovered to his astonishment that she had sold most of the furniture in the house! 'That's it!' he said. 'Open a store!'"

She did. And soon Ernie joined her in the business, new and used furniture. "But Mom decided she just didn't like new furniture. So she started yet another store and she did so well she kept Dad's store afloat!

"We all did our homework at the store. Mom and Dad focused on the business every day from early morning to late at night." But Debbie knew she was destined to be in the home furnishings business and began as a teenager, part time and after school, learning her trade. Somewhere along the way, there was a name change from Pioneer to Oak Lane.

It was in 1988 that Deb decided she "needed to be on her own. With the help of my parents, I opened an all oak store and called it Royal Oak

Furniture. I wanted to do things differently. Mom said we kids should not work for anyone else, we should work for ourselves. And as in so many other respects, she was right!

"Why oak? It's a beautiful wood! But over the years I found it was important to add maple, cherry and birch, more styles, more contemporary and transitional upholstery, all with

"Mother had this great idea to buy and sell used furniture. One day my father came home unexpectedly, and discovered to his astonishment that she had sold most of the furniture in the house!"

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UPPERWOODS

more emphasis on furniture fashion.

"My younger brother, Terry, was very much a part of Royal Oak from the beginning, brawn and brains! He made a great contribution to the success of the store. Both Terry and my mother passed away from cancer some years ago, the inspiration for our work with Edmonton's Cross Cancer Institute and Rickert House."

Ten years after the birth of Royal Oak, Deb encountered Trudy Callaghan of Odvod Media, a firm described as "marketing outfitters", and Trudy has been her "right hand" ever since. During the Royal Oak years, many innovative promotions were conceptualized and implemented.

"When Trudy began to urge me to make a name change, to rebrand, I was horrified at first! I worked so hard to make Royal Oak known, I said, and you want me to change my name and image?

"My ideals are pretty much the same as they were at the outset. I still feel very strongly about selling only Canadian made furniture even though during all the tough times (and believe me there have been some!) I was continually being offered import product. If I had decided to alter my plan and start buying import, and then was creative enough and did not value my reputation, I could stand to make a lot of money. However, I refused to go down that road. Canadian furniture is unbeatable and it doesn't matter what celebrity is endorsing any particular product, bottom line you just can't beat true Canadian quality.

"Then there is service; you just must provide excellent service. I am always reminding my staff that we MUST provide our customers with amazing ser-

vice. Remember, I tell them, without our customers we do not need to have this conversation! It's really that simple. Sometimes you really don't have to dig much deeper than what's right in front of you!

"But rebranding. Year after year we would advertise, using beautiful images of all sorts of furniture, not just the same old 'oakey dokey' stuff. We were still getting comments from some potential customers that they did not want to shop at an oak store. I have to admit that it was a difficult decision, but once we got going with it, it allowed us to retain the best of the past and make positive changes to take things up a few levels.

"You always need to be prepared to change the way you do things even though sometimes it's uncomfortable and you almost feel that you are contradicting yourself. Times change, people's concepts and wants are con-

tinually changing. If you are not willing to move with the times, you will surely be left behind."

An alliterative slogan was developed for UpperWoods to reiterate and reinforce Debbie's core conviction, "Passionate Purveyors of Canadian Made Furniture". This tag is used on all ads, mailing pieces, the website, television and radio.

A new website has been launched. "It's proving to be a big asset, an awful lot of work but it's really worth it. We get lots of compliments and, of course, customers! Trends and styles are important, however, we are focusing first on quality and great value. That is what will stand the test of time. Trends come and go. And I absolutely would consider, have considered! selling product on line. We have started with 'Web Deals', clearing out products from our warehouse. For example, right now we have a \$2200

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Pictured is the UpperWoods team. Starting on the left is owner Deb Crepeau, Kim their Designing Diva and Ross the delivery expert. The gent in the red shirt is Rob the controller. Next is Dave who is capable at helping out in every aspect of the company from management to sales to warehousing and customer service. To his right is Carla the quality control specialist, Brian, Donna Terrie and behind is Anastasia. At far right is Cathie.



"I tell my staff, without our customers we do not need to have this conversation! It's really that simple."

solid maple dining table, slightly damaged, and selling for \$1100.

"Trudy is recreating a very popular newsletter previously designed for Royal Oak that featured the care and maintenance of fine furniture, profiles of many of our suppliers, décor trends and more. She should be ready to launch it in the fall.

"In the future, we will probably use both Facebook and Twitter. We are keeping an open mind with technologies, attitudes are changing so much and so quickly. I want to increase the size of our database also using e-mail addresses. However, I am very aware that consumers are becoming more

and more reluctant to share this information as they're being inundated by some companies on a weekly basis or even more. So we have a new programme at UpperWoods that will educate our customers as to how we will use their information. This programme is called 'Perks and Privileges'. Throughout the showroom, there will be very visible table top signs that will explain our promise to not abuse their data, as well as provide details as to what the 'Perks and Privileges' really are. By the way, I'm still working out the fine details!

"We believe our demographic to be the 23-plus young professionals, trendy, eclectic. And the higher income earners right up to 65 years of age and beyond.

"We've added Arts and Crafts to our original wood mix of urban casual and rustic country, and we're 'marrying' it to lighting in the new Edison Gallery (named after Thomas Edison, of course!) just built on our upper level. Metal brackets, brick walls, beams, very Frank Lloyd Wright-ish. My little sister, Lindie, and her husband, Gerd, owners of Woodbeam Company Inc., designed and engineered the space for and with us.

"Our marketing approach has necessarily changed. We are using print

ads for events, twice each week in the Edmonton Journal and in 'Avenue', a premium glossy magazine, 12 months of the year. All ads are placed on the right hand page in publications; if they are smaller than full page, in the bottom right hand corner.

"We are using television a few times each year using Global Television during the morning and evening news to reach our demographic. And these commercials also appear on our website.

"We used to send out 100,000 postcards to our data base, plus unaddressed cards to different postal codes with suitable demographics. We've stopped that and are now getting to our audience in different ways.

"Our annual Customer Appreciation Nights continue. A really great wine and cheese. They are always successful. Every invited guest receives a very attractive Monet-like hand-painted ceramic trivet by Artables, an innovative local company. And we're talking about creating new promotions.

"I'm happy to report that we have kept most of our old customers and gained lots of new ones who had not been attracted to Royal Oak; we've heard that they assumed the furniture designs would be old fashioned!"

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ANDY SHER
 Westlife Furniture & Beddings, Auckland, New Zealand



"We partnered with Larry Mullins to run a Storewide Clearance Sale in our rural town of 1000. Coach Larry provided the playbook to run an unbelievable sale that created a buying fever unmatched in recent sales held by Dralle's. We are so happy Larry was recommended to us. Thanks Larry, I know this was a small sale compared to what you are use to, but I thank you for helping out the 'little guy!'"

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 (Be sure to read Larry's timely article in this month's *Furniture World!*)

RETAIL STORIES

UpperWoods' preferred customer list now totals approximately 8,000.

"We have not had a booth for awhile in the local Home Show; we felt we could spend our time and energy more productively. However, we might consider doing it again in a different way in the future.

"We continue to value highly our talented suppliers. One of them, Holly Woods, a personal hero, was a local Entrepreneur of the Year. She is a talented craftsperson who manufactures wonderful huge, heavy, original tables and takes a really serious interest in producing quality pieces."

Other suppliers include Durham, West Bros., Verbois, Dine-Art, and TH Solid Wood.

Debbie attended the 2012 Toronto Furniture Market last January, and added "the beautifully designed upholstery of Frank and Carmela Perri, of Perri Fine Furniture" to UpperWoods supplier list. She spent time at the Trends Display (story in this issue) and was impressed with "the creative design techniques and brilliant use of colour".

Her most heartfelt commitment, "Staying true to what I believe. Canadian made furniture. Supporting the local community. Customer service. I have been doing business with some superb manufacturers for almost a quarter of a century and have made great friendships with many of the people I've been fortunate enough to work with. I align my company with manufacturers who provide not only fantastic furniture, but also stand behind their products. This allows me to give UpperWoods' customers the best furniture and service available anywhere."

We explored Debbie Crepeau's dedication to Canadian made goods

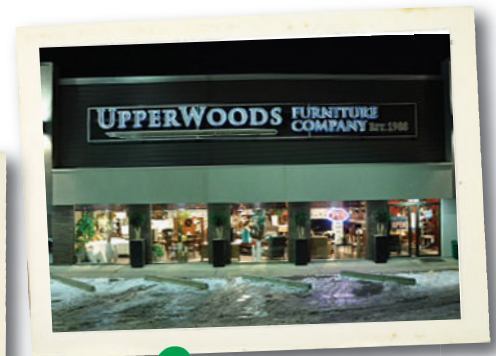
in greater depth, and she provided insights that any US or Canadian retailer selling domestically made furniture and accessories can use. She said, "Canadian consumers are now

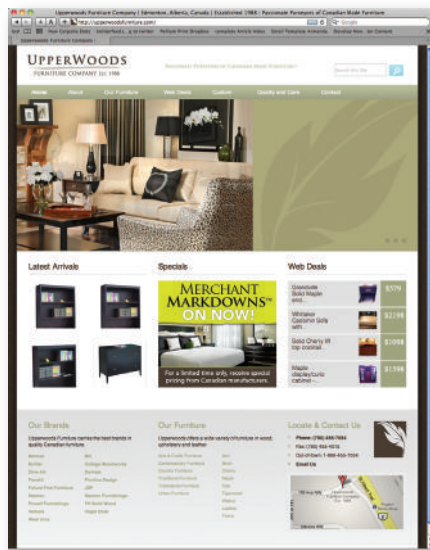
"Consumers are becoming more reluctant to share this information... so we have a new programme called 'Perks and Privileges' that will educate our customers as to how we will use their information."

definitely looking for domestically made furniture. Many have purchased the good looking off-shore products at cheap prices only to be reminded that 'you get what you pay for' most of the time. A year or so later these people find themselves looking to replace the failing furniture, unfortunately then filling our landfills with the substandard stuff. We actively promote Canadian Made Quality Furniture. This is UpperWoods' story and we're very proud of it. And our customers appreciate our approach. We don't use specific techniques to highlight Canadian Made. It's not really needed in our store since ALL our furniture is Canadian Made. Our designer, Kim, highlights our complete showroom. Our sales people (all of whom have design background) introduce the topic of Made in Canada as they greet customers when they enter



Store exterior shown under construction and following the rebranding initiative with new signage.





At left the first brochure Debbie Crepeau made for her Royal Oaks store, as well as the home page of her newly rebranded UpperWoods website that features Latest Arrivals, Specials and Web Deals.

our showroom, great quality, solid wood, superior finishing process, controlled emissions. One of our associates, Anastasia from Belarus, is a furniture designer. Many of our suppliers are focused on their mission, and are becoming 'green' and using finishes that are formaldehyde free."

For years, Debbie has addressed the issue of Canadian goods suitability to the

northern climate. She compares Alberta's humidity with that of the Sahara Desert, an environment in which many imported

"We have started with 'Web Deals', clearing out products from our warehouse."

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Jodi Mason, Owner Urban Home
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UPPERWOODS

pieces could easily “crack, warp or break, whereas properly kilned northern woods remain stable.”

UpperWoods range is not only Fort McMurray and Grand Prairie. Debbie reaches out to British Columbia and Saskatchewan, neighbouring provinces, as well as Alberta. “There is a real advantage when they buy in Alberta. They pay provincial sales tax in their own provinces, a tax that is not exacted in Alberta.” A few months ago, a disastrous fire virtually obliterated the town of Slave Lake. Debbie is engaged in helping with the rebuilding and refurnishing process.

Rebranding, done well, according to experts in the field, creates a sense of authenticity and trust when customers perceive their needs are being

responded to. The process must be implemented in a subtle and methodical manner. There is no magic formula but careful strategy like that employed by Debbie, Trudy and their team enables customers to invest their emotions in the “new” entity. They must continue to maintain constant care with each individual project, interacting with professional colleagues and the community that surrounds them.

Said Debbie, “I was reflecting back to the days when my showroom was full of furniture that I loved, it was all my style. As a result, business was not as great as it could have been! Needless to say, I quickly learned to be more diverse in the product I chose for my showroom!

“Recently I came across my very first attempt at a brochure. WOW! It is probably 20 years or so old, and I just discovered that I neglected to include my ‘phone number. I had printed my fax number instead!

“When I stop and think about how I got to this point in my career, I almost shudder. And I’m very grateful as it was a rough road. And one thing that I will never forget is where it all started and how I got here.”

Debbie and her staff are supporters of Global Television Edmonton’s “Woman of Vision” programme, and they hold Silver Sponsorship. The programme celebrates the accomplishments of outstanding Edmonton area women and 12 recipients of this recognition are honored at an annual

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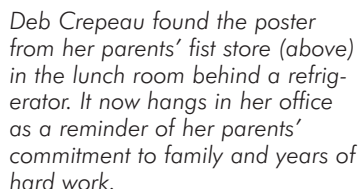
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UpperWoods uses print ads for events, twice each week in the "Edmonton Journal", (left) and in "Avenue", a premium glossy magazine, 12 months of the year. They used to send out mailings of 100,000 postcards (above) but have discontinued that in favor of other media.

Their primary community outreach involves the Rickert House, a refuge for people who live outside the city and need a place to stay while they're receiving cancer treatment. "The home was totally gutted

and refurbished and we supplied all of the furniture for this home. We want anyone who has to endure such an unpleasant experience, at the very least, not have to 'go home' to a stark hotel room. Instead they can go to this cozy little house with

all creature comforts." Patients' families are also welcome at Rickert. The facility is named after the original owners of the home. (www.rickert-house.ca)

-Janet Holt-Johnstone

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