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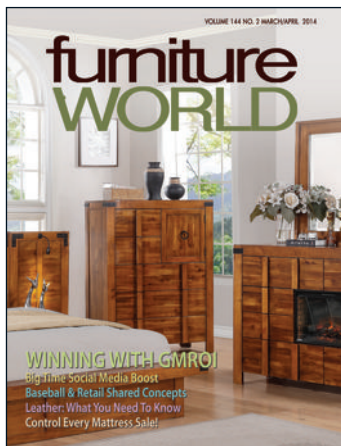
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EDITOR'S CORNER

Winter Retail Lessons

As I am writing this, we anticipate what will hopefully be the last snow storm in the Northeast this winter. So, it seems appropriate to reflect on recent lessons learned. Personally, I found out the hard way that it's not a good idea to go on a roof to fix a gutter during a snow storm.

At retail there have been lessons as well. It's not breaking news that the weather took a toll on retail traffic in many parts of the country. For furniture retailers whose ecommerce capabilities are not what they could be, the bitter cold traffic these past months should be a strong reminder that when consumers stay home, they can still shop online for furniture with competitors. The good news is that even the most local of retailers can compete against the big guys online with a bit of help in setting up just the right website coupled with a razor sharp focus on driving traffic to it with SEO and pay per click.

Also, when traffic slows it becomes even more important to make the most of every UP. This issue includes two wonderful features on how to do just that, by controlling each and every sales encounter. Enjoy!

-Russell Bienenstock, Editorial Director

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IMPROVE MERCHANDISE PERFORMANCE USING GMROI

by David McMahon

Let me ask you a simple question. If you could own one of two similar businesses, each producing equal margin volume but one of them carried greater inventory, which would you choose? Of course you would choose the business with less inventory.

It's bizarre that there is such wide variation in inventory levels among comparable retail furniture operations. The direct result is that the higher inventory businesses experience lower profits and less cash flow than their competition. This in turn limits sales growth due to fewer funds being available for re-investment.

Operations that carry less inventory at the same margin volume minimize their operating expenses due to lower carrying costs in terms of storage, damages, machinery, interest, and people to maintain that inventory. Being leaner allows them to maximize cash due to lower trade payables and greater profit. These operations tend to have higher sales growth rates too. This is due to a consistently higher

open-to-buy and money available for growth investment. Best seller stock-outs can be minimized and new merchandise can be tested more often than operations that have their hands tied due to bulging over-stock.

Whatever the situation, there is always room for improvement, which begins with tracking. To begin tracking, a metric must be used. Total inventory dollars is not a metric. That means nothing on its own. Inventory must be compared against something. This is the purpose of GMROI. Gross Margin Return on Inventory compares your inventory to the margin dollars that it produces. The GMROI formula is simple: $GMROI = \text{Gross Margin Dollars annualized} / \text{average inventory on hand}$.

Here is how to use GMROI as a metric to improve performance:

1. Track GMROI for your entire operation on a monthly basis: You do this to get an overall picture of how your merchandise is performing at a particular point in time. Suppose it is

April third and you set aside a couple hours to review your progress and to strategize. Take your sales for the past three months (Jan 1 to March 31) and subtract your landed cost. That will give you your gross margin dollars. Now annualize that number over one year by taking your gross margin dollars divided by three and multiplied by 12 months. For example, if sales were \$4 million for three months and landed cost was \$2.2 million annualized, GM would be \$7.2 million. Now figure average inventory by taking the inventory at the start of the period and at the end of the period and dividing it by two. (You can average over one month or several months as long as you are consistent in your formula.) For example if inventory began with \$3.49 million and ended with \$3.57 million, the average inventory that you carried would be \$3.53 million.

In this example, your GMROI is $2.04 = (\$7.2 / \$3.53)$. That means that \$1 in inventory generated a return of \$2.04. Whatever your number is, the most important thing is that

"The big observation is that the top selling vendor, Vendor A, actually is pulling the category down with a GMROI of \$1.64 compared with the category average of \$1.99."

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Chart #1: Track GMROI For All Vendors Sorted By Sales Volume

Category/Vendor	Average Inventory	Annualized Sales	Landed Costs	Annualized Gross Margin	Gross Margin %	GMROI
All	\$3,530,000	\$16,000,000	\$8,800,000	\$7,200,000	45%	\$2.04
Upholstery	\$650,000	\$4,000,000	\$2,100,000	\$1,900,000	48%	\$2.92
Leather	\$690,000	\$3,200,000	\$1,824,000	\$1,376,000	43%	\$1.99

Chart #2: Track GMROI For Three Vendors In The Leather Category

Category/Vendor	Average Inventory	Annualized Sales	Landed Costs	Annualized Gross Margin	Gross Margin %	GMROI
Leather	\$690,000	\$3,200,000	\$1,824,000	\$1,376,000	43%	\$1.99
Vendor A	\$250,000	\$1,000,000	\$590,000	\$410,000	41%	\$1.64
Vendor B	\$190,000	\$995,000	\$575,000	\$420,000	42%	\$2.21
Vendor C	\$50,000	\$300,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	50%	\$3.00

you know it. And, that you are tracking it so you can improve it!

(Note: Although most good inventory management systems can do the calculations for you, it is important that you understand how to do the math in your sleep. That is one thing that separates inventory management professionals from novices.)

2. Track GMROI for all vendors sorted by sales volume. List them underneath their respective categories.

The previous step tells you where you are overall. Step two is used to help hone in on where improvements are needed. All merchandise belongs to two families: a Category and a Vendor. In full line Furniture Retail, for example, there are roughly 12 primary merchandise categories. (For example: Upholstery, Occasional, Leather, Motion, Dinette, Dining Room,

Bedroom, Mattress, Office, Youth, Accessory, Rugs). First, it is important to know your GMROI for each category. This allows you to spot which categories are pulling your overall GMROI up or down. By doing this you will likely see that some categories such as mattresses are consistently higher than others such as occasional. You can clearly see where your money is coming from and where it is going.

EXAMPLE

In Chart #1 above, two product categories are compared with the overall annualized results. Together, Upholstery and Leather make up 45% of the entire sales volume. If these areas can be improved, this will have a significant impact on the entire businesses' cash flow. Upholstery is definitely out-performing Leather. In

Upholstery there is less inventory carried, a higher sales volume produced, at a higher margin. Overall Upholstery GMROI is \$2.92 compared with the average at \$2.04 and Leather at \$1.99. This business should take steps to improve Leather GMROI by creating a system that promotes leaner, faster turning inventory at a higher GM, thereby contributing to an increase in overall GMROI.

Now, under each category list the vendors that make up that category. When you list them, sort them by their sales volume. This allows you to see the most important vendors that influence the results at the top. In Chart #2 above, you can see how this might look using three vendors in the Leather category.

The big observation here is that the top selling vendor, Vendor A, actually is pulling the category down. It has a

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"The big observation here is that the top selling vendor, Vendor A, actually is pulling the category down. It has a GMROI of \$1.64 compared with the category average of \$1.99."

GMROI of \$1.64 compared with the category average of \$1.99. As a comparison, Vendor B does a similar sales volume but carries \$60,000 less in inventory on average. Vendor C produces the highest GMROI at \$3 because it requires a minimal amount of investment and the salespeople are selling it at 50% gross margin.

3. Determine areas of strengths, averages, and weaknesses: When you perform analysis on your own data, clearly identify categories in terms of strong, average, and weak performers in terms of GMROI.

Using the examples above, note that areas of strength in Upholstery and for Leather Vendor C. If this were your data you might find that Leather Vendor B is average and Leather Vendor A is one that needs attention. This type of analysis will help you focus on the areas of your merchandise that will make the biggest and fastest improvement in your business.

4. Define improvement strategy: This is the step where you must set the overall goals for your merchandise performance improvements. First, assign a project leader for your team. Then, periodically review the progress each month to determine if the strate-

gy is working or whether it needs to be fine-tuned. A big problem that some businesses have is that they see what needs to be done, but they don't manage the process, so change is slow. If your improvement strategy is important to you, then you must check your results often.

This example shows a big opportunity. The obvious area to focus on is improving Leather Vendor A. The general strategy will be to increase GMROI to above the current store average, to a 2.05, within 3 months. The project will be assigned to the Head Buyer and Sales Manager to manage. They will reduce inventory levels and work on increasing gross margins.

5. Execute improvement tactics: Let's continue to use Leather Vendor A and get more specific about what needs to happen for the strategy to be executed. This hinges on answering the question: How can we go about reducing the inventory and increasing gross margin without harming sales?

Here are some tactics:

- *Set an open-to-buy for new merchandise trials. Do not purchase new inventory until this area of the business is at the desired merchandise \$ level for sales.*
- *Execute a price markdown or inventory aging system to highlight stagnant inventory in the line-up. Use various actions to sell old inventory. This may include spiffing*

the sale at a higher commission percent.

- *Ensure that all merchandise is displayed and continues to be displayed quickly.*
- *Look at scheduling deliveries faster with a cross-docking system.*
- *Review best seller and special order pricing for hidden margin opportunities. There are often micro pricing adjustments that can be made that add up to quite large profits.*

6. Return to step 1: So, what would happen in this example if the business managed to successfully execute a strategy to grow the GMROI of Leather Vendor A to 2.05? Refer to charts titled GMROI For Vendor A Before & After on page 14 to see one possibility that is achievable:

- *The result of funds freed up from inventory is \$26,000 on average.*
- *The result of extra margin dollars produced is \$50,000 extra per year.*

The effort is worth it. This is just one area that, if improved, will have a significant impact. Multiply this over many areas over time and the combined results of a higher GMROI will be massive.

It needs to be noted that GMROI tracking, strategizing and improvement execution does not end. Best practice companies go through the



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GMROI For Vendor A - BEFORE

Category/Vendor	Average Inventory	Annualized Sales	Landed Costs	Annualized Gross Margin	Gross Margin %	GMROI
Vendor A	\$250,000	\$1,000,000	\$590,000	\$410,000	41%	\$1.64

GMROI For Vendor A - AFTER

Category/Vendor	Average Inventory	Annualized Sales	Landed Costs	Annualized Gross Margin	Gross Margin %	GMROI
Vendor A	\$224,000	\$1,000,000	\$540,000	\$460,000	46%	\$2.05

process of improvement on a continual bases. Therefore, this final step just takes you back to step 1 for you to continue the never ending cycle of inventory management.

Every operation has areas of strengths, averages and weaknesses.

Every operation has room to improve. The willingness to use GMROI as a management and operational tool is one factor that separates the best performing stores from their peers. Set aside some time each month to review your results and develop a strategy for

improvement using GMROI as your driver for success.

About David McMahon: David McMahon is the Director of Consulting and Performance Groups at PROFITsystems, a Division of Accellos. He is a Certified Management Accountant and Professional Consultant. If you wish to chat about growing your business, David McMahon has offered a limited amount of his time to discuss this with you. David is a Certified Management Accountant and Senior Business Consultant for PROFITsystems, Inc. Questions about this or any of David's articles archived on FURNITURE WORLD Magazine's website at <http://www.furninfo.com/Authors/List> can be directed to David@profitsystems.com or call 800-888-5565.

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FURNITURE LIBRARY

GARDENS DEDICATION

The Bienenstock Furniture Library will officially unveil The Pat Plaxico Gardens during the April 2014 High Point Market. Show visitors are encouraged to check out the Library, enjoy the gardens, its interior spaces and resources.

Named in honor of designer Pat Plaxico, whose distinguished service to the furnishings community has earned her a reputation for excellence, the gardens are a place where anyone with an interest in furniture and design, can find inspiration. "The sculptures, landscaping and additional parking, made possible by donations from friends of the Library," explains current Library Board President, Russell Bienenstock, "unify its interior and exterior spaces, making the new campus ideally suited for hosting furniture industry groups and events."

The garden project is just the latest

facilities update undertaken by the Library. It's book collection was recently re-cataloged and the entire Interior re-designed. A new conference room available for meetings, seminars, lectures, and events was added, and the building expanded to improve access, and accessibility.

For those who have not visited before, BBFL is one of the most interesting specialty libraries in America. It is located on North Main Street in High Point, just a mile North of the Market's center. Open all year, it is used by furniture designers, interior designers, students, manufacturers, industry suppliers and retailers.

The collection of more than 5,000 books and periodicals include significant volumes on design, furniture, interiors, architecture, textiles, finishes, and construction published since

1640. Rare books such as original works by the 18th century furniture masters Chippendale, Sheraton and Hepplewhite, plus hundreds of others can be viewed in a temperature and humidity controlled rare book room.

"The garden includes several outdoor spaces which lend themselves to meeting areas, notes Pat Plaxico. "Paired with the spaces available inside the library, there are opportunities to have lectures, retreats and seminar space for groups up to 25. It is very heartwarming that so many folks have contributed to the gardens. It has literally been a 'grass roots' effort. I really love all the pieces of sculpture which add to the fun and playful nature of the gardens. The gardens are a little gem of solitude on a busy city street."

Charles Sutton, past Board President adds, "The labels of icon, legend, Renaissance woman and creative genius all do apply to Pat for her contributions to our industry, the Furniture Library, her profession, the community and state. But what I have always admired about Pat is that she is a 'get it done worker'. If she is on board with a project, she is always a 100% contributor; giving her thoughts and time pro bono to the effort".

"Show visitors are encouraged to check out the Library, enjoy the gardens, its interior spaces and resources."



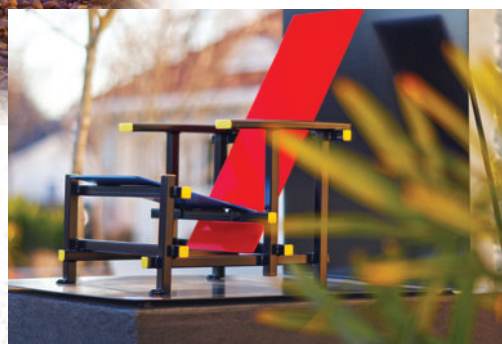


The Red and Blue Chair is a reproduction Gerrit Rietveld design, representative of the De Stijl art movement. Donated by Charles and Martha Sutton.

Large, stainless steel geometric focal point of the Pat Plaxico Gardens titled "Jitterbug" was given to honor L. Paul Brayton, long time Library Board Member and furniture industry icon.

Three bronze books represent knowledge, while the open mirror, stainless book invokes imagination. The sculpture was given to honor Charles B. Sutton, long time board member and President of the Board, 2011-2013.

"See, Hear, Speak No Evil" sculpture designed by Raymond Waites was donated to the Library by Mark and Julie Phillips of the Phillips Collection



In the near future the Library intends to add a scholarship for Landscape Architecture and Garden Design to complement the existing design competition scholarships for Interior and Furniture Design. Also on the drawing board are the addition of a high tech space for collaboration, and the launch of the "Speaking Volumes" design seminar series.

About Pat Plaxico: Plaxico is a nationally recognized interior designer renowned for the reuse of historic buildings — adapting old structures for new purposes. Her portfolio includes Historic Market Square, the EJ Victor building, the Phillips Building (now High Point Convention and Visitors Bureau) and the Bernice

Bienenstock Furniture Library. She's been a member of the Furniture Library board for 38 years.

About the Library: The Bernice Bienenstock Furniture Library is a worldwide center for research, design and collaboration, which holds the world's largest collection of rare and significant books on the history, and design of furniture. Founded in 1970 by Furniture World and the Bienenstock family, the Library is devoted to the advancement of knowledge about design, furniture, interiors, architecture, textiles, finishes, and construction.

For more information visit <http://www.furniturelibrary.com>.

"The sculptures, landscaping and additional parking, made possible by donations, unify its interior and exterior spaces, making the new campus ideally suited for hosting furniture industry groups and events."

LEATHER

RETAIL EDUCATION GUIDE

Part 1

by Russell Bienenstock

This two part series is a complete guide for retail owners, buyers and sales professionals that details leather features, benefits and advantages. It also includes best retail practices from a panel of industry experts who generously provided Furniture World with tips on marketing, selling, training product knowledge, and servicing leather.

LEATHER HISTORY

Like stone, wood and wool, leather is a natural product. It has been a prized commodity throughout history. All of the earlier Renaissance styles, particularly the Spanish and English favored leather upholstery. Techniques for embossing, tooling, painting and gilding leather were disseminated by

Spanish craftsmen in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Throughout this period, all types of furniture were covered with leather and studded

with decorative nail-head patterns. In the 18th century, the art of preserving hides and tanning them into leather had become an old, respected trade. The tanning process took almost a year and was completed by coating the hides with oil and grease, then scraping and treading on them. Oxhide and calf skins were a favorite in the late Louis XIV styles, and fine goat leather was often used by Chippendale and subsequent designers. Then, as today, cattle hides were the major leather source because of their availability, strength and hide size.

LEATHER FEATURES

From a consumer standpoint, buying a leather sofa can seem like a "no-brainer". There are no fabric patterns to choose, simplifying decorating decisions for the design-challenged. It is also true that quality leather has properties which can make it superior to many fabrics. Consider the following:

- *Leather outlasts most fabric coverings. It has an exceptionally long*

useful life.

- *It will not tear and is half again as strong as other upholstery materials -- even along the seam lines.*
- *It is fire resistant and emits no toxic fumes, even when exposed to intense heat.*
- *Modern full grain leather products won't crack or peel.*
- *Quality leather stretches and retains its shape without sagging.*
- *It "breathes", assumes body temperature rapidly and is instantaneously comfortable.*
- *It resists heat and sun damage.*
- *Leather is a practical material, ideal for busy lifestyles. No special solvents or cleaners and no lengthy or expensive procedures are necessary for its care.*
- *Leather generally ages well.*

On the other hand, depending on how it is used, covers promoted and sold as leather differ in how long they will last, how easy they are to clean, in their suppleness and, how effectively

"Some manufacturers' top grain leather only weighs one to one and a half ounces a square foot while some other's can weigh three to three and a half ounces. Thicker is better."

- Ramona Freeze, R&D Leather Furniture





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"Bonded leather is made of leather pieces that are glued together, then covered with essentially a vinyl top. Bonded leather behaves much like vinyl. The only difference is that it doesn't have the same stretchability."

-Bruce Nurse, President, Rocky Mountain School of Furniture Repair

wares are a good value.

"A lot of education is required to sell leather," notes Paul Gonzalez, CEO of the leather specialty chain Texas Leather Interiors.

Jim Riedl, President and CEO at Arizona Leather Company with 16 locations in California, Arizona and Georgia agrees. "We tout ourselves as the leather experts," he explains. "When we bring somebody onboard, we make sure that they are well equipped to answer the customer's questions. Unfortunately, across our industry, there is really no standard in leather furniture, to compare apples to apples. So, we have to define for our clients the differences between a particular product found elsewhere and ours. That's because in general, the information our clients are getting out there is not just inaccurate, but completely false."

"I think that educating sales associates about the product that they're selling is number one," confirms Ramona Freeze, President of California based R&D Leather Furniture. "As a leather specialist it's easier because we focus on just one product. Our people know how the leather is processed, all about construction, the thickness of the leather, how much it weighs per square foot, and how much pressure it can take per square inch. Having this information makes our salespeople so much more confident and it adds to their enthusiasm when customers also get excited by this information. But," adds Freeze, "we don't overload customers with information. If we're working with

they can be repaired. There are big differences in leather price, quality and wearability, yet retail customers may have trouble evaluating how these differences correlate with desired benefits. This isn't surprising since even retail salespeople who should have this expertise, may not be conversant with the types of leather, finishes or products such as leather splits, vinyl and fabric/leather composite materials.

Although home furnishings industry professionals do not need to know the fine details of leather production, basic information regarding hide quality, tanning, dyeing and finishing can help retailers to steer customers toward making informed purchase decisions.

Product Knowledge: There is quality to be had at all price points. And, what seems like a good value for one customer may turn out to be a disaster for another when it comes to leather. This is the reason why retail salespeople who sell higher end goods need to know why their products are worth more, and why those who sell more promotional products should be able to explain why their

a housewife, we use terms and words she knows such as cleanability, durability, color, style and comfort."

KINDS OF LEATHER

All leather is the product of animal hides, however, these vary in their quality and the ways in which they are converted into leather. High quality leather is expensive. The raw material cost represents a substantial percentage of the total cost of manufacturing leather upholstery.

Animal hides are converted through a many step process which preserves, softens, beautifies and protects the finished product. Only a small percentage can be used to make upholstery leathers which must have large sections free from serious blemishes. Whereas it takes only a small piece of leather to make a good shoe; a sofa cushion requires a large panel of high quality.

Top & Full Grain: As part of the involved upholstery leather preparation process, suitable animal hides are split into a top layer (the one which had hair on it) and a thick lower layer.

The top layer, also called top grain, can either be processed into full grain leather which is not buffed and sanded; or into corrected grain leather that has had the surface markings altered by buffing and sanding.

Generally, leather that has too many surface imperfections (too much character) will require correction. Full grain leather, is considered to be of greater beauty and higher quality than

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"Motion used to be about 30 percent of our business. Now it's probably close to 60 percent in reclining sectionals and reclining sofas."

- Jim Riedl, President and CEO, Arizona Leather Company

corrected grain leather, and so commands a higher price.

Splits: The lower layer may then be further split and processed into suede split or coated split leather. Coated split leather is somewhat stiffer and less durable than top grain leather. It is sometimes used to cover upholstered sides and backs that do not need to flex and move much.

TRIMMING COSTS

As the popularity of leather upholstery has increased, so has the demand for less expensive options. Manufacturers may do this by covering sides and backs with less expensive splits, use bonded leather products or matching vinyl panels.

At retail, consumers may not be able to readily tell when side and back

panels are not full grain, because alternative products have aesthetic properties roughly comparable with full grain leather. Even vinyl, if well matched for color and grain can fool all but a trained eye.

Bonded Leather: "Both bonded leather and top grain can be finished the same," notes Bruce Nurse, President of Rocky Mountain School of Furniture Repair and owner of the Guardsman FurniturePro franchise in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. "But, bonded leather is made of leather pieces that are glued together, then covered with essentially a vinyl top. Bonded leather behaves much like vinyl. The only difference is that it doesn't have the same stretchability because it has leather on the backside glued to what is essentially vinyl on the top side. At the lower end, bonded

leather is being used on outside panels or maybe covering a whole piece. It can be made to look really good, but by the same token, the durability of the cover, isn't the same.

"Care must be taken," he continues, "when repairing bonded leather because it's much more heat sensitive than vinyl." Nurse notes that there is an upside to bonded leather which is that it resists staining. "So, if the dog soils it or somebody spills orange juice, it cleans off easy, but if they nick, scrape or damage the surface in some way, it's a bit harder to fix. And I would say to somebody who's buying bonded leather that they should be careful with it.

"Of course another benefit of bonded leather," he explains, "is that it is less expensive. I do wish that customers would do more research before they buy, and that sales people would provide better information at the point of sale." He also acknowledges that buying top grain leather isn't a panacea for every customer. "So, if a customer asks for something durable and is told by a sales associate that an aniline leather sofa is the most durable, he or she would be correct. Top grain is strong. But should the customer have a child or pet who has an accident, sits down with sun tan lotion on their legs, or even spills a glass of water, if the top grain leather doesn't have a durable finish, it might mark, resulting in a very unhappy customer."

Several people interviewed for this article told Furniture World about what they consider to be an ethical dilemma retailers face when presenting pieces that include leather composite or leather like materials.



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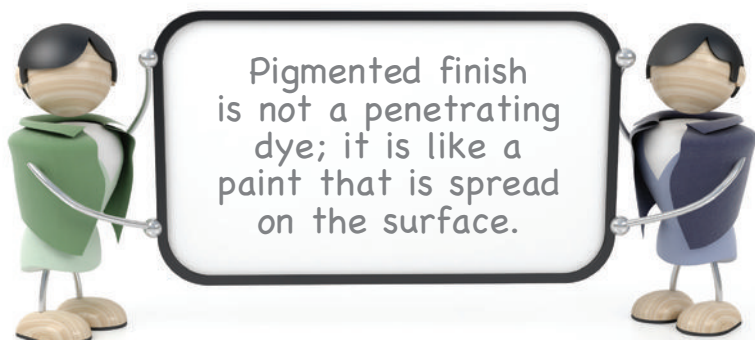
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Omnia Leather's Peter Zolferino explains, "There are many new products coming out that use the word leather but are actually combinations of leather materials that are part leather materials and part fabric. So, a retailer might sell a material that contains ground up leather, with a polyester finish on top at a \$499 price point and the consumer walks out thinking that they've purchased a leather sofa. There's nothing wrong with selling a promotionally priced sofa, but retailers have a responsibility to tell customers who don't know the difference between full grain, bonded leather or the latest leather/fabric combination."

Durability: With regard to durability,

full grain leather, corrected grain leather and split leather of comparable thickness have very much the same strength characteristics. Split leather usually does not have as good flex resistance, which is the reason it is used in non-flexible areas. Grain correction, or even the removal of the top grain layer does not alter the leather strength when comparing equally thick samples.

"Not all top grain leathers are the same," counsels R&D Leather's Ramona Freeze. "Some manufacturers' top grain leather only weighs one to one and a half ounces per square foot while some other's can weigh three to three and a half ounces a square foot. Thicker is better. The manufacturer is going to give it the

exact same warranty because it's cowhide and they're not sure how it's going to be used in the home. So it's up to the retailer to steer customers to leather with the appropriate finish which will depend upon the use that consumers are going to give it in their home. If they have, three kids and run a daycare center out of their home, I'm not going to sell them a distressed waxed pull up or brushed leather. I'm going to try to explain that they need something that has a finish on it, and that a sealed leather will provide more wear."

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LEATHER

RETAIL EDUCATION GUIDE

clean like vinyl, but at the same time feel soft and supple. This view is largely inconsistent with the reality of leather. Even the best quality leather has flaws and natural markings. These markings on the top grain layer are analogous to fingerprints. They distinguish genuine leather from man-made materials.

Character Marks: The character of leather is in many ways similar to grain variations in wood. Just as the wood veneers and solids used to craft a fine table top must be carefully chosen and matched, so must leather sofa panels. If the wood grain is poorly matched or of poor quality, consumers may reject the finished product. Problems usually arise when consumers are not told in advance what to expect, and that their delivered piece varies from the floor sample. If consumers insist on a finished product that has 100% uniform color, 100% consistent grain and markings, they should buy less costly heavily finished corrected grain leather.

GRAIN CORRECTION

As noted previously, the term top grain leather refers to leather that retains the top portion of the hide. Full grain refers to top grain leather that also retains its natural surface markings. Top grain leather that has too many surface imperfections may be processed (corrected) by buffing/sanding the surface to remove objectionable marks. Natural looking patterned effects can

then be re-introduced by coating the leather with layers of pigment finish and embossing it under heat or high pressure. This process can smooth the grain or produce unique patterned effects (ostrich, alligator, lizard, etc.). The result is known as corrected grain leather.

TANNING

Tanning is the process that turns an animal hide into leather. It preserves the hide, makes it softer, more pliable and durable. Your customers may remember leather, that after several decades of use cracked, eventually revealing reddish, rotted leather underneath the pigmented finish. Says Bruce Nurse, "I would suggest to you that the rotting has less to do with the transparent penetrating vegetable dye and has more to do with the oils and acids from the bodies of the people in the home. After many years, the oils and acids migrate through cracks in the finish and break down the tissue. Weaker cuts of leather saturate and tear." Today, virtually all leather is tanned with a chromium tanning process which is a type of mineral tanning. With normal use and care, modern chromium tanning techniques produce leather upholstery that can last several decades.

DYEING & FINISHING

Tanned leather is first colored with a penetrating dye. The dye permeates the surface

of the hide giving it color, but does not cover over natural markings. The leather can then be finished in one or more coating operations, with clear or pigmented finishes that do not penetrate the surface. These final finishes provide abrasion and stain resistance as well as color enhancement. Generally, the more surface finish a leather has, the stiffer (boardier) it becomes, but tanning formula and hide quality also affect leather stiffness.

Aniline dye in common industry usage refers to any dye that penetrates into the leather, coloring it, but not coating its surface with pigment. Virtually all upholstery leathers are initially treated with a penetrating aniline dye that allows the natural grain to show through.

The amount of dye used in leather production depends on the extent to

"Offering more options, colors, leathers, fabrics, customization is important. Retailers who overlook that and focus solely on price are probably missing out on some sales."

-Stephanie Lucas, President, Domicil and Brands, North America



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LEATHER MARKET TRENDS

which the dye has penetrated the leather. The dyeing of leather can be controlled by the manufacturer to either fully or partially penetrate it. Leather that has been fully penetrated with dye is known as fully struck through leather. If it has only been superficially dyed (only the flesh and grain surfaces penetrated), it is called partially struck through. For obvious reasons, leather whose cut edges will be exposed in the finished upholstered piece must have the dye fully struck through, but normal wear will not expose the interior of partially struck through leather.

Aniline Leather: Pure aniline leather, sometimes called aniline leather, aniline finish leather or premium select leather, is a product that has a clear protective coating but no applied pigmented surface coating (finish).

This is the best quality and most expensive leather. It is made from hides having a minimum of natural markings which have not needed to be grain corrected, embossed, or coated with pigment. Natural characteristics of the hide show through and the surface is soft and supple. Moderate color variations are nor-

mal and these un-pigmented leathers tend to develop a rich patina with age. Only a small percentage of hides are good enough to be converted into pure aniline leather.

Dr. Peter Marino explains that "Since most consumers will not forgive leather its "blemishes," very few hides, comparatively speaking, are aniline finished (pure aniline). Such finishes are absolutely clear. By analogy, an aniline finish is to leather what the clear lacquers and stains are to wood. But while the grains of wood are not obliterated by sanding to remove scratches and dents, the grains of leather are. The reason is obvious. The grains in wood run throughout; in hides, they do not. Therefore, while clear lacquers and stains are common wood finishes, the opposite is true of leather."

Semi-Aniline: Semi-aniline leather (aniline plus leather) has not as some believe had less aniline dye used in its manufacture than leather described simply, as aniline leather, pure aniline leather or aniline finished. The term semi-aniline leather describes full grain leather which contains only a small amount of surface coating (finish); a premium product which allows most of the natural character of the leather to show through. It is, therefore, misleading to describe a heavily finished or protected leather as being semi-aniline

dyed.

"Whenever anyone recommends aniline or semi-aniline finished leather," counsils Bruce Nurse, "it should always be pointed out that these finishes develop a natural patina very quickly and can stain and/or mark very easily. Oils, hair, skin, etc., even water can permanently stain these finishes if it sits there long enough, sometimes just minutes. The finish is not as durable with respect to stain-resistance as the pigmented finish. The penetrating dyes used are transparent, leaving unique features visible in the hide and the natural patina that ages the leather cover with grace over time.

Protected Aniline: Protected aniline leather is less expensive and more common than pure aniline or semi-aniline leather. Its coloration is more consistent and because it has been coated with protective pigments, the leather's natural markings are less noticeable. Protected leather is more heavily pigmented than semi-aniline leather and is actually easier to clean than pure aniline leather because surface pigments repel water and stains... standing up well to heavy use. "Fully finished (pigmented) leather covers have a protective polyurethane or poly-acrylic coat that makes it somewhat stain-resistant and easy to clean,"explains Bruce Nurse. "The pigmented dye and poly protective coat gives the leather cover good wear-ability.

"If they need more protection we don't suggest a completely naked vegetable dyed hide because if their kid spills a Kool-Aid, it's going to get stained."

- Paul Gonzalez, CEO, Texas Leather Interiors



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"We have to define for our clients the differences between a particular product found elsewhere and ours. That's because in general, the information our clients are getting out there is not just inaccurate, but completely false."

-Jim Riedl, Arizona Leather Company.

The actual dye may be a transparent penetrating dye and an opaque pigment that's much like a paint coating the surface of the cover "I would suggest that all pigmented finishes have a clear protective polyurethane or poly-acrylic topcoat cured on top of a pigmented dye. Dye in this case can be a misunderstood word; even an overused or wrong word. Pigmented finish is not a penetrating dye; it is like a paint that is spread on the surface. Should someone cause an abrasion through any method, including vigorous cleaning, it will expose a neutral or contrasting color back. Quite frankly, it's like someone scratching the paint off your car or damaging your dry-wall. Paint scratched off the pigmented finish of a car will expose the metal substrate. Pigment/paint on drywall, damaged by bumping it or scraping it will expose the substrate behind it."

MARKET TRENDS

Fine leather upholstery used to be found in the dens and living rooms of only the very wealthy. The category was characterized by heavy, traditional styles and the use of strong colors such as burgundy, oxblood, burnt orange, rust, walnut, tortoise, navy and blackberry. These leathers generally had heavily glazed, shiny finishes. Massive, traditional chesterfields, tufted wing chairs, traditional saddle-arm and double bustle pub sofas characterized leather upholstered furniture

styles.

More recently, advances in tanning technology, globalization, the introduction of composite leather materials, and changes in consumer buying preferences have helped leather furniture sales to grow at a tremendous pace.

Contemporary styled leather upholstery has emerged as the growth category with broad consumer appeal. Not only has the styling of upholstered pieces changed, leather now comes in a wider array of designer colors and is generally softer, more pliable and comfortable.

Leather manufacturers and retailers we interviewed told us that there are three major trends in leather furniture today. They see a move toward contemporary styles, the incorporation of motion and younger consumers buying more leather furniture.

"The major current trend that we're seeing," notes Peter Zolferino, President of Omnia Leather, "is a swing to European contemporary on a smaller scale, very clean lines that include motion, or motorized motion. Some of the growth in contemporary is being driven by younger buyers, and some is due to a shift in the taste level of the overall marketplace. Consumers are looking for reclining seats and adjustable headrests. We've seen our motion business increase about 15 percent in the last year. We're also seeing some different color pallets, nice orange colors and pastels in both leather and fabric.

Obviously browns and off whites still sell, and our traditional lines are still strong."

"In general," agrees Arizona Leather's Jim Riedl. "Cleaner lines on furniture is what people are leaning towards, whether that means contemporary or just an uncluttered, simple design that is timeless. Definitely that is where a lot of our sales are occurring. I just said contemporary, but some of the more traditional looks, scaled down with cleaner lines also appeal to our customers. Another trend we've seen in the past 12 to 24 months has been motion furniture, which is on fire. It used to be about 30 percent of our business. Now it's probably close to 60 percent in reclining sectionals and reclining sofas.

"I think our customers have gotten a little younger," Jim adds. "Prior to five years ago, our customer was 45 to 50 or older, and I think that the age has dropped a little bit to maybe 37 to 55."

"At Texas Leather," Paul Gonzalez tells Furniture World, "Our demographics have always been 30 or 35 to 70. It's just always been like that. When we open stores, we look for that \$80,000 plus income, well educated customer."

"The trends have changed as to who's buying leather now," agrees Ramona. "When we first started it was an age group of 35 years and older. Now we're selling leather furniture to first time buyers, kids that are just getting married. There is no target age



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"There's nothing wrong

with selling a promotionally priced sofa, but retailers have a responsibility to tell customers who don't know, about the difference between full grain, bonded leather or the latest leather/fabric combination. - Peter Zolferino, President, Omnia Leather

group now. Our store is in Bakersfield, CA which has become more metropolitan. Younger people come in wanting a more, contemporary uptown look, a New York loft look, a Pottery Barn look. Most consumers come in already knowing the kind of style they want which makes our job easier. They are looking for style first, then comfort and then color. We also see people who buy a rustic urban look and are mixing that in with the contemporary. People used to have an idea that leather furniture had to be, office-like or it had to have hair on it like, the King's Ranch. The major trend now is going toward more urban and more distressed."

Elaborating on the reasons for consumer interest in motion, Paul Gonzalez at Texas Leather says, "It's a segment that's gone up year after year, and now motorized is becoming a major part of that because our customers are spending more time at home with their home theaters and reclining sofas. Especially the baby boomers are buying recliners and going for a little bit more comfort."

"I'm also seeing a big trend for the

last two or three years, especially here in Texas, in the growth of the conversation sofa, with more angles, not so linear or L-shaped. We are seeing more curved shapes, and four seated or three seated conversations are a big push for us."

Stephanie Lucas, President, Domicil and Brands North America, sees a shift toward contemporary as well. She says, "Stylistically we see contemporary as a growing category. And when I use the word contemporary I use it loosely. It used to be that you were either a contemporary styled person or traditional. Now what we see is the blending of design, so much so that it's possible to integrate contemporary into a kind of an eclectic style in one room."

Another trend she sees is that, "Gen X and Gen Y buyers are giving up on the idea that the furniture they buy will last forever. That makes these buyers more open minded. Now customers feel that they have an evolving style and that in five or six years if they're tired of it they might change it. And, I think overall that's a good thing for our industry. It's a consumer mindset

that will keep the marketplace fresh and people continuing to shop for furniture.

"She also believes that, "There are more requests right now from people wanting it the way they want it. So, offering more options, colors, leathers, fabrics, customization is important. Retailers who overlook that and focus solely on price are probably missing out on some sales.

"Retailers are less likely to display a sofa, love seat and chair as a matching set," concludes Lucas. She observes that retailers need to make each slot work. "And I think " she says, "it's by showing as much versatility in that slot on the floor as they possibly can. To do that they might show styles in leather and fabric, perhaps show the sofa in leather, the chair in fabric and an accent chair in a pattern."

NEXT ISSUE

The second part of this series will include information on repair, extended warranties, care and cleaning, a features/advantages chart, and a big glossary of leather terms.

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Loloi

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AC Pacific

The Madden, covered in soft luxurious marbled bonded leather features storage arms consoles, cup holders, USB charging station and a chaise style footrest to provide continuous leg support. The quiet and smooth power motor enables every user to set a personalized position for optimum comfort with the push of a button.

Contact information on index page 96.



Chairtech

This comfortable small footprint chair designed by Pieter de Moor is available in a wide range of high-end leather colors and contract grade fabrics.

Contact information on index page 96.



Domicil

The 8825 modular sectional features adjustable ratchet-style head-rests and arm-rests with a tight-seat construction that continues almost all the way to the floor. This style can be configured to fit nearly any space. Available in leather and fabric.

Contact information on index page 96.

Greenington

A new eco-friendly choice in solid bamboo, the smartly scaled Sienna Bedroom Collection features clean lines and beautifully beveled edges. The condo scaled Sienna case pieces are accented with smooth stainless steel pulls and soft closing undermount drawers.

Contact information on index page 96.



Omnia

The Delano features adjustable head and footrests as well as silent power mechanisms. Available in many fine leathers and colors. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 96.



Douglas

This new dining table series is offered in Walnut or Oak with high pressure laminate tops. Shown in Walnut.

Contact information on index page 96.



BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Capel

Granada, with its Moorish flair, is hand tufted in India of 100% wool and features a micro-loop pile. Sizes available include 5' x 8', 7' x 9' and 8' x 11'. A 5' x 8' retails for \$673.

Contact information on index page 96.

Legends Furniture

Unique platform bed with directional LED lighting and a Co-Z-Dresser with an 18" electric fireplace insert built in.

Contact information on index page 96.



West Bros

The Fulton Dining collection is made of solid White Oak with leather drawer pulls. Available in Sand and Pewter finishes. Made in Canada.

Contact information on index page 96.



Pastel

The Quanto Basta Collection features a 47" round wood top with clean lined stainless steel and Sonoma Veneer. It is paired with matching side chairs upholstered in Nature Linen with a Sonoma Veneer back and stainless steel frame.

Contact information on index page 96.





Agio

Balmoral's rectangular porcelain dining table shown with cast aluminum seating in a quatrefoil design. Tailored weather-resistant cushions in a warm beige fabric add comfort and long-lasting beauty to this dining group.

Contact information on index page 96.

Horizon Home

The New Ironwood Collection. wall unit features modern reclaimed design with a soft industrial flair. Features include multi step lacquer finish, over an uneven plank construction, full extension glides and solid wood construction. New for this Spring.

Contact information on index page 96.

Elran

The Jesse collection offers contemporary styling with a channel style back, sloped, padded track arms, and bucket seat with chaise longue seating. Made in Canada.

Contact information on index page 96.



Surya

Regency lamp with a silver metallic shade sits atop a curvaceous base crafted of mercury glass and brushed metal. This sleek and elegant lamp is perfect for a variety of living environments. Suggested retail \$230.

Contact information on index page 96.



BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Jaipur Rugs

Luli Sanchez is the design collection of Cuban born, painter and surface designer Lourdes Sanchez. The LST49 from this collection is 100% wool tufted, made in India.

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DeLandis Leather

Three seat leather sofa from the Siena Collection is durable and elegant. Features include solid hardwood frame, memory foam seat cushions, and corner blocks with glue for superior frame strength.

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Powell

The Dune Buggy Twin/Twin Bunk Bed has realistic wheels, headlights and bumpers. Fits standard twin size mattresses. Retail for \$749.

Contact information on index page 96.



Ashley

The "Elemen-Harness" upholstery collection features top-grain leather in seating areas with skillfully matched vinyl everywhere else.

Contact information on index page 96.



Borkholder

The Creekside Collection is available in Sap Cherry Brown Maple and Red Oak in a variety of finishes. Shown in Sap Cherry with Michaels Cherry finish. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 96.



Nourison

Autum, is from the Rhapsody Collection. This design presents flickering abstract shapes on an intricately striated ground. Loom Knotted and made of 80% wool and 20% nylon.

Contact information on index page 96.

Stein World

Created in cooperation with Panama Jack, this living room group is one of thirty plus introductions including occasional tables, accents, mirrors and lighting.

Contact information on index page 96.



Violino

This transitional sofa in natural top grain leather is made with memory foam and down seating. Suggested retail \$1499.

Contact information on index page 96.



imm cologne design



Prostoria

This maker of upholstered furniture and innovative sleepers created the Up-lift armchair with integrated bed.



Muon

One of a range of sleeping solutions, that include lighting, sound, massage, and adjustable positions with tablet touch screen control. Users have the option of waking up to a sunrise simulation.



De Castelli

De Castelli's blends design, art and craftsmanship, using iron, cor-ten and stainless steel.



Girsberger

Specializes in chairs and tables for offices, meeting rooms, living spaces and dining areas. This company develops and produces innovative seating solutions.



Gubi

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Dorothee Mainka

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About the show

Featured images were taken at the recent imm cologne/Living Interiors 2014 show, Cologne, Germany 2014. Featuring 1,209 exhibitors from 52 countries, the show attracted 120,000 visitors. This year, imm cologne turned a spotlight on the objects that transform houses and apartments into homes. Shown at right are images from two of imm cologne's most popular exhibits, "Das Haus – Interiors on Stage" described as both a designer portrait and a visionary blueprint for the home, and winners of the D3 talent forum, where visitors discovered experimental designs, original creations and clever new construction principles developed by promising newcomers to the design scene. For more information visit www.imm-cologne.com.



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MATTRESS SALE

KEEP CONTROL OF EVERY

Do your RSA's keep control of the sale or give up control to customers?

by David Benbow

When you feel sick, you usually go to see your doctor. What would you think if your doctor said to you, "Welcome to our clinic. We have treatments available for a variety of ailments and diseases. Some of them are on sale. Why don't you browse through this medical journal and find one that you like. I'll be in the next room if you have any questions."

Does this sound completely ridiculous?

Then, why is it not considered ridiculous when the Retail Sales Associate (RSA) in a bedding department says essentially the same thing to a customer? Just as the physician knows the ailments, the treatments and the cures, the RSA should know all the beds, their feels (comfort levels) and their prices. Just as the patient only knows his symptoms, but little else, the customer usually only knows his problems (symptoms) and little else. To think that the customer can just browse around until he "finds one

he likes," is just as silly as the doctor/patient scenario we described in the first paragraph.

THE ENCOUNTER

The opening act of each retail sales drama starts pretty much the same way. Customers walk into a store and RSA's greet them with the hope of making a sale.

At once, this encounter between two human beings, who are probably total strangers, becomes a contest for control of the ensuing interaction. We'll call this interaction The Sale.

The final outcome of The Sale will depend almost entirely on whether the RSA keeps control or gives up control to the customer.

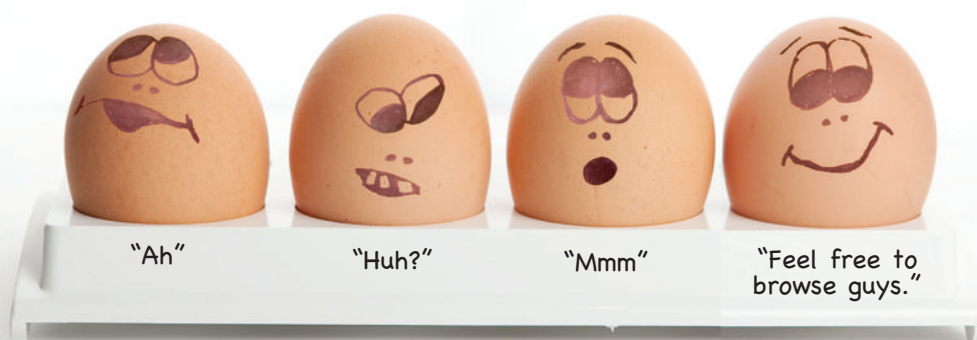
There is an old saying in retail, "Somebody gets sold in every sales encounter. It's either the customer or the salesperson." Guess what happens when the salesperson got sold? If you guessed that the customer leaves empty handed, you guessed correctly. When a customer leaves

empty handed, the salesperson, at some point, probably relinquished control of the sale. When this happens, nobody wins and everybody loses.

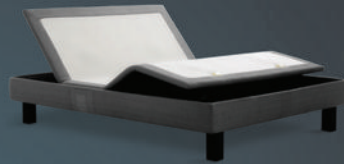
WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CONTROL?

What is control, anyway? The first entry in the Oxford English Dictionary defines control as: "the function of directing and focusing action."

"I have observed many RSAs who just let customers go with the flow. The attitude of the RSA being, "They know what they are looking for, and if we have it, they'll find it. I'll just make myself available if they have any questions."



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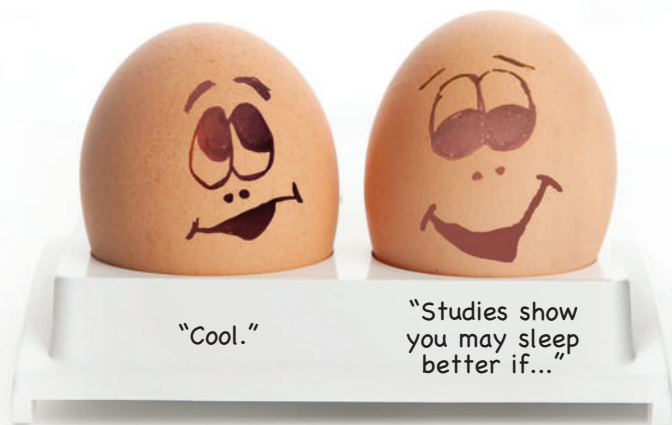
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"Control IS directing the sale and using the power of conversation to keep the customer interested and focused on the goal."

Shouldn't this be the RSA's role in the sale?

In his Furniture World article, "Social Media," January/February 2014, Volume 144 No. 1, page 75, Larry Mullins says, "The power of the one-on-one conversation remains the most effective method of selling on earth." Ask yourself, have you ever noticed much of a one-on-one conversation when the customer is wandering around the store unattended with the RSA standing alone, watching at a distance, waiting and hoping that the customer will have a question?

Control of the sale IS NOT pushing, dominating, browbeating, high-presuring or out-talking the customer. Control IS directing the sale and using the power of the conversation to keep the customer interested and focused on the goal. The goal is to make the sale and solve the customer's prob-

lem. To reach the goal the RSA must learn about, analyze, and understand the customer's problem. That's why he or she is in your store to begin with, to try to solve a problem.

If control is so important, how and when does the RSA gain and hold onto control of the sales encounter? What does the RSA do if he loses control, or cannot gain control to begin with? We'll discuss these questions in the following paragraphs.

FIRST, PREPARE THE RSA

Before we begin analyzing the process of establishing control of the sale, we must emphasize that no RSA can control any one-on-one conversation unless he or she is PREPARED for his/her role on the sales floor. Like an actor in a play, or our doctor mentioned above, the RSA must be trained

and prepared for her role. This does not mean that the RSA has to memorize a script.

This leads to our next RSA qualification, and that is confidence. To control the sale, the RSA must have confidence in himself and his products. That brings us back to preparation again, doesn't it? Being thoroughly prepared is the only way to feel confident and to project that confidence to the customer. Confidence is contagious. The confident RSA will pass that confidence on to customers and confident customers are much more likely to make a purchase and feel good about their purchase.

WHY SHOULD THE RSA TRY TO CONTROL THE SALE?

I have observed many RSAs who just let customers "go with the flow".



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"This is where your hard-earned control can suddenly evaporate, and when it does, so does your hope of making the sale. It's very important to keep your couple together; keep both of them engaged."

The attitude of the RSA being, "They know what they are looking for, and if we have it, they'll find it. I'll just make myself available if they have any questions."

Let me say this. Many, if not most, customers DO NOT KNOW what they are looking for. As we said in a previous paragraph, the reason they walk in the door to begin with is because they have some sort of problem. The sole purpose of the RSA is to help solve that problem. The RSA who does not take control of the sale with the purpose of solving the customer's problem, will lose the sale to an RSA down the street who will take control and solve the problem.

HOW AND WHEN DOES THE RSA GAIN CONTROL?

Okay, now we have a prepared RSA ready to take an "up". He's also confident in himself and his products because he is prepared. Do you think the prepared, confident RSA is going to just lay back and let the customer find everything for himself and just answer a question when needed? I don't think so. So, where does this prepared RSA begin to establish control?

Control begins with the greeting: If you are a reader of sales training books and articles, you may have noticed that "The Meet and Greet" is widely debated and discussed. Heated arguments among sales trainers voice a variety of opinions on what constitutes a "Good Greeting." This is

not an article about the Meet and Greet; it is about establishing Control of the Sale, but let me make one important declaration. The point of a strong, interesting greeting is to quickly gain control of the sale. The big problem with "May I help you?" or "How can I help you?" or "Welcome to our store!" is that none of these greetings grabs the customer's attention and focuses that attention on the RSA. Therefore, they do not help the RSA gain control of the sale. First and foremost, the greeting should make the customer feel comfortable with the store and interested in what the RSA has to say. When the customer feels at ease, the RSA has a much better chance to gain control of the conversation. What is a good greeting? That will be the subject of a future article. So, where does the RSA go from here?

Qualify to keep control: Qualifying, which is asking the customer questions to find out exactly the nature of his sleep problem, should really solidify the RSA's control of the sale. Qualifying not only analyzes the customer's problem, it also provides the opportunity for the RSA to establish a rapport with the customer. The concerned, skilled RSA who carefully probes the customer's wants and needs should build the customer's confidence in the RSA as someone who really is qualified to help them. Once a genuine rapport is established, maintaining control should get a lot easier.

Selection to keep control: The Selection step is where the RSA's preparation and product knowledge really start to pay off. If a store is correctly merchandised with a full array of products, the skilled RSA should quickly be able to find the right product for the customer at the right price. Using the answers obtained in the Qualifying step, the RSA now must plan and follow a route through the store whereby he will LEAD the customer to the right product. But, the Selection step can also be dangerous. This is a critical juncture in the sale where customers can start wandering away from the RSA. This is where your hard-earned control can suddenly evaporate, and when it does, so does your hope of making the sale. It's very important to keep customers engaged. This is where RSA preparation can really come in handy. This is where presenting timely educational facts to hold the attention of customers is important.

You will know the Selection step has succeeded when the customer discovers the bed or product she really likes and is willing and/or eager to buy. I like to call this discovery event: **LANDING on the bed.**

Control at the close: When they are Landed, go for the close. Closing is a process. This closing process includes Pitching the bed, which also can be called the Presentation. At this point, hopefully, the RSA has the customers or customer lying on the bed, in rapt attention, as he reaffirms their intelli-

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"If the customer is following the RSA, the RSA probably has control. If the RSA is following the customer, guess who is probably not going to make the sale?"



gent decision with the benefits of the bed, supported by features. At this point, control of the process should come naturally, but it can still be lost if the RSA is not careful. Watch out for the dreaded control-killer, "Is this the one you want or do you want to look around some more?"

As we all should know, the sale does not end with the close. Prepare the happy customer to become a satisfied, repeat customer for many years to come. Control, by this time, should be easy. Your customer is happy, the RSA is happy. Now is the best time to ask confidently for referrals and future sales. Get some idea of the customer's future needs and wants. Let him know that you will be his scout and consultant for all future furniture and bedding purchases; and you will faithfully follow up. All you need is contact information, such as e-mail address, etc.

LOSING CONTROL WARNING SIGNS

How can you tell if an RSA has gained or lost control of the sale? Observe who is following who. If the customer is following the RSA, the RSA probably has control. If the RSA is following the customer, guess who is probably not going to make the sale.

Keeping control of the sales process is not always as easy as this article makes it sound. There are many pitfalls between the Meet and Greet and the final happy Goodbye when the

thrilled customer, receipt in hand, exits the store waving happily at the confident, triumphant RSA.

What could possibly go wrong? We have a supremely prepared RSA with a pleasant, engaging personality and he still can't gain and keep control of the sale?

The answer is almost always, The Customer Can't or Won't Pay Attention to the RSA. Why?

Illustrated here are a few problem scenarios.

The Couple. Most RSAs will agree that couples, especially those in the 25 to 54 age bracket, are your favorite customers. As mentioned previously, the RSA must keep the conversation interesting to hold customers' attention. However, couples can also be harder to control than single customers. If one half of the couple is interested, but the other is not paying close attention, and starts wandering around, the next thing you know, he or she calling out across the room, "Honey, come look at this one!" This is where your hard-earned control can suddenly evaporate, and when it does, so does your hope of making the sale. It's very important to keep your couple together; keep both of them engaged.

If one half of the couple starts wandering off, the RSA **MUST**, tactfully and gently, pull him or her back into the sales presentation.

Couples with Young Children. Why do people bring small children to look at mattresses and furniture? For whatever reason, if they do, the RSA must patiently bear this burden and try to maintain control (of himself and the sales process.) Regardless of what these customers are looking for, parents are easily distracted by their children, especially unruly ones. Sadly, the only suggestion I can offer is for the store to set up a small "children's entertainment room" with TV and games, where the parents can easily keep an eye on them. You certainly don't want to try to correct unruly and

"Please, encourage the parent, and not the three year old, to make the buying decision. We've all seen the spectacle of the parents begging the baby to decide which one it likes the best. Watch your control vanish when this happens."

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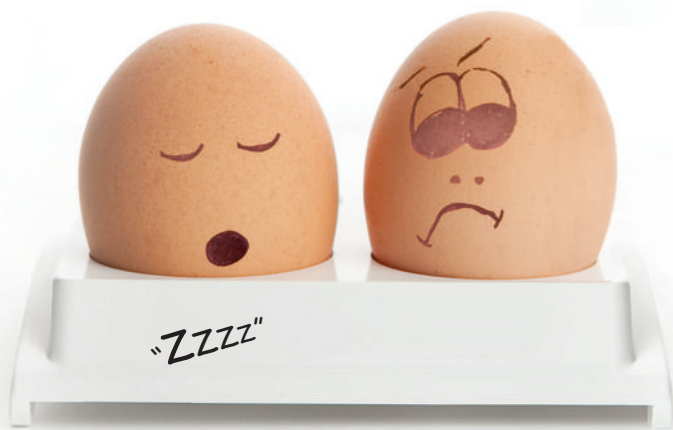
- Barbara Nelles // Sleep Savvy and BedTimes Magazine

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"Pay attention to the customer's attention status. Is he showing buying signals or boring signals?"

misbehaving children. Parents quickly take offense. If the parents are looking for children's beds, the best way to hold their attention, is to emphasize the importance of proper sleep for children. Be armed with the facts concerning sleep and children's health, and make these facts part of the conversation. Concerned parents are usually a good audience for the appeal to the health of their children. If they insist on cheap, however, find

cheap, write it up and get them out of the store as quickly as possible.

I want to make a quick point about mattresses and furniture for very young children. Please, encourage the parent, and not the three year old, to make the buying decision. We've all seen the spectacle of the parents "begging the baby" to decide which one it likes the best. Watch your control vanish when this happens.

How do you, the RSA, know if you

are keeping or losing control? Pay attention to the customer's "attention status." Is he showing "buying signals" or "boring signals?" If he yawns and/or asks for your card, he's bored. You've got to re-gain control, quickly, or you've wasted the entire encounter.

Multiple Customers: If you work in a small store, particularly in a small mattress store, you may be the only RSA on the floor. What happens when several customers come in at once or when the "be-back bus" stops in front of the store and lets off three or four people? It's hard enough to control one sales conversation, much less four or five. You still have to keep control, as best you can. Here's what I suggest. You must greet and quickly qualify EVERY customer. Do not ignore anyone. Explain in a voice that all can hear that you are working by yourself and you will help everybody and you will make it worth their while to be patient. Once you qualify each customer, then you must PRIORITIZE the customers by their potential. Don't let the \$3,000 king set walk, so that you can find the right twin mattress protector for a customer who bought their mattress at a warehouse club.

RE-GAINING CONTROL

Even the most prepared RSA will, once in a while, run into a tough customer that refuses to be controlled. What do you do with this person? One method I have used to good effect on occasion is to change the subject altogether; to look for common ground. Weather, sports, politics (be careful with this one,) cars, pickups and grand-children are all subjects (among many others) that can spark interest in even the most taciturn



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customer. GET THEM TALKING is often your best tool to gain control, if all else fails. Talking (and agreeing) about anything, to establish rapport, has been known to turn the most aloof up into a satisfied long-term customer. Which brings us to our next idea.

Keep them in the store. I noticed many years ago that the longer a cus-

tomers stays in the store, (especially the one that cannot seem to make a decision), the more likely it is that she will eventually decide to buy. The customer who is not under control (not in the conversation) will usually walk out early and unsold.

Let them talk it over. Sometimes the customer (especially couples) will ask

the RSA if they can talk over the possible purchase privately (this usually happens when they are lying on the bed.) Always honor this request. Moving away and letting them talk does not mean losing control of the sale. You must keep an eye on them, however, and be prepared to break in on their conversation at the first utterance of the dreaded, "Should we look around some more?" If you have maintained strong control of the sale up to the point of letting them talk privately, you should not have any trouble in moving right back in and re-assuming the initiative and control.

Turn the sale over to another RSA.

What if you just cannot gain control of the sale? If another RSA or manager is working, turn the sale over to them. Sometimes a Turn-Over (T.O.) works wonders. There is a correct, effective way to do a turn-over for maximum effect. There is a whole chapter in my book, *How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales*, the *Bed Seller's Manual*, for full details on the T.O.

IN SUMMARY

Control of The Sale is the single most important facet of the sales process the RSA can exercise. Failure to control the sale, usually signaled by the RSA haplessly following a customer around the store, is the single most fatal error an RSA can make. When your salespeople control the sale, your customer wins, you win, your store wins, the manufacturer wins, and for that matter, so does the Gross Domestic Product for the U.S.A.

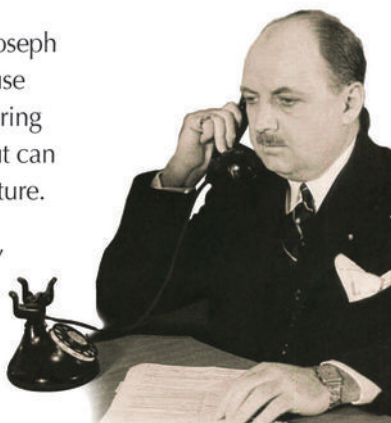
About David Benbow: *David*

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"Don't let the \$3,000 king set walk, so that you can find the right twin mattress protector for a customer who bought their mattress at a warehouse club."

Benbow, a twenty-three year veteran of the mattress and bedding industry, is owner of Mattress Retail Training Company offering retailers a full array of retail guidance; from small store management to training retail sales associates (RSAs.) His many years of hands-on experience as retail sales associate, store manager, sales manager/ trainer and store owner of multiple stores in six different American metropolitan areas qualifies him as an

expert in selling bedding at the retail level. David is the author of the recently published book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual". This book is the first to systematically present a complete, organized, but easily read and understood text book for mattress and bedding retail sales associates, beginner and experienced professional alike. It is a complete training course in one 292 page book. The book can be pur-

chased on-line at either <http://www.bedsellersmanual.com> or www.mattressretailtraining.com.

He also offers hands-on training classes for retailers on a variety of subjects and offers on-line classes that can be downloaded from the websites mentioned above.

David can be contacted via e-mail at dave@bedsellersmanual.com or in person at 361-648-3775.

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TOMS-PRICE

A case study on thriving through four generations.

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

It's highly probable that 100 years from now Toms-Price will still be a notable presence, furnishing the homes of discerning consumers in North America and internationally, perhaps inter-galactically! The company's first 100 years reflect decades of financial wisdom, pragmatic imagination, a powerful respect for history, and a self-deprecating sense of humor.

The Prices were and are undeniably entrepreneurs, their ingrained self-discipline made "outside" mentors superfluous. Fourth generation Scott Price talked with us about his great-great grandparents David and Mary Bisset Price. Just after the American Civil War the couple had ventured from England in North Marston, Buckinghamshire, to settle in a small farming community, Sycamore,

Illinois, about 70 miles west of Chicago where, to this day, the Price family continues to prosper.

Their son, George Edward Price, moved to the big city to attend Northwestern University. There, studying economics, he encountered Edwin Toms, a friend and future partner, Toms' roots a Midwestern family farm. They became room-mates. Both young men had summer jobs at a local furniture store, "Ed" as office manager and Edwin in sales.

In 1908, the time came for the two of them to find permanent employment. They "figured they could do it better" than their employer, and set up their own shop on Chicago's Wabash Avenue, combining both talents and resources. The partners' furniture was made by local craftsmen in Illinois and Michigan, and often delivered by

horse and buggy.

Said Scott, "From the beginning, they focused on high-end, quality furniture. It was branded with the shop-mark 'Toms-Price – Good Furniture –

"Every employee has my personal cell phone number, and they don't hesitate to use it when they have a problem, need assistance in making a sale or just want to talk to the boss."

Shown at right is the 1872 Grover house in Wheaton, IL where George E. Price, Jr moved The Toms-Price Company, creating the "New England style Colonial furniture store" of his dreams. In 2002, the most recent addition to Toms-Price's present Wheaton store was built, increasing the showroom to its present size of 65,000 square feet.



In 2010, the company opened its newest location in South Barrington, Illinois (left).



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*Source: Independent study produced by Mann, Armistead & Epperson, LTD. February 22, 2012.

2005 marked the opening of Toms-Price's Furniture Outlet, new corporate headquarters and expansive distribution center in Bloomington, IL.



"Measured expansion in good times will help you have measured contraction in bad times. We believe that things are never as bad or as good as they seem."

Chicago, IL', and we regularly get e-mails from customers with pieces purchased in those early years asking about history and valuation. Popular woods then were oak, rosewood and walnut.

"But," Scott told us, "George Price's favourite business was actually not furniture, but Black Angus cattle ranching. He also had a fruit farm. He loved to go to the stockyards, the slaughter houses on the south side of Chicago, and buy and sell animals. Both my father and my grandfather have memories of going there with him. Let's just say their experiences were not quite so positive, and they were glad they'd got out of the farming business and stayed in the furniture business . . . it's a little more glamorous!"

"But there's a flip side to that story," Scott laughed. "George Price's family

back in Sycamore continued the farming business. They recently sold it to Monsanto Corporation for \$500 million (which might buy a fair amount of glamour!) so I guess maybe we picked the wrong business to continue in!"

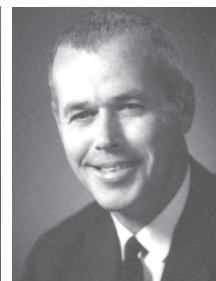
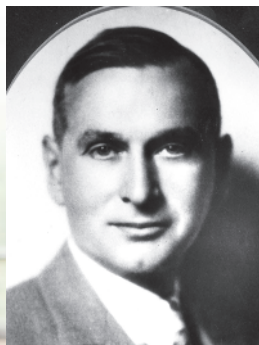
Toms-Price "thrived in the 1920s, struggled in the 1930s and coasted during the 1940s. Edwin Toms retired in 1940, and George Price branched out into other business arenas. He was a true entrepreneur with a diverse array of interests.

"Responding to the huge number of bank closures in the 1930s, he started a successful chain of savings and loans. He was the first Black Angus cattle rancher in Illinois, he played minor league baseball and he held substantial real estate throughout the Midwest. The U.S. Government's Argonne National Laboratory, a nuclear research facility, conceived as

part of the Manhattan Project, sits on land that George sold to them after World War II.

"His son, George 'Ed' Price Jr., served as an Intelligence Officer in the U. S. Marine Corps, Pacific Front. When he returned home, he was given the opportunity to work in any of his father's many businesses. At first he chose the savings and loan business but his initial position, running the collections department, quickly left him with the desire to switch to another business! But it wasn't until 1955, nearly 10 years later, that he made his move to management in The Toms-Price Furniture Company.

"My grandfather passed away a few months ago, September 2013 at age 93, and he really didn't discuss his service at length. It was only upon his death that we learned a lot about how important and dangerous his mission



Far left current president Scott Price (4th generation), founders George E. Price & Edwin Toms, George "Edward" Price Jr. (2nd generation), David E. Price (3rd generation).

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Lincolnshire location

"We try to own as much of our real estate as possible, we believe leases are debt. In 106 years we have never had a line of credit or bank loan against our inventory or business."

was. As an Intelligence Officer, he held the plans for the unrealized invasion of Japan. Time and time again, he would go out on a mission during the Island Hopping campaign, and be one of few men who came back alive.

"One story he would tell was of a time when he was on an island invasion and something hit his face and he couldn't see. He thought his face had been blown off or he had died. He reached his hand to his face and felt for it. It was still there, just completely covered by a giant Asian horned toad!

"One thing my grandfather learned in the military was decisiveness. He made decisions quickly, never looked back and never questioned himself. He had little sentimentality. When he decided to retire in the mid-1980s, he made the decision, announced it and had cleaned out his desk within a

week. There was no looking back. In the last 20 years, he built, bought or sold over 15 homes. He could make a decision and execute it immediately.

"I believe that in business some reflection is always important, but you also cannot dwell on the past or mourn loss for too long. Ultimately you have to move on – and forward. Retail has its share of setbacks and, in any job where you deal with the general public, you have to have a thick skin. I think my grandfather really learned that growing up in 20th century America, during the Great Depression, World War II, etc.

"When he switched to the furniture industry, he immediately closed the Chicago showroom on Wabash Avenue and moved the business to the growing western suburbs. Believing that furniture was best displayed in vignettes that mirrored a home-like setting, he purchased an actual home, the historic Grover Homestead in Wheaton, Illinois. Then he built his new store around it

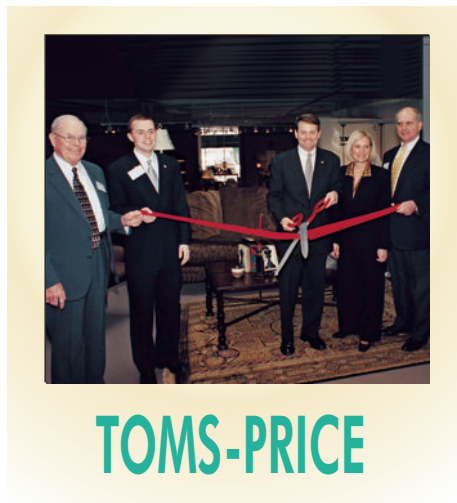
"It's really a unique place. Seven additions, it's now 65,000 square feet, bursting forth from that little house which is still there! In all our stores we've tried to create unique and inspiring displays that come from the furnishings we carry. Our Stickley Galleries feature Arts and Crafts inspired architecture, paint colours,

moldings and flooring. Last year, we featured four trend rooms in each store, done up to the nines in the Pantone colour of the year which was emerald green."

Back to Ed. "He liked to keep things simple. He carried only a few lines, exclusively selling high-end, solid wood furniture. His key manufacturers were Henkel-Harris, Statton, North Hickory, Pennsylvania House and the Wright Table Company. He focused on early American and 18th century reproduction furniture, and developed a reputation throughout the Midwest as the go-to store for high-end American furniture.

"He built several of the additions to the Wheaton store in the 1960s and 1970s, solidified the company's reputation for quality, conceived our annual floor sample sale, now a Chicago tradition, and helped start our long-standing relationship with Stickley Furniture.

"With his experience of the Great Depression, Grandfather was intensely conservative financially and was very debt-averse. Our business has survived for 106 years and has successfully transitioned through four generations of our family. We have operated continuously, stayed family owned and never been late on a bill. I believe," said Scott, "our survival and success is mostly due to our rep-



Ribbon cutting ceremony for the Grand Reopening of the Wheaton store in 2002. Left to right are: Ed Price (second generation) Scott Price (fourth generation), David and Denise Price (third generation) and the mayor of Wheaton, James Carr.

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utation and ability to sell quality product and provide a high level of customer service, but strong financial discipline cannot be overlooked. It's not very sexy, but a clean balance sheet will get you pretty far in business (and in life!).

"Ed did not believe in days payable; he paid the same day the bill came. This mentality carried over to both my father and me. We have never financed expansion; it has always been paid for through cash generated in the business. We try to own as much of our real estate as possible, we believe leases are debt. In 106 years we have never had a line of credit or bank loan against our inventory or business."

But to continue the story of George Price's 1960 conception of the extraordinarily successful annual floor sample sale. "It was the first Saturday in November of that year. It was a total floor sample sale. He offered all of the store samples at aggressive price points. Customers were invited to preview pieces in the weeks leading up to the sale, but they could not purchase early or know the price of the actual sample until the first day of the sale.

"The first years were successful, too successful! The store was literally cleaned out, and my grandfather had no furniture to sell for the next several months while he waited for new samples! Today, we pre-buy new samples, using the sell-through rate from the

prior year so that we are quickly back in business.

"The sale grew, and became the subject of local legend. Starting in the 1980s, customers began camping out the night before and lining up very early in the morning. By the time we opened the doors at 9 a.m., the line stretched around the block and once even circled the entirety of the 65,000 foot store!

"My grandfather's simple idea became such a success because it was easy for the customer to understand, held the same day every year and provided the two things customers like best, a good deal and instant gratification.

"One of the high water marks of our business has been our relationship with Stickley Furniture, and the growth of Toms-Price over the years thanks to the incredible success of Stickley's historic mission oak and cherry collection.

"Before 1940, our store had primarily been known for Colonial American and 18th century reproduction furniture. We had none of the many style and product categories we carry today. In 1983, my father, David, together with my grandfather, attended the High Point Furniture Market and visited the Stickley Furniture showroom.

"They were taken aback both by the quality of the furniture and also by the pride and commitment of the owners, Alfred and Amyn Audi.

"They are paid a graduated bonus based on their sales for the preceding quarter that increases in percentage with increased sales levels. I believe this rewards the high performer while not punishing the low performer since it is a bonus and resets quarterly."

"They were also taken aback by the fact that they could not purchase the line! At that time, Stickley was doing business in Chicago with Colby's Furniture, a division of Huffman-Koos Corporation. Stickley's strict one-dealer per major metro market policy meant that there was no room for another dealer.

"Two years later, Huffman-Koos declared bankruptcy and the opportunity to become Stickley's exclusive dealer in Chicagoland presented itself. In his last act before retiring, my grandfather visited the newly built Stickley factory in Manlius, New York, and returned home instructing my father to buy the line with the words, 'You'd have to be crazy not to carry Stickley'.

"In 1989, Stickley reissued the historic mission oak collection. Although it's hard to believe today, this was a real departure for Stickley and for the retailers who sold their product, especially Toms-Price. My father almost declined to carry the mission oak collection when it was first reissued for fear customers would think him crazy for putting something so different on the floor of our store!

"But the mission oak collection went on to become our most successful introduction ever and our largest selling product category for the next 20-plus years. Mission oak also helped us shift from our purist 18th Century focus into a diverse array of style categories right at the time that

State-of-the-art 30,000 sq. ft. showroom in the Old Orchard Shopping Mall in Skokie, convenient for Chicago and Northshore residents.



Americans were beginning to live more casually and move away from the formality of the 1980s.

"I believe that Toms-Price and Stickley Furniture have a retailer-vendor relationship that is unique in the furniture industry. Today, Stickley is not only our largest vendor, but a real calling-card for our business. Die-hard customers called 'Sticklettes' come into our showrooms regularly to see what's new, buy the annual limit-

ed edition piece, attend our Arts & Crafts seminars and, of course, buy furniture!

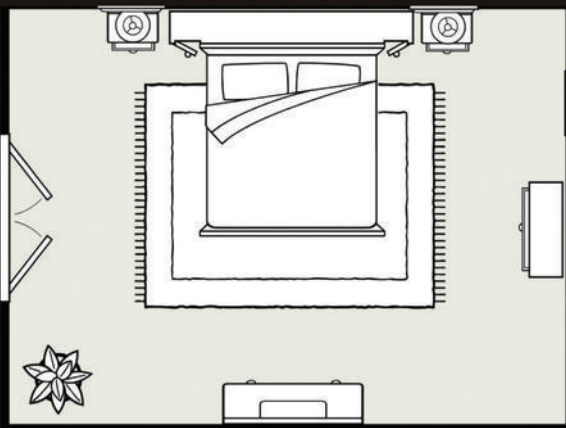
"The relationship with Stickley also helped us to understand the power and importance of carrying products that no one else does. Exclusive lines now make up nearly two-thirds of our overall business and help make our stores 'special' and 'unique'. Today Toms-Price is the exclusive Chicagoland retailer for many ven-

"In recent years, as many competitors have closed, we have had the opportunity to really select the top designers and salespeople from the Chicagoland area."

dors at the high end of the furniture industry.

"We carry over 50 furniture brands today. Major suppliers include

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Mailer for Toms-Price's Annual Floor Sample in their 100th anniversary. Also assorted promotional pieces and print ads.



"The sale grew, and became the subject of local legend. Starting in the 1980s, customers began camping out the night before and lining up very early in the morning. By the time we opened the doors at 9 a.m., the line stretched around the block."

Century, Hancock and Moore, Wesley Hall, Vanguard, Baker, Durham, Hooker, Bradington-Young, Sam Moore, Jessica Charles, Zimmerman Chair and Shifman Mattress.

"It was in 1977, after six years as a furniture representative with Pennsylvania House, that my father, David, officially joined the company. He immediately set out to expand the business, and he built a substantial addition to the Wheaton store, nearly doubling the size of the showroom. He added manufacturers, style categories, an interior design department,

a mattress department and conceived plans to add additional locations. Business was so good in the 1980s that growth plans literally had to be put on hold. There were just too many customers to service already!

"In 1997, the second Toms-Price location, a 55,000 square foot store in Lincolnshire, Illinois, was added. In 2002, a 25,000 square foot addition to the Wheaton store was built, increasing the showroom to its present size of 65,000 square feet."

Scott joined the company in 2003. He had worked in the investment banking business for several years. "My focus was also on growth and, in 2004, we opened a 30,000 square foot showroom in Skokie, Illinois, at Old orchard Mall.

"A 100,000 square foot state-of-the-art distribution centre and a 25,000 square foot outlet centre followed in 2005.

"In 2010, we opened our newest location in South Barrington, Illinois. And we began selling online in 2013.

"We had been observing the growth of online sales in home furnishings as well as the success of high-end

lifestyle players (Room and Board, Restoration Furniture) in selling custom and semi-custom product online. Then we entered this new phase of business very carefully. In a highly custom business, it's hard to see how to properly convey the sheer number of choices that could go into each piece of furniture. Further, many of our vendors restrict online selling, or even showing pricing online. This makes it difficult for the retailer because we feel we have to limit our product offering online. This, to us makes the online experience less than the store experience.

"That said, too much choice overwhelms consumers, and an edited version of the store is probably not a bad thing! We decided, initially, to partner with one of our suppliers, Hooker Furniture, on their I-Store/P3 program, administered by MircoD rather than go-it-alone. This certainly reduced our upfront investment and mitigated our risk."

We asked Scott about placement of the Stickley product line throughout the Toms-Price showrooms. "We gal-lerize Stickley, especially the Mission collection, and each store features a

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large display that is tailored to the look of that particular store and market. For example, our Skokie/Old Orchard store has a more contemporary Stickley build-out as it is closer to the city and has a more contemporary customer base."

Toms-Price offers Arts and Crafts seminars to their enthusiastic "Sticklettes" and others. "Mike Daniels, Stickley's long-time corporate historian, makes an annual pilgrimage to Toms-Price to educate and entertain our customers about the history of the Arts and Crafts movement in America, and Stickley's unique place in preserving the lost art of the craftsman. We usually do three seminars annually with Mike which are all well attended, 75 to 100 people.

"Mrs. Audi, the CEO of Stickley, often says to customers, 'Get educated about what makes a quality piece of furniture'. I would echo that sentiment and add that an educated customer is our best customer because they understand the value of what we

are selling.

"In recent years, we've introduced other speakers to our seminar series that have continued the theme of quality and craftsmanship. One of the most popular has been Alan Price (no relation!), the lead designer for leather manufacturer Hancock and Moore. Alan brings leather hides, leather bags, shoes, boots and even a go-cart with a leather seat to show the crowds how he gets his inspiration for his unique designs.

"While he is giving the seminar, he even hand-burnishes a leather chair which we then raffle off to one lucky winner.

"We've also partnered with Pleasant Home, a local organization that preserves Arts and Crafts homes designed by Chicago architect, George Mayer, participated in the Arts and Crafts Conference in River Forest, Illinois, and been involved with the Frank Lloyd Wright Conservancy."

We had talked earlier about Toms-Price's unique management style. Said Scott, "It has developed from within, more of a Jack Welch * 'straight from the gut' style. We have not employed any outside consultants or sales trainers. I have learned that mistakes can often be as good a

teacher as success.

"I do personally attend the Willow Creek Leadership Summit every year, and have drawn a lot of inspiration from some of the speakers and leaders there: Bill Hybels, Patrick Lencioni, Jim Collins, et al.

"My parents, David (Chairman) and Denise Price (Accessory Buyer) are a very important presence at Toms-Price, although both have cut down to part time in recent years".

Sales associates, 50 of them, are all "interior designers. We only hire degreed or licensed interior designers or career furniture salespeople with significant industry experience. About half our staff are SID, IIDA or IDS.

"In addition to regular commissions, SPIFFs and sales contests, our sales/design staff has the potential to earn a bonus four times a year (quarterly). They are paid a graduated bonus based on their sales for the preceding quarter that increases in percentage with increased sales levels. I believe this rewards the high performer while not punishing the low performer since it is a bonus and resets quarterly. Anyone can have a good quarter and anyone can have a bad quarter. I like recognizing good performance regularly. Our entire staff is eligible for our annual profit sharing plan, and this has been a significant source of retirement savings



"We add an extra year to all vendor warranties, and many of our products come with lifetime warranties."

Every product is opened, inspected and deluxed prior to delivery. Delivery is quoted on a two-hour time window.



for many of our employees.

"Because we require a degree, license or significant furniture experience, most of our sales/design staff comes to us often at the recommendation of local manufacturers' representatives. We have had extremely low turnover over the years. The average tenure of our 150 employees is 10 years. And we are known in the area as both an enjoyable place to work, and a place where you can make real money. In recent years, as many competitors have closed, we have had the opportunity to really select the top designers and salespeople from the Chicagoland area.

"We have a significant independent designer program and, from time to time, some of these outside designers will want to come inside. Several of our current team members are former IDPs from our program."

Toms-Price reaches current and potential customers with advertising, television, print, radio, social media, direct mail and public relations events. "Our best advertising is word-of-mouth and reputation, but we certainly count on our current customer base for additional business. We track lifetime purchases, and each customer is worth a significant amount to us, so it's important to get their purchase right the first time! Our current advertising mix is 30 per cent direct mail, 30 per cent broadcast (TV and radio), 25 per cent print and 15 per cent online."

Scott takes delivery seriously. "We own our truck fleet and directly employ our drivers. We feel this is important for maintaining control of a white glove delivery experience versus contracting our delivery. Every product is opened, inspected and deluxed prior to delivery. Delivery is quoted on a two-hour time window, and we were

96 per cent on time during 2013.

"Regarding customer service, again we own our service fleet and directly employ our service technicians. One of our service techs is actually our longest serving employee having worked at Toms-Price since before I was born! Ninety per cent of service calls are closed in the home. We add an extra year to all vendor warranties, and many of our products come with lifetime warranties."

Scott added, "Probably there is nothing too unique here, but we certainly strive for a first-class experience with every customer touch point. Quality people – drivers, service technicians and customer service folks --

are really the important element of ensuring that quality customer experience."

Toms-Price's strongest charitable outreach is as exciting and unique as one might expect. "RISE International (www.riseinternational.org) builds rural primary schools in Africa and currently has 151 schools and 100,000 children in schools. It's an organization I've served for many years as a Board member and currently Board President.

"In 2008, in celebration of our 100th year in business, we partnered with RISE to build a school in rural Angola, Africa, in memory of the late Stickley President, Alfred J. Audi who

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RISE International builds rural primary schools in Africa and currently has 151 schools and 100,000 children enrolled. At left is an Angolan school named in honor of Alfred Audi.

"Competitors can replicate nearly everything about your business, but the one thing they cannot do is replicate you. People are the unique element in any business."

had passed away in 2007. In 2008, we donated the profits from the sale of the Tom Jones Drinks Table (the 2008 Stickley Commemorative piece) to the school, and then personally matched those funds. The school has 800 students and was dedicated in the summer of 2008. I was very fortunate to have been there for the dedication.

"Most of our personal charitable giving is done through our church, Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois."

Integral to Toms-Price success over the years is "Family-ownership acces-



sibility. We are totally hands-on," said Scott. "We are accessible to all of our customers and employees. Every employee has my personal cell phone number, and they don't hesitate to use it when they have a problem, need assistance in making a sale or just want to talk to the boss. We treat our customers the same way. Our policy is that all calls or emails must be returned within 24 hours.

"Our conservative balance sheet really helped us survive during the great recession of 2008 and 2009. Looking around the country, the high-end of the furniture business seems to me to have suffered the greatest. Furniture is a fashion business and, beyond the natural swings in business conditions, there are also changes in fashion. Stores that are en vogue one day can be out the next. For this reason, measured expansion in good times will help you have measured contraction in bad times. We believe

that things are never as bad or as good as they seem.

"Competitors can replicate nearly everything about your business, but the one thing they cannot do is replicate you. People are the unique element in any business. Our customers know that they are buying from an established family-owned store and that if there is a problem they can speak with the owner. As we grow, we've tried to instill that ownership mentality in our staff.

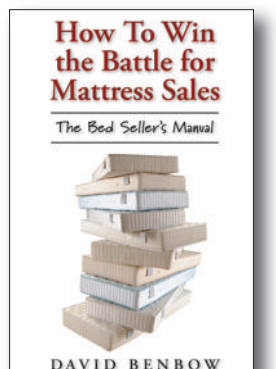
"To this day, I still have a few personal clients and I enjoy helping customers on the floors on key holiday weekends. A member of the Price family personally greets every customer, sometimes thousands, who shop our semi-annual Warehouse Sale."

Note: Jack Welch is an author, and Founder of the John Welch Management Institute.

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by Joe Capillo

I've long said that furniture stores should be managed like sports teams. All teams I follow in professional sports have a lot of coaches to help their players perform at peak levels. Think about it: Baseball teams have a team manager, a hitting coach, a pitching coach, a fielding coach for infielders and outfielders, a bench coach, a first base coach, and a third base coach. Football teams have a head coach, offensive coordinator, defensive coordinator, and other more specialized coaches for just about every position on the team.

In individual sports like tennis and golf, every player has a coach to help them play better.

Furniture retailers have a group of individual "players" who go one-on-one with shoppers to convert them to customers, and in typical situations all the company's revenue is dependent upon the individual skills of these players – your salespeople. Stores have a sales manager, and perhaps an assistant sales manager supported by players in merchandising, purchasing, display, logistics, and, of course, finance.

In professional sports, players have been coached – taught – from childhood how to play the game, and their chosen position. They've been through countless one-on-one sessions to teach them how to think about their role, how to execute under

countless possible scenarios. Professional players practice constantly – and they've done it since the day they began playing.

Then there's this: Every sports team has a game plan, a strategy – a "way we play" that is taught, and drilled into each player in countless meetings and training sessions – outside the game.

On game day or match day, all the coaches are right there – where the game is being played, observing each play, each player, each situation from the point-of-view of their game plan and that of their opponent. Adjustments are made on the fly, from one play to the next, or during timeouts.

Every play is measured, recorded, reviewed, and used to make necessary changes to the plan of action. Of course, our game is played every day, but that makes it even more potentially rewarding financially.

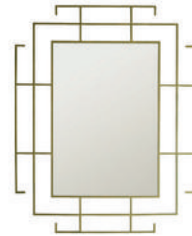
Someone once described our kind

of retailing as consisting of "long periods of mind-bending boredom, followed by short bursts of intense excitement." I agree.

Let me pose some questions:

- Do you have a game plan? a "way we do things here." A "Here's how we deal with customers." Is it situational in nature? Like "What if...?"
- Is the game plan written out and fully documented so the "players" can see it, learn it, practice it and understand it?
- Do you talk-the-talk and walk-the-walk every day – all day?
- Do you have a coach, or coaches, whose role it is to ensure that your selling strategy – your "game plan" is actually executed on the floor?
- If you have a "game plan", a way-to-work-with-customers, do you allow for practice?

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"You probably spend more time planning and reviewing merchandising and advertising than you do on sales – the top line of your P&L Statement."

- If you have no such plan, who actually controls your business at the point-of-contact?
- Do you control your sales floor using all the above tools, or do you just open the door, and then add up the sales at the end of the day to see what happened?
- Can you review each customer contact (play) after the day is over?
- Where are your sales managers while the "game" is being played?
- Who is observing, listening, coaching during the interactions with your prospective customers?

Baseball has been described as "a game of failure". A .200 hitter lasts a few years. A .300 hitter goes into the hall of fame. Failing 70% of the time as a batter gets you a plaque in Coopersburg! Why? Because the difference between 20% and 30% is 50%!

For you, this means that if your store has a 20% close ratio overall (not at all uncommon) and you can improve it to 30% - moving from failing 80% of the time to only 70% of the time, your sales volume goes up by 50%. You don't need any additional shoppers; you just need to perform better with the ones you get.

But, how do you systemically close more sales? First, of course, you need a selling strategy, a "way we do things here." Next, you need the complete commitment of the owner, president, or whoever is at the top of the company. Not just a wink or nod, but a

blood and guts commitment, that this is the right way to serve your customers.

Next, you need a coalition of all managers to drive the strategy every day in every store with every "player" to talk-the-talk and walk-the-walk. You need to teach, and your salespeople need to learn the strategic and tactical things they have to do every day with every customer, and you have to allow for practice, practice, practice through post-engagement reviews and more training as needed. If you want salespeople to sketch rooms to advance their connection to what customers really want, review their sketches. If you want contact information about shoppers who do not buy, conduct daily reviews with each salesperson. It's a simple thing to set up a methodology for this so that your "game" is reviewed and everyone is held accountable for tactically delivering your strategic plan.

If you want your salespeople to say certain things to your customers, write the dialog you want used, and make time for practice. Then, observe the action on the floor, and reward compliance and effort to deliver what you want. Again: practice, practice, and practice.

When you think about your business strategically, you probably spend more time planning and reviewing merchandising and advertising than you do on sales – the top line of your P&L Statement, from which your bottom line evolves. Remember that 50% difference between closing 20 sales for each 100 shoppers you get, to closing 30 sales. Even improving from

20% to 25% brings a 25% increase in sales with no additional advertising expense required – just better performance.

If your sales managers – coaches on the field of play – are more involved in administration or merchandise issues, or service – or anything that takes them off the field of play, change that now! Look at the huge opportunity you're missing for more revenue because no manager or coach is really involved in every play on the field.

If your store's overall closing ratio is 20% you probably have wide variation among individual salespeople. In a typical operation a larger number – usually more than half, will be below that level – some far below. These people need and deserve help, and your selling strategy is their guide to achieving success for these team members. Your sales coaches are the people responsible for having your strategic selling plan executed on the field – your selling floor. There's way more opportunity for more sales than you may think.

About Joe Capillo: Joe Capillo is a 41 year career veteran, experienced in managing and consulting with furniture retail operations. He is also a contributing editor for Furniture World Magazine. Questions on any aspect of this article or retail sales management, can be directed to Joe Capillo at joefcap@gmail.com. See all of his articles on Furniture World's information rich website at furninfo.com/Authors/Joe%20Capillo/21.





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SOCIAL MEDIA

BIG TIME

BOTTOM LINE BOOST -PART 2

by Larry Mullins

Give me about three minutes and (if you are open-minded) I may be able to change the way you think about the possibilities of social media and branding your business. Some morning when you are away from your store simply call 701.852.3536. This is the number of I. Keating Furniture in North Dakota. A cheerful voice will greet you and say: "Good morning. It's a great day at I. Keating Furniture. How may I help you?" Now, call your own store. Or just about any store. Compare the greetings. When you call your store, if you hear a bored voice just say the name of your store, you have some work to do. As they say, "you never get a second

chance to make a first impression."

Effective branding and social media are built from dozens of contact points with customers and prospective customers. Each of these contact points are precious moments. Opportunities to be friendly, fearless, and creative. Walt Disney knew this. He judiciously scripted these encounters. And he sold Disneyland almost entirely by means of social media, or what I prefer to call People Media. In the last article on social media I wrote: "Whether you choose to or not, you are using People Media every moment of every day. Social media adds new tools that others (like I. Keating) have learned to use knowingly, creatively and effectively to their advantage. You can too."

The purpose of this article is twofold. First to establish in your mind that no amount of technology, no sophisticated platform (including Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr, Instagram, etc.) can substitute for old-fashioned respect, courtesy, and the desire to serve. Every individual in your organization is part of the People Media process. It starts with you, with the messages you send to your managers and staff. And it includes all the contact points from the first greeting to the delivery, and possibly even your service people. Delivery personnel who are trained to re-enforce the purchase by praising how it looks are

proven to reduce buyers' remorse and service calls. The second purpose of this article is to emphasize that a compelling story can make or break an advertising campaign. So, before we have a final discussion on the various platforms of social media, let's talk about the most blatant failing in furniture and mattress advertising today: No Story.

WHAT TOP AGENCIES KNOW THAT YOU DON'T

People Media is all about being believed. Top advertising agencies have the same mission as psychologists, teachers, missionaries, politicians and lobbyists. They are in the business of shaping people's attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors. They desire to influence and persuade

"Before we have a final discussion on the various platforms of social media, let's talk about the most blatant failing in furniture and mattress advertising today: No Story."

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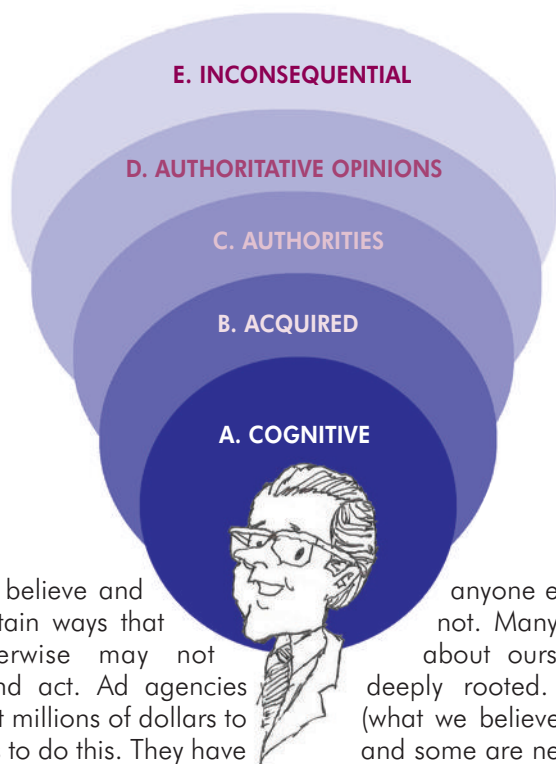
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"We all have many different kinds of beliefs operating on five levels. Dr. Milton Rokeach isolated these beliefs when he worked with Michigan State University."

people to believe and act in certain ways that they otherwise may not believe and act. Ad agencies have spent millions of dollars to learn ways to do this. They have learned that there are five levels of beliefs. If you follow me for the next several paragraphs you will know more about how these levels work than any of your competitors. Knowing this, you will create better advertising than ever before.

This is not to say the advertising man wants to influence the same beliefs that the psychologist or minister seeks to influence. We all have many different kinds of beliefs operating on five levels. Dr. Milton Rokeach isolated these beliefs when he worked with Michigan State University. You should find them interesting:

Type A Beliefs: These are cognitive beliefs about reality that you are certain are true. These beliefs concern observable realities. For example, you could say: I know I am reading an article. I know a guy named Larry Mullins wrote it. I know this is a table. And on and on. These core beliefs are supported by one hundred percent social consensus. They are almost impossible to influence or change. We become very upset when these core type A beliefs are challenged and brought into question.

Type B Beliefs: these are acquired beliefs that were developed from your personal experience. There are things we definitely believe whether

anyone else agrees with us or not. Many of these beliefs are about ourselves, and they are deeply rooted. Some are positive (what we believe we are capable of) and some are negative (things we are afraid of). Most good entrepreneurs, sales persons, and achievers exude confidence because they believe they are competent and intelligent. These are B-Positive beliefs. But many of us also have B-Negative beliefs. Sometimes they are strong enough to cripple our efforts to achieve. They are neurotic self-doubts, anxieties about our self-worth, our identity and our competence. These are beliefs we should want to change. Psychologists specialize in helping us in this process. Dominating personalities and narcissists with impregnable self-esteem are adroit at exploiting negative beliefs in others in order to control their relationships.

Type C Beliefs: These are beliefs in certain authority figures whom we have come to trust. These third kinds of beliefs, type C beliefs, are powerful, but less difficult to change than type A and B beliefs. All of us tend to identify with certain authorities who tell us what to believe and what not to believe. We do not have the information to be able to determine the truth of many things ourselves. So we turn to authority figures who have earned our trust, scientists, historians, ministers, teachers, pundits, critics, and the like. We look to them to advise us (in their judgment) what is and is not true, beautiful and good in the world.

Type D Beliefs: These involve the specific information a trusted authority provides about an issue. These are called peripheral beliefs. They are not necessarily cast in stone, but they tend to be difficult to change. I believe the planet Venus cannot sustain life, not because I have been there, but because I trust the scientists who have determined this. We can disagree with some specific opinions of authority figures and still maintain a significant degree of respect for them.

Type E Beliefs: Beliefs regarding personal preferences and tastes that you, as a professional furniture expert, will seek to influence. A customer may believe his mattress will last a lifetime, and does not affect the quality of his sleep and perhaps even his health. Another may believe her choices in leather furniture are limited to shades of brown. These Type E beliefs are relatively easier to change than the previous types. And the most powerful change agents for type E beliefs are social media.

To stand out from the crowd you must become the most trusted authority on home furnishings and mattress sets in your marketing area. You must learn to tie peripheral type E beliefs to deeper type D, authority figure beliefs.

How do you become the preeminent authority on home furnishings and start winning market share? By providing information. That is what authority figures do. Countless consumers are out there silently begging for a home furnishings expert they can trust. Social media are vehicles of

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Eva Nelson
Indoor Furniture, MD

Indoor Furniture would not be here today if it were not for PMP. I have a greater market share than I did before, and the restructuring promotion's positive effects will continue to benefit my store for years to come.

We generated ten months' worth of business during the 10-week restructuring promotion, while improving our margins by 20%.

Scott Knox
Priba Furniture, NC

From the first meeting until our last meeting, you were dedicated to the success of my sale, you paid attention to the details that set my store apart from other stores, and customized the event specifically for my unique situation.

The difference between PMP and the other promotion company I used before was like night and day.

Greg Dakessian
Family Home Furnishings, OR

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"Type E Beliefs

are relatively easier to change than the previous types. And the most powerful change agents for type E beliefs are social media."

opportunity to connect with these folks. Content is still king. And the only thing that transcends content is context. The supremely powerful social media are still, and will always be, personal, one-on-one contact. Not just by sales people. Everyone in the organization is responsible, from the person who answers the telephone, to the individual who delivers the furniture. All personnel must be informed, scripted, and understand your story. Every good store has a noble story. Every successful sales event has a credible rationale behind it. Every top sales consultant has a captivating elevator speech. For more information on elevator USP speeches, go to www.furninfo.com/Search, enter the number 11660 in the search field and click on the magnifying glass icon.

Here is the gist of the elevator speech concept: Imagine you are on an elevator, and a prospective customer walks in. She recognizes you as a local furniture store entrepreneur. As the doors close, she asks you this question:

"You know, I am going to spend quite a lot of money soon on furniture and new mattresses. I'd like to patronize you as a local merchant, but I am just not sure. Why should I buy my home furnishings from you and not that big chain store?" You have seconds to answer her question before

she gets off the elevator. What would you say?

"If you want to have some fun, test your staff to give their best elevator speech in a sales meeting. Strive to devise one yourself. It should be no more than 100-150 words. It should be crafted in the interest of the consumer and must embrace your Unique Selling Proposition factors. This is also your story. People don't like a sales pitch, but they love stories."

How does one create a culture in which their associates passionately engage prospects and customers with that clarity? The same way Walt Disney did it. By taking responsibility for it. If you are the owner, you are responsible for the culture of your company. You cannot delegate it. You must create and sustain it.

CONTENT IS KING, CONTEXT IS SUPREME

Content is king, but no matter how awesome your message is, no customer is going to say "yes" if you interrupt her entertainment. She will not like it if you waylay her with a giant pop-up in the middle of a Web page she is reading. Most prospects would do away with all the banner ads and pop-ups and, yes, also TV and radio commercials if they could. These are maximally intrusive. Next to one-on-one People Media, consent advertising is the strongest. You get

people to consent to your messages when they are interesting and valuable.

In his great social media book, "Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook ... How to Tell Your Story in a Noisy Social World", social media guru Gary Vaynerchuk summarizes his master social media strategy like this:

"Your story needs to move people's spirits and build their goodwill, so that when you finally ask them to buy from you, they feel that you have given them so much that they would be almost rude to refuse.

"Jab, jab, jab, jab ... right hook!

Or ...

Give, give, give, give ... ask.

Get it?"

This revolutionary concept of the service motive is not complicated, but may be difficult for most old school marketers to understand. It is unlike the raw power of classic marketing theories, but rather like power modulated by sincere empathy for the prospect. On its ultimate level, it is like the power of those few who do the impossible and change the world. Not only people like Orville and Wilber Wright, Mahatma Gandhi, Rosa Parks or Mother Teresa, but also the business innovators like Sam Walton, Steve Jobs, and Fred Smith.

Now let's summarize all this social media and People Media stuff:

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BIG TIME SOCIAL MEDIA

1. SOCIAL MEDIA can make or break your business, and it begins with you.

2. FACEBOOK is a great medium to tell your story. Take the time to learn Facebook, or someone who knows it's ins and outs including paid options to help. Be sure to have a Facebook logo on your website, and use it in your ads. It will pay rich dividends.

3. TWITTER is cool, but, in my judgment not the right context for furniture and mattress news, which are relatively big ticket items and not very "newsy." Great medium for celebrities, sports, and some applications if Twitter messages are kept up to date and relevant, but I don't see it worth the time for furniture stores.

4. PINTEREST is hard to ignore. Women outnumber men users by five to one. Gary Vaynerchuk says if you have a product that would interest women "... you're a dope if you are not on Pinterest." It is very visual and easy to use, but here are a few

guidelines:

- *Make your pictures feed the dreams of the women who want more beautiful homes, or if mattress related, better health.*
- *Give your pictures (called "boards") clever, creative titles.*
- *Include a price when appropriate.*
- *Include a hyperlink to your website.*

5. INSTAGRAM is mostly artistic content, for the younger generation. Soft sell, no hyperlinks.

6. TUMBLR is another artsy medium appealing mostly to 18-34 year olds. Essentially photographers, musicians and graphic designers.

You will achieve a substantial business benefit if you choose to become one of the handful of furniture entrepreneurs who take the time to examine the potentials of People Media. Remember, you are doing People Media every minute of every day whether you want to or not. It's your decision whether you allow it to be

happenstance or planned, compelling, and in proper context. Your big box competitors can never match the hometown guy or gal with an honest, noteworthy story.

About Larry Mullins: Larry Mullins is Marketing Feature Editor for Furniture World and has 35+ 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 BREAKTHROUGH*, available on Amazon and in book stores. Larry is founder and CEO of UltraSales, Inc. Questions on this article? Call Larry directly for a free, no-obligation consultation about how to add 25% or so to your bottom line in 2014 at 904.794.9212, or email larry@larrymullins.com. See all of Larry Mullin's articles at www.furninfo.com.



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SALES

PROCESS ENGINEERING 2014

Part 2: Control the Silver Platter. It's the secret to achieving higher average sales and closing percentages.

By Hal McClamma & Tommy Miskelly

Many home sector retail salespeople are simply haphazard. Their professional actions are never planned, proactive and intentional. Instead, they bounce around the store like a ball in a pinball machine. They clock in and clock out and hope for the best. And sadly, they never reach more than a fraction of their potential, creating a mediocre underperforming store with a wide range of performance between salespeople.

Most stores have a couple of salespeople at the top, a large bunch in the middle and a few at the bottom. The bottom low performers seem to churn; their names may change, but over time this performance ranking list looks pretty much the same... a few at the top, a bunch in the middle followed by the bottom performers.

This wide range of performance should sound a 'Priority 1 Emergency' alarm for any retail sales manager or store owner. A wide range of performance can signify a HUGE problem in your store. It is not just LOST sales. In addition to a very real and preventable sales leak, a wide range in performance is proof positive that your customer has a vastly different experience depending upon who greets them at the door.

A while ago I was walking the floor with a client when his attention shifted

to the front door. The next words out of his mouth were incredible... incredible in a very bad way. Perhaps you've said similar things when the doorbell rang in your store. He said, "I hope 'So and so' is not up, that customer is my neighbor." I snapped in reply, "Why in the world is 'So and so' working here, greeting your hard fought for customers if you do not have complete and utter confidence in his/her ability to properly serve any customer including your neighbor?"

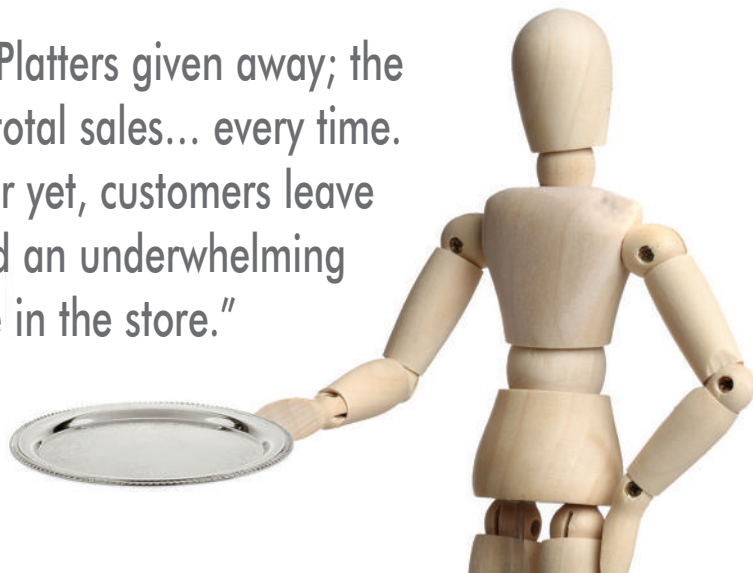
Let's take a look at a concept that was introduced in the January/February 2014 issue of Furniture World called the 'Silver Platter'. The 'Silver Platter' is a great way to validate what brand or variety of salesperson or sales team you have hired to represent you. It separates the

wheat from the chaff. Generally, stores that do a great job controlling the 'Platter' have salespeople who operate in a narrow range of performance, maximize customer opportunities and sell more.

There are two types, varieties or brands of salespeople in home sector retail. First is a less than successful, undesirable and low earning amateur order taker who does not control the 'Silver Platter'. Second is a highly desirable and successful professional high achiever, high earner who is planned, proactive and intentional. These high performers maintain complete control of the 'Silver Platter' in every single customer interaction.

So, what is the Silver Platter and how does one control it? And, why does it really matter?

"The more Platters given away; the lower the total sales... every time. And sadder yet, customers leave having had an underwhelming experience in the store."





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SALES

PROCESS ENGINEERING 2014

When selling, an amateur salesperson often loses control of the sales process in one or more different parts of the interaction with the customer. When a salesperson loses control of the sales process, close percent and average sale plummet in dramatic fashion. Small negative changes in the average sale and close percent combine for a huge decrease in total sales.

And conversely, when a salesperson retains control of the selling process, the close percent and average sale both rise handsomely, leading to a very nice increase in total sales.

We use a visualization tool in our sales training program called the Silver Platter. Each salesperson is asked to visualize in their minds eye that they are carrying a 12-inch oval Silver Serving Platter' under one arm as they greet each and every customer, as they qualify customers, as they present product, as they close the sale, as

they release their customers and as they follow up with both buyers and non buyers.

This Silver Platter simply represents or symbolizes CONTROL of the sales interaction or process. Whoever possesses the Silver Platter, seizes control of the sales process. The salesperson MUST control the sales process and keep the Silver Platter tucked safely under their arm and all the while; the customer should always feel as if they are in control of the process.

I also want salespeople to visualize surrendering that Silver Platter to the customer each time they lose control of the sales process. Many times a customer leaves the store with out furniture. Instead they may walk out with three, four or more symbolic Silver Platters in their possession. The more Platters given away; the lower are total sales... every time. And sadder yet, the customer leaves having had an underwhelming experience.

If you are a sales manager, coach or owner, you will want to watch carefully for the six areas listed below in which many amateur salespeople give away that darned Silver Platter.

Lost control equals lost sales. Retained control equals higher sales.

AMATEUR SALES PERSON "JEANETTE"

Let me introduce you to Jeanette. Jeanette is a master Silver Platter donor. She is a timid fearful salesper-

son. Jeanette is an amateur who gives away 100's of Silver Platters each week. Control of the sales interaction almost always rests with Jeanette's customers. Perhaps you have a Jeanette on your sales floor. Worse yet, all of your salespeople may be clones of dear Jeanette. Let's look at how Jeanette gives away those expensive Platters.

Here are the main points where Jeanette and many amateur salespeople lose control of the selling process.

- *The Greeting*
- *Qualifying*
- *Presentation*
- *The Close*
- *Departure*
- *Follow up*

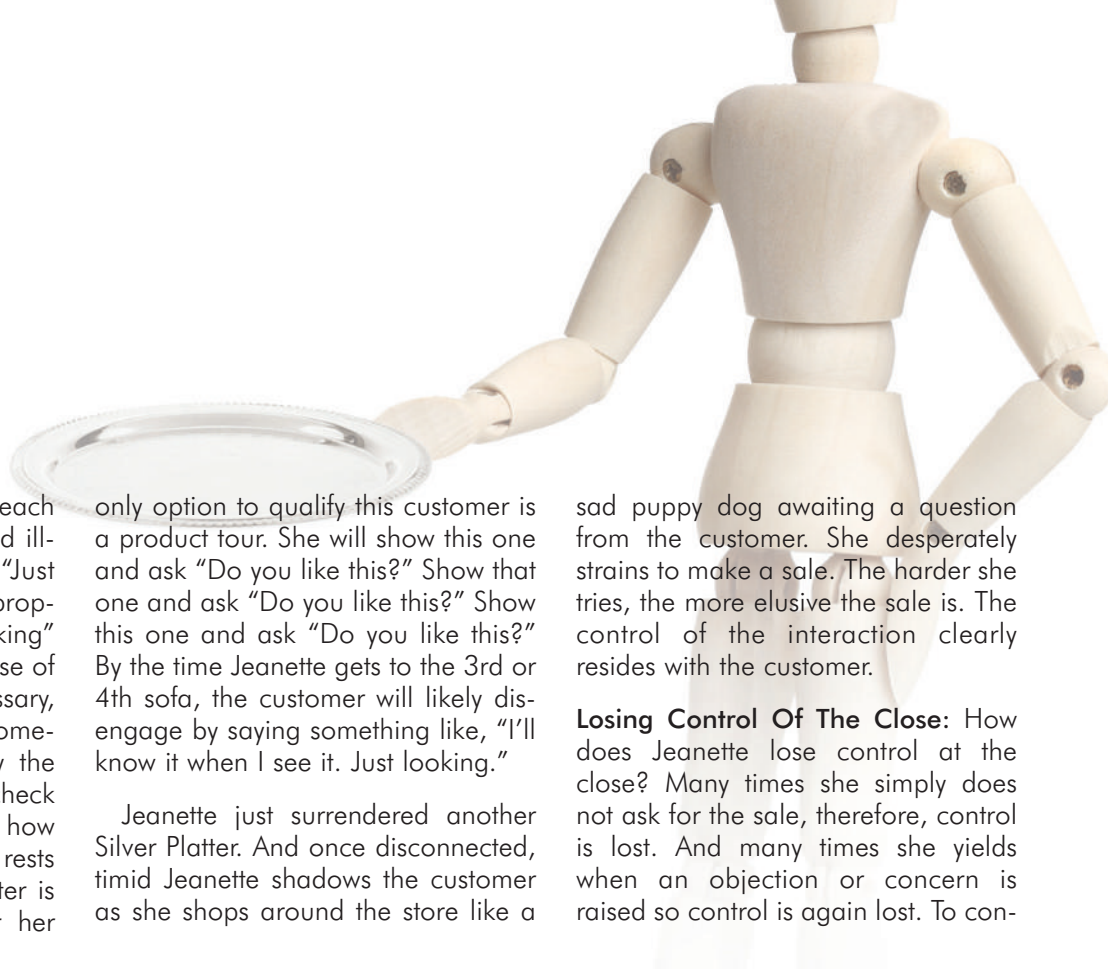
Losing Control At The Greeting:

Jeanette often loses control at the greeting when she greets poorly and elicits a dreaded "Just Looking" from customers. Then she lets many of them simply walk away.

There are two ways she loses control during the greeting. First, she uses the incorrect greeting and secures the "Just Looking" response a very high percentage of the time. The second way control is often lost in the greeting is when Jeanette releases the customer to look around with a phrase similar to, "OK, holler if you need me." She has given the Silver Platter away because control now rests with the customer.

"The second way control is often lost in the greeting is when Jeanette releases her customer to look around with a phrase similar to, "OK, holler if you need me."





To retain control, why not teach Jeanette to avoid all of the stupid ill-advised greetings that elicit “Just Looking”. Explain how to greet properly and slash her just “Just Looking” percentage in half. And if a release of the customer is absolutely necessary, why not teach her to forecast something along the lines of, “Enjoy the store, if it is Okay with you, I will check on you in a few minutes and see how you are doing.” The control now rests with Jeanette and the Silver Platter is neatly and safely tucked under her arm.

There is a monumental difference between forecasting a re-approach and “Holler if you need me.”

It is time we retailers realize that “Just Looking” is another way of saying “Get Lost.” If your “Just Looking” percentage is high, sales will always be lower. The first sale a salesperson must make is... selling themselves. A salespersons’ first goal is staying with the customer because building trust, getting the customer to lower their guard and open up is impossible from afar.

Losing Control By Not Qualifying: Qualifying is another area where weak salespeople like Jeanette cave and give away the Silver Platter. Imagine her customer enters the store and does not say “Just Looking” but rather states a need for a new sofa. Jeanette then poorly qualifies by asking a couple of questions such as color preference, and then proceeds to take them on a product tour.

A product tour without proper qualifying is simply an invitation to lower sales and get a customer disconnect. In Jeanette’s defense, without her knowing how to properly qualify, her

only option to qualify this customer is a product tour. She will show this one and ask “Do you like this?” Show that one and ask “Do you like this?” Show this one and ask “Do you like this?” By the time Jeanette gets to the 3rd or 4th sofa, the customer will likely disengage by saying something like, “I’ll know it when I see it. Just looking.”

Jeanette just surrendered another Silver Platter. And once disconnected, timid Jeanette shadows the customer as she shops around the store like a

sad puppy dog awaiting a question from the customer. She desperately strains to make a sale. The harder she tries, the more elusive the sale is. The control of the interaction clearly resides with the customer.

Losing Control Of The Close: How does Jeanette lose control at the close? Many times she simply does not ask for the sale, therefore, control is lost. And many times she yields when an objection or concern is raised so control is again lost. To con-



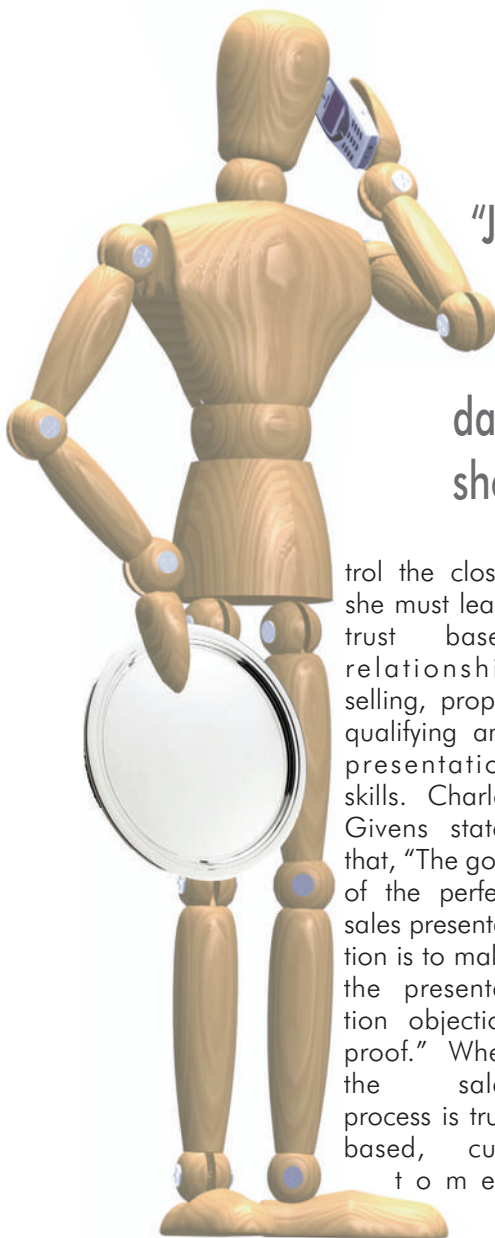
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"Jeanette should retain control of the "Platter" by forecasting; 'I had a blast serving/helping/meeting you today. If it is okay with you, Ill touch base with you in a day or two and see how you are doing on your shopping/ project/ room.'"

control the close, she must learn trust based relationship selling, proper qualifying and presentation skills. Charles Givens states that, "The goal of the perfect sales presentation is to make the presentation objection proof." When the sales process is trust based, customer

focused, planned, proactive and intentional, the 'close' is almost automatic and Jeanette's sales will skyrocket.

Losing Control By No Follow-up:

When a customer does not buy on this visit, many times Jeanette loses control by simply presenting her business card (along with another Silver Platter) and saying something like, "Holler if you need me." Or, "Call me if you have any questions." Jeanette must learn to release the customer from the store the same way she releases the customer in the store. Jeanette should retain control of the Platter by forecasting; "I had a blast serving/ helping/ meeting you today. If it is okay with you, Ill touch base with you in a day or two and see how you are doing on your shopping/ project/ room."

Most customers will say, "okay". But most customers will also think Jeanette will never call. What a pleasant surprise when she does call.

I am sure you've seen this on your sales floor... weak salespeople simply sitting around in a group hoping that 'So and so' will come back today and buy that \$1500 sofa. 'So and so' should be back today for that mattress. And 'So and so' should return for that bedroom. Of course 'So and so' does not come back. And many times if you ask Jeanette or other salespeople to call their 'So and so', they have no contact information and no follow up can possibly be done.

You've probably also experienced this in your store. The manager marks down a slow seller and Jeanette says, "I had a customer looking at that the

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Read Larry's timely article in this issue of *Furniture World*

SALES

PROCESS ENGINEERING 2014

other day." And you know what happens next, don't you? The manager says, "Call them and write that order." And Jeanette so effectively displays the deer in the headlights look. She should have kept her mouth shut because she just indicted herself. She has NO contact information because she is a Silver Platter donor.

Controlling the release of customers and being intentional about follow up is a key success factor for professional high achieving salespeople.

Jeanette needs to learn how to control the Silver Platter throughout the sales process including following up with buyers and non-buyers.

CONCLUSION

Observe your salespeople while they are on the floor with customers. Become an expert at identifying the times when a salesperson gives away the Silver Platter. Look for the six points at which most weak salespeople give away the control of the sales

"By the time Jeanette gets to the 3rd or 4th sofa, the customer will likely disengage by saying something like, 'I will know it when I see it. I'm just looking.'"

process, then coach your salespeople on how to keep control.

Does it really matter if your salespeople control the Silver Platter? Yes it does. You will never maximize your customer opportunities, your store sales and your profitability without a sales staff that controls the sales interaction from start to finish. You will never reduce the range of performance of your sales team without high achieving professionals. And, you will never provide knock your socks off service to your neighbor without a lean mean Silver Platter controlling sales team.

It comes down to this; people either do not know what to do, or they know what to do and choose not to do it. I would much rather be accused of being ignorant than unwilling! And once people know what to do, the high achievers simply do the little things that the mediocre deem unnecessary.

Offer For Furniture World Readers:

Log on and take the FREE Furniture Sales Management Effectiveness Quiz. Through this quiz, you will clearly ascertain whether your salespeople and sales managers are really set up for success. Most sales managers and coaches are great people but woefully unequipped. You will also receive an in depth report showing opportunities for improvement or validating the fact you are doing it right.

To take this free quiz just visit www.IntegrityBusinessCoaching.com and select "Free Tools" menu on the top menu bar.

About Hal McClamma: Hal McClamma is the founder of Integrity Business Coaching. He has over 30-years in the home furnishings industry with leading companies like Havertys, Barrows, Burdines, Maas Brothers and Jordan Marsh.

Business Development Director, Tommy Miskelly is owner of Miskelly Furniture a Top 100 retailer.

Integrity Business Coaching's team of business coaches, trainers and analysts have owned and run stores and chains and have had senior executive level leadership experience in some of the largest home furnishings retailers.

Questions about this article may be directed to Hal McClamma at Hal@IntegrityBusinessCoaching.com or call 334.470.9999.

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LED UPDATE 2014

Should you switch to fourth generation LED's?

by Monte Lee

Articles on LED accent lighting have ranged from the promise of a "better" way to light retail to the reality of today's retail lighting. Early adopters saw the promise and even though they knew another product tomorrow might be "better" they took the plunge and relamped their stores. If you haven't made the move yet, maybe you'll be interested in where we are today and how the promise came true.

In 2009 I wrote an article, "Path to Sustainable Retail Lighting. LEDs & More" (Furniture World Magazine, October/November 2012) that led to some interesting conversations. At a point in the discussion I would be asked, "Do you like LEDs or not?" because my answer in that article – "sometimes" was pretty vague. Five lighting years later my answer is, "Absolutely yes."

In 2009 what I called the first generation of LED could replace a 45-50 watt halogen in retail settings. My concern then was that 45-50 watts in track lighting didn't meet the criteria of sustainable lighting: "Lighting that

meets the qualitative needs of the visual environment with the least impact on the physical environment." My thought was 45-50 watts wasn't enough light to show the color and textures of our home furnishings products. Today, we have LEDs that can replace a 120-watt halogen, so we can meet both criteria.

Three light years later in "Time For Furniture Store LED's" (Jan/ Feb 2012 Furniture World) I stuck with the "sometimes" endorsement for the second generation bulbs but added, "Personally I would switch from halogen to LED when the third generation, 2700K bulb is available in 2012." I was caught by surprise when it didn't look like a space capsule. There were other surprises as well.

IMPROVED LED FEATURES & BENEFITS

The lighting industry has made great progress in LEDs, but I tip my hat to Philips and the "AirFlux™" design. The reason most LEDs look like a space capsule is a heavy heat sink that takes heat away from the electronics inside

the bulb. AirFlux™ eliminated the heat sink in favor of passing air over the electronics. It is similar to a jet engine that pulls cool air in the front and exhausts hot air out the back. There are no moving parts, so comparing the process to a chimney will do. The point is that heat is removed from the electronics by air flow, and that is a good thing.

In addition to looking more like a PAR light bulb, the 3rd generation AirFlux™ is much lighter. That means there is likely to be less "head droop" where the weight of the LED causes the track head to lose position. That is really common in older track heads and results in a lot of labor to correct the aim.

The 3rd generation produced about 50 lumens per watt with an 18-watt lamp. Output is roughly equal to a 60-watt halogen and I have seen some nice stores illuminated with 60-watt halogens. Beyond a nice look, the LED is more efficient. The 60-watt halogen only generates 15 lumens per watt so the energy savings of 42 watts per lamp is significant.

Table #1: LED Specifications.

Specification	Lumens	CBCP	Watts	Relative Price
19PAR38/F25 2700 DIM (AirFlux™)	1180	6800	18	100%
13PAR38/CorePro/F25 2700 AF	830	3200	13	77%
13PAR38/F25 2700 DIM AF50 (Single Optic)	900	5300	13	94%

Airflux PAR38





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LED vs. HALOGEN COST EQUIVALENTS

Specification	1 LED	10 Halogens
Bulb Cost	\$35.00	\$75.00 (buying 10 halogen to equal one LED)
Installation	\$7.50	\$75.00 (time used x salary and benefits x 10)
Efficiency	\$52.00	\$220.00 (@ \$0.10 per kWh)
Total	\$94.50	\$370 (per socket)

FEWER FEATURES & MORE BENEFITS

Four light years later we have an improved 3rd/4th generation LED. The first improvement in the AirFlux™ design was to eliminate dimming, reduce input watts and increase lumens per watt. Initially, companies like Philips thought that since halogen lamps were dimmable, that this feature was a required feature on replacement LEDs. Dimming is not a requirement for retail display lighting, so taking the dimming circuitry out reduced the price by 23%.

Reducing the input watts of new lamps in the CorePro series further reduced the total cost of ownership. The resulting 13-watt LED PAR lamp generated 58 lumens per watt and was still in the range of a 60-watt halogen. Good but could be better.

BEST SO FAR: GEN 4

Some folks didn't like the gray bodies of the early LED PAR lamps; some did. Some folks didn't like being able to see individual LEDs on the face of the PAR lamp; some didn't care. Many lighting manufacturers used a single optic, one lens to focus light from the LEDs into a coherent

beam. There was competitive pressure for Philips to offer a single optic but while they were changing things they came up with a significant boost in output.

The "Single Optic" LED from Philips keeps a 13-watt input but boosts output to 69 lumens per watt for a total of 900 lumens. With that output focused into 5300 Center Beam Candle Power (CBCP) the 13PAR38 can compete against 75-90 watt halogens. The 19-watt version is comparable to a 120-watt halogen. With 1,180 lumens and 6,800 CBCP the 19 watt has enough power for the front window.

For sockets that need a PAR30, slightly smaller LED the Retail Optic version drops to 12 watts but still produces 850 lumens and 5,000 CBCP. That is strong enough to compete with anything in a PAR30 size and meets

both parts of the sustainable lighting criteria.

DOING THE MATH

LED technology has really changed our business as a lighting distributor. In year 2000 we would hear from our customers on a reorder every three to six months. By 2005 that reorder time extended to a year, maybe a little more, because of the service life of the infrared halogen lamps. Making a sale with LEDs basically makes your customer go away because the LED will last for about 10 years. Over the life of the LED you don't need to reorder or replace the bulbs and that is a major savings.

Another major difference is price. I

"With that output focused into 5300 Center Beam Candle Power (CBCP) the 13PAR38 can compete against 75-90 watt halogens. The 19-watt version is comparable to a 120-watt halogen."

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"Using the LED vs. halogen cost information in the table, you can see that if you have 600 heads in your store, the difference per year is \$16,530 in favor of your bottom line."



have an old price list from 1998 showing the price of a halogen at \$4.20. That bulb lasted for 2500 hours and today's halogen version lasts for 4400 hours. By making an allowance for the longer life, today's halogen costs \$4.26 (including freight) which isn't much change over

more than a decade.

Keeping track of LED pricing is like watching the stock market; some days it is up some days it is down. Talking in dollars is really meaningless. The price changes so often so I have used percentages in table #1 to show the "relative" value for each lamp as of

March 2014. Take the new 19-Watt Single Optic model. "New" is the operative word and given the lamp's features and benefits it commands a relative price of 100%. The 13-Watt Single Optic has the same features but a lower output. That lamp has a relative price of 94% compared to the Retail Optic. The CorePro series was designed as low cost entry lamps. It does not dim and has a relative price of 77% compared to the best in the line. (See LED Specifications Table).

The other price consideration is that utilities are still offering rebates for using LED display lighting and exit signs. Amounts vary from \$10 to \$35 and you usually need to apply early in the year when funds are available, but rebates make the conversion a really attractive deal. Here's the basic math:

Using the LED vs. halogen cost information in the table, you can see that if you have 600 heads in your store, the difference per year is \$16,530 in favor of your bottom line. So my clear answer today is, "I like LED lighting."

About Monte Lee: Monte Lee is a Regional Manager for Service Lamp Corporation, a distributor of lighting products such as fixtures, bulbs, plus lighting consulting and design services for retailers. Inquiries on any aspect of furniture store lighting can be sent to Monte care of FURNITURE WORLD at mlee@furninfo.com. See all of Monte Lee's articles on store lighting posted to the www.furninfo.com website.

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