# funiture WORLD

### THE RETAIL DETAILS

Success Story: Art Van Furniture

Money Under Your Mattresses

**Leather Repair, Service & Warranties** 

Win At The Name Game

**Performance Indicators You Should Track** 



### ACCESSORIES MADE EASY

RUGS

**PILLOWS** 

**THROWS** 

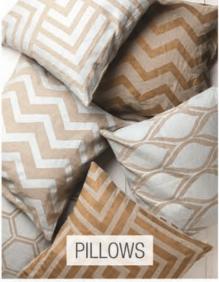
WALL DECOR

ACCENT FURNITURE

LIGHTING



RUGS: DEN-5004, IN-8602, NOD-106, ANC-1003, OLY-9001



PILLOWS: MS-004, MS-005, MS-002, MS-001, MS-003, MS-006



THROWS (top to bottom): TID-004, TLS-7000, TOR-008, TOB-1003, TID-004, TOR-006, THA-8002, TID-003



ART: LJ-4097, ART-1025, LJ-4056, ART-1023 // MIRRORS: MRR-1010, MRR-1013, LJ-4187, RWM-2004



ACCENT FURNITURE: POUF-239, POUF-203, POUF-78



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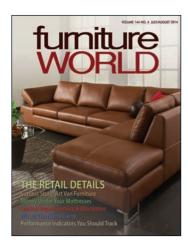


RUG: BID-2008 // PILLOWS: LP-001, FA-058 // ACCENT FURNITURE: POUF-205, POUF-213



DECORATIVE ACCENTS: NCV-852-L, NCV-850-L, NCV-851-M, NCV-850-S, NCV-851-S





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The Business Solutions Magazine For Furniture Retailers
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Retail Education



Operations



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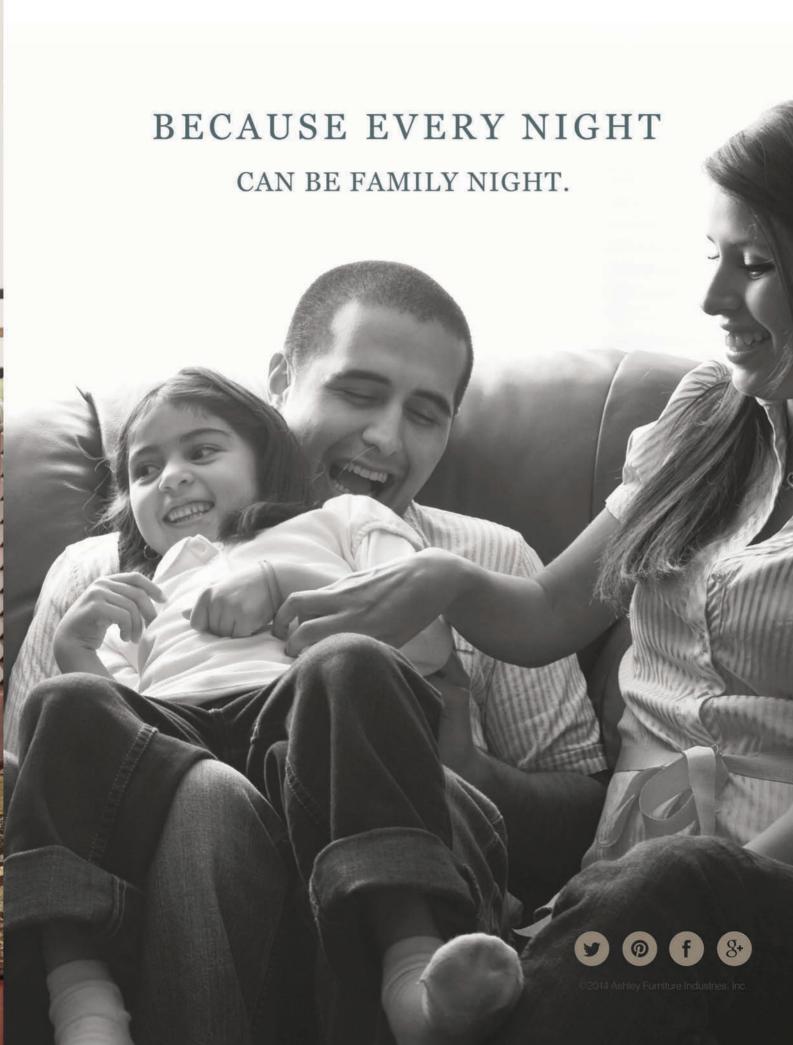














**EDITOR'S CORNER** 

The Eight Foot Rule

n this issue, Larry Schneiderman, CEO of the six-store Minnesota-based retail chain Schneiderman's Furniture advises Furniture World readers to never let a shopper pass within eight feet without smiling and welcoming. He calls it the 'Eight-Foot Rule'. Smiling is a practice that's as important as checking your retail performance indicators (article by David McMahon, page 24). It's as useful as sweating the retail details (article by Hal McClamma, page 92). And, it's as profitable looking beyond the numbers to base selling initiatives on a noble purpose (article by Joe Capillo, page 96).

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy." It's true that a smile can be contagious. It signals to customers that they are welcome, and that they enjoy their jobs. Some folks come by their smiles naturally. Others, need reminders that life need not be so serious, introspective or sullen.

Here's a suggestion. Do a google search on the "science of smiling". Make it a topic for a sales meeting. Teach Larry's Eight Foot Rule, and remind your employees as well as yourself to wear one whenever possible.

Russell Bienenstock, Editorial Director



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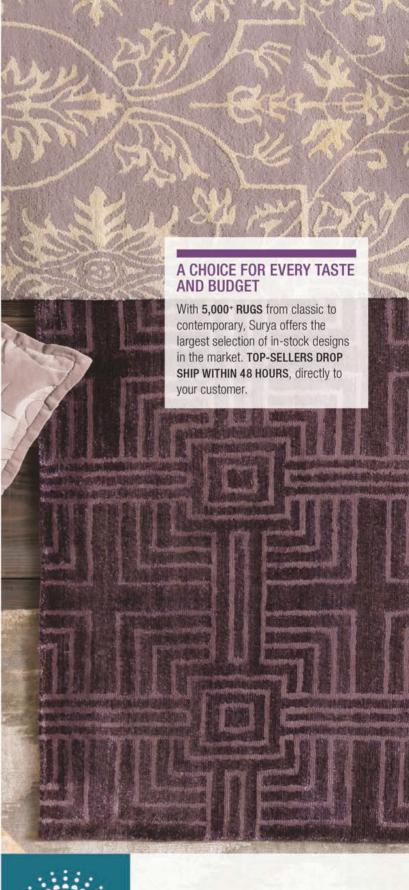
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# NAME AT THE AMERICAN E

Simple inexpensive ideas for keeping your store's name front and center.

by Gordon Hecht

he next time you are traveling, training, or working in a retail furniture store, take a trip to the break room. It's the little corner in back of the store where the staff can grab a quick coffee or lunch, or unwind after a challenging customer experience. While you are there, snoop into some of the drawers or cabinets and check out the packaged condiments and spices left over from trips to fast food restaurants.

If my hunch is right, the number one branded packet you will find is Taco Bell Hot Sauce. And if my second hunch is right, you will rarely find McDonald's ketchup. All of those packets have a cost. I can picture a boardroom in Oak Brook, IL where McDonald's accountants and food scientists have painstakingly computed the cost per packet and matched it

to the number of packets needed, by demographic group, to ingest an order of Supersize Fries. That number may be 2.174 packets, and a directive may have followed to their franchisees to pack no more than 2 packets of Ketchup in each to-go order.

Meanwhile I picture another boardroom in Irvine, CA. The "off the wall"
people at Taco Bell figured the cost
per Hot Sauce Packet at 4 cents each.
They also researched how many people keep packets in their home, and
how many people see those packets.
They may have also sent a directive to
their stores to be sure to pack an extra
"handful" of sauce packets in each
to-go bag. Six packets cost less than a
quarter, but keep their name brand in
front of customers. The Taco Bell people took it a step further and now print

funny one liners on their condiment packs, ostensibly to show, share, and collect! Taco Bell knows that every packet drives home its name and keeps customers coming back.

Now, think about our Furniture Business. We represent the largest investment (in dollars and product size) that consumers make inside their home that does not have Name Branding on the products. Go home tonight and look at your refrigerator, toaster, vacuum cleaner, and alarm clock. You can plainly see the brand name, and that name stays firmly in your mind for years. My Smart TV is so smart that it reminds me that it is an LG every time I turn it on.

If you want your business to remain viable, you need to keep your name brand top of mind for your customers. It is far less expensive to retain an existing customer and, when they remember your name, it is easier for them to give long-term personal recommendations. While most of your customers would be resistant to gleaming chrome lettering on their dresser shouting "Made By Jones Furniture Company" there are other ways to convey brand name.

our store name is... ON YOUR REFRIGERATOR!

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"My Smart TV is so smart that it reminds me that it is an LG every time I turn it on."

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Geneva



Marcy





"Both store and team logos were brightly featured. The stickers were free and those sports-crazy Beaneaters pasted them on about every bumper, even a few with New York license plates!"

Powerful Attraction: Use the power of refrigerator magnets to increase your Brand Magnetism. Once a magnet is placed on the fridge, it is rarely removed! Right now in the Hecht kitchen there are more than two dozen magnets including the 2004 Cleveland Browns Schedule, Pioneer Citizens Bank (I stopped doing business with them in 1993), and a "Save the Date" wedding announcement for Patrick and Tabitha, who have been married six years.

Just handing out magnets won't do it. Here's how to accomplish two tasks with one action. (I am a wildlife enthusiast and will not kill two birds with one stone): You can eliminate "Not at Home" delivery customers by marking their delivery date on a refrigerator magnet in the shape of your delivery truck, or make it a "Save the Date" with a photo of your store front. Leave a blank space for the date that they have to be home. Ask your shopper to place the magnet in a visible place. Chances are that you have just bought a five year advertisement that your customer will see several times a day.

The Gold Seal: Case Goods experts will tell you that the top left dresser drawer is the most used drawer in the master bedroom. If you want to remind your shoppers where they made their purchase, invest in Gold Foil labels with your store name and phone number, as in, "Furnished By The Colonial Shoppe (702) 555-1776." Add in your logo to keep your store image clear for them.

You can also place those labels

inside china cabinet and TV cabinet doors, or on sofa decking.

Bumper Crop of Shoppers: Boston is a great shopping town and competition is razor sharp. There, Jordan's partnered in a local promotion and shared space on Bumper Stickers with the Boston Red Sox. Both store and team logos were brightly featured. The stickers were free and those sports-crazy Beaneaters pasted them on about every bumper, even a few with New York license plates! Traffic jams made thousands of cars into slow moving billboards.

You might think that partnering with a major league team is expensive, and you would be RIGHT! But why not think locally and support your local High School or Little League? Minor league teams and other local festivals are another option. BTW-you will get brand exposure for the life of the automobile.

**Easy as Pie:** You may have never heard of the pie company that had a unique shape to its pie tins. The tins were on the shallow side, which made

them perfect for skimming them through the air after the pie was eaten. Students in the Northeast discovered this and made the tins into a recreational plaything. Later, Wham-O Toys made a similar dish out of plastic, but saved the Pie Company Name-Frisbee!

Summertime and Back-To-School are great times to give away those flying discs to everyone who enters your store. Sponsor a Fun in the Sun event and your name will be flying through the skies. People will keep those for years, and will remember where they got them.

There's an old joke about Pie are Square, but pies are usually round. Another great way to keep your name in front of your customers is to provide a round mouse pad with every desk or home office you deliver. Take it a step further and provide a pencil cup and desk calendar.

Tip of the Day: If your store is in a typical American or Canadian town, your customers dine in a restaurant for about 1/3 of their meals. Most restaurants accept credit cards for payments, and diners are more likely to pay with plastic than cash. You have the chance to make an impression on every one of those diners.

Next time you enjoy a meal out, be generous. Leave your server twice your normal tip. The extra \$5 or \$10 won't break you, but will have a big impact on that server's day! And, leave more than a tip. Take a few pens



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**BUILDING A** 







### AME GAM

with your company's name and logo, and leave them on the tip tray.

Restaurant Servers are always short on pens because they have to leave one at every table they work. You'll get your just desserts by knowing that your pens will be used by several servers and seen by hundreds of shoppers within the first week that you give them!

Full of Hot Air: Celebrate your customers' delivery day and make life easy for your delivery team. Getting new furniture and mattresses delivered is a special event in your customer's life. We deliver every day, but they only get new furniture every few years. Why not make it a party!

After your customer purchases, give them a bag with ribbons and a few balloons (with your store's logo on it,

"The next time you enjoy a meal out, be generous. Leave your server twice your normal tip. And leave more than a tip. Take a few pens with your company's name and logo, and leave them on the tip tray."

of course!). Let your shopper know that they can help the delivery drivers identify their homes as a delivery address if they would inflate the balloons and use the ribbons to tie them to the mail box or front door. The upshot is that your drivers won't have to search for hard to find house numbers, and your customer's neighbors will know something special is going on! Nosy neighbors will want to see what's new, and you might just profit from the "Keep up with the Joneses" syndrome.

Want to have a bigger impact? Spend a few bucks on some "We're Expecting a Special Delivery" signs. Make it extra eye-catching-like a stork carrying a sofa! You can recycle the signs by having your delivery team pick them up after delivery.

Talking Heads: I travel to a lot of cities and small towns where I make it a point to watch the local morning news shows. While there are varying degrees of production quality, almost every news show has a portion where the TV Hosts sit on casual chairs and chat. If you are advertising with any local TV station, call your media rep and request the opportunity to donate furniture for a new stage set. All you need in return is a line in the closing credits "Chairs and Sofa furnished by Manor House Furniture". That 3-second line will appear five or more times a week for the next year making it well worth the \$1000 - \$2000 investment on your part.

Getting and keeping your Brand Name out front is a vital step in moving from" just another place to shop" to the first store chosen. You might think that good customer service, great products, and the lowest prices will get you there, however, the three or four stores down the street think that will get them there too! Be proactive and invest your time and a little money on creative ways that will not have an immediate pay-out, but will lead to long term success.

The last line on the theme song for TV sitcom Cheers went something like "You want to go where everyone knows your name". Be the store in town where everyone knows YOUR name.

Editor's note: If you have some "Name Game" items of your own please send an image and description to Gordon care of russ@furninfo .com. You will receive by return email a photo of Gordon's refrigerator magnet collection!

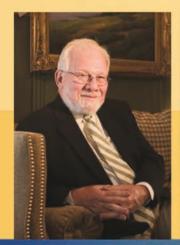
Gordon Hecht: Gordon Hecht is a 39 year maverick of the Home Furnishing business starting as a Delivery Helper in Las Vegas, NV. Following a successful sales, store management, and multi-store management career he joined Ashley Furniture Industries. In his role as National Director of Sales for Ashley Sleep, Gordon helps Retailers improve Bedding Sales through training, merchandising and display. He lives in Columbus, OH with his wife Michelle.

Any questions or comments about this article or about any retail issue can be directed to Gordon at Ghecht@ashleyfurniture.com.



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### DROP EVERYTHING

Ideas, stories and teaching moments from a family furniture business.

by Larry Schneiderman, Schneiderman's Furniture

n 1948, my parents, Max and Edna Schneiderman, bought a small, broken-down general store in the rural township of Elmer, Minnesota, about 45 miles northwest of Duluth, in an area of the state known as the Iron Range.

From the humble beginnings of an ill-stocked general store, retailer Schneiderman's Furniture has grown to include six large stores in the Minnesota cities of Duluth, Lakeville, Roseville, Woodbury, Plymouth, and Rochester.

I sold my first piece of furniture in my parents' store when I was 15 years old and I've been hooked ever since.

Over the years I collected some instructive stories I decided to share with other furniture retailers in the just published book, "Call of the Couch". As a long time reader and fan of Furniture World magazine, I am also sharing some of these insights in this short series of articles.

### WHAT DAD TAUGHT ME ABOUT MENTORING

When I talk about my dad in today's world, it may sound like he was rude. It was so different back then. There were so many things he did, or said, that I wouldn't even consider. For example, my dad hated to sell carpeting. Selling carpeting could be tedious, and really, the customer was dependent on the salesperson for help. Added to that, a lot of it looks alike. So, it's time-consuming. My mother would be the first to assist a

"Occasionally we have to remind our people to drop what they're doing when a customer is nearby."

carpet customer. If she was busy with another customer, then I would work with the carpet customer.

Eventually my wife, Sheila, started working at Schneiderman's and she was good at selling carpeting. Well, one Sunday we had three customers and they were all interested in carpet. So, here we all are in this small, confined carpet area. We are all showing samples.

My dad's customer says to him in a loud voice, obviously wanting the other customers to hear it, "I can buy this same carpet for \$2 a yard less at Goldfine's."

My dad looked at him, took a \$20 bill out of his wallet, laid it on the table, and said, "I'll bet you that you can't find that carpet for \$2 a yard less at Goldfine's."

The guy said, "I don't want to bet."

Dad puts another \$20 down on the table and said, "I bet you can't find this carpet for \$1 a yard less at Goldfine's."

The guy said again, "I don't want to bet."

So Dad puts another \$20 down, and he said, "I tell you what. I think you and I both know you won't buy any carpeting from me today. I'll bet you \$100," he says as he puts two more twenties down, "that you can't buy this carpet for the same price at Goldfine's as you can buy it here."

The guy said, "I don't have \$100."

"Then you don't have any goddamn business looking at carpet." Dad





### "I'll bet you \$100,"

he says as he puts two more twenties down, "that you can't buy this carpet for the same price at Goldfine's as you can buy it here."

made this bold statement while he was scooping up his five twenties, and the couple took off.

Dad, Mom, and I would often visit about the day on Sunday nights as we closed. That night, my dad asked me, "You were embarrassed by that, weren't you?" I said I was.

And then my mother said to me, "I sold to my customer and you sold to your customer because your father made the point." That was true, even though he would never have wanted to see me do what he did that day, and I would never act that way toward a customer or allow a sales consultant to do so.

Looking back, I believe that his purpose was greater than just making a couple of sales. He was acting as a mentor to me in a way that was memorable.

At Schneiderman's today, we often hire people who have little sales experience. They appear to have the aptitude for it, but they don't really know whether or not they're going to like it—or whether or not they'll do well. They have a lot of preconceived notions about selling.

Many furniture retailers put salespeople out on the floor with little training or ongoing mentoring. That's a shame, because without that, they can't build confidence to be comfortable with their store, it's policies, products and services. So confident, in fact, that they would be willing to bet \$100 that their customer could not find a better value elsewhere.

#### THE EIGHT-FOOT RULE

The eight-foot rule is to never let a shopper pass within eight feet without smiling and welcoming. Here's its sidekick: Never fail to look up and acknowledge your shopper as she moves near you. If you're on the phone or gazing at a computer

screen, stop, look up, and smile. Stop, look, and listen. It's the safest way to happy customers.

Smile Every Time: I am impressed when I'm at a business where the employees appear to be happy. Recently, six of us had brunch at the BLVD Kitchen in Minnetonka on an

### THE RIGHT CHOICE



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**Retail Card Services** 

"Once the right item has been found and any objections answered, it's a kindness to help a customer finalize her choice."

Easter Sunday. Whoever hires people there has mν admiration. To a person, they smiled, were helpful, and as I commented to my daughter-inlaw, Natalie, they all exuded an attitude of, "I sure am glad to be working my butt off on Easter Sunday."

Likewise, e m p l o y e e s should be thankful for the customers who come our stores, whether we're working with them or not. There's a lot stress

unpleasantness in the world; let our place be a respite.

Don't walk by a customer or anyone without a welcoming smile, whether that smile is returned or not.

Drop Everything: Occasionally we have to remind our people to drop what they're doing when a customer is nearby. We need to acknowledge people, show them we know they're important. Customers sometimes signal their desire to be left alone by looking the other way and avoiding eye contact. Still, maintain the habit of smiling and saying "hello" because we at retail are charged with making their experience a good one.

#### SOME CALL IT "THE CLOSE"

Some call it the close, but I call it gathering evidence and calling for the verdict. My friends know I'm always up for a good meal. Casual? Fast food? Formal? Steak? Seafood? Once we gain a consensus, I always appreciate the friend who steps out and calls us into action. I want to eat. I don't want to discuss every variable of eating out. So it is with our customers. Once the right item has been found and any objections answered. it's a kindness to help a customer finalize her choice.

Jumping The Gun: In selling circles, it is a common perception that to be a great sales consultant, you must be a great closer. That is true, but a lot of damage can be caused by prematurely suggesting a customer should buy something. When a sales consultant hasn't asked the right questions to understand the needs and then tries to push the customer into buying something he or she doesn't need, that action is likely to remove any trust. In this case, the sales consultant confirms the worst thoughts people have about pushy salespeople. It damages the store's reputation and it reflects poorly on the vocation. It is far better to view the process step by step, offer suggestions, answer objections honestly, and then only when you feel the customer is in agreement, ask for the

sales order. Paul Zimmerman, our long-time sales and operations manager, has noticed that we get far more complaints from customers who felt we weren't helpful enough, rather than we were pushy. It's worth remembering that customers want to find solutions and they need our help.

Are You Like A Tire Store? We will sometimes have sales consultants who voice the opinion that they think customers should be left to browse. When we hear this unfortunate view surface, we drag out our "tire store" comparison. Imagine you need to buy a set of tires for your car. Upon entering, you're greeted by a pleasant salesperson, who says, "Go ahead and browse around at our tires." Okay, now what? Wouldn't it be far more helpful and effective if the salesperson asked some questions like: What kind of car are these for? What happened with the tires you have now? What is your main concern? Is it safety? Is it price? How many do you

Some question the validity of the tire store metaphor, but I don't. If anything, a mistake buying tires will be less costly than a misstep with a quality furniture purchase.

The Ideal Sales Consultant: A disadvantage of the big furniture stores, including ours, is that it's easy to lose a customer in the showroom. We've sponsored focus groups and we've asked the question, "What is the ideal sales consultant?" The comparison that has often come up is that the sales consultant should be like a great

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### **DROP EVERYTHING**

"Some question the validity of the tire store metaphor, but I don't. If anything, a mistake buying tires will be less costly than a misstep with a quality furniture purchase."

server in a good restaurant, out of sight until you need them. That's easy to say, not so easy to execute. Not too long ago, I visited El Dorado Furniture in Miami and was impressed to notice that their salespeople are required to not only stay available to customers, but to escort them out the doorevery time. While I waited for a cab to pick me up, I counted customers leaving, and every single one of them was with a salesperson as they left.

I'll Know It When I See It: One of the more common things customers sometimes say as they're browsing the showroom is, "I'll know it when I see it." I have pondered how a shopper

will know it when they see it when, in reality, they don't really know what they need. One of our top sales consultants told me how he works on this "secret." He listens to what the customer savs and then asks permission to show them an item. If it doesn't fill the customer's need, he asks, "What should be changed to make this work?" Then they work on it from there. Often the customer leaves happy, having found what she had in mind. I told you he is one of our best.

#### **NEXT ISSUE**

More tips and retail stories from Larry Schneiderman.

About Larry Schneiderman: Larry Schneiderman is the CFO of the six-Minnesota-based Schneiderman's Furniture. He sold his first piece of furniture when he was fifteen and has been hooked ever since. Don't ask him when he's going to retire—they don't have a treatment facility equipped for his kind of customer-service addiction. He is the author of the recently published book, "Call Of The Couch: A Family's Love Affair With It's Business." Says Brian Tracy, the best-selling author, entrepreneur, and business development consultant, "This book tells a memorable and rich story of success in business, lessons learned, and the wisdom that every person can apply."

Comments about this article or questions can be addressed to www.larrvschneiderman.com.

Offer for Furniture World Readers: Larry's book is available for sale through www.larryschneiderman.com with a \$5 off coupon for Furniture World Readers.

Editor's Note: If you have retail stories to share, please send them to Furniture World Magazine at editor@furninfo.com.



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# SEVEN RETAIL DERFORMANCE INDICATORS YOU SHOULD TRACK

by David McMahon

et me tell you a story of two retailers who were competitors for several years. One is prospering today. The other went out of business.

They had similar footprints and decent locations. They both had similar marketing campaigns, targeted to the same types of customers. On the surface, they both appeared to be fairly equal businesses, but they were not. There was one critical factor that set them apart. One was a student of their business and the other was a victim of it.

The student measured performance, learned from the results, and

"There are several indicators that successful retailers use to be a student of their business so they can surpass their unfocused competitors. Here are 7 important measurements and how to use them."

took quick decisive action to continuously improve. This business had focus.

The victim reacted to the latest situation of the day; flying blind, unfocused, without a pilot's license.

The focused business produced increasing sales, profits, and cash flows over time. The unfocused business ate into profits and burned cash. When a slight downturn hit, the good business operator had reserves to weather the storm, whereas the reactionary operator had to take on increasing debt and eventually filed for bankruptcy.

The lesson here is simple, listen, understand, and act. Listen to your business. Seek to understand what it is telling you. Act on what you hear to improve. Listening to your business involves looking at key indicators. Understanding them involves not only being educated on what the metrics mean and how they are calculated but knowing what factors determine their results. Acting is execution on improvement. Listening and understanding are useless without this.

Here are seven indicators successful retailers use to be good students so they can surpass their unfocused competitors:

Sales to Plan. Absence of a plan is a plan to fail. Obviously

sales volume is critical. Why then is it that many retailers do not set achievable selling targets? I don't have the answer to that, but I can tell you that if you set proper sales goals, you will have a MUCH greater chance of achieving them.

### Sales to Plan = Sales / Planned Sales (Expressed as a %)

You want to be above 100% on this metric. For example, if your retail unit has a target of producing \$100,000 for a certain time period and it produced \$94,000, you've fallen short at 94% of plan. (\$94,000/ \$100,000). However, if the unit produces \$110,000, it has exceeded the goal at 110% of plan (\$110,000/ \$100,000).

This type of metric should be done for your entire business, for all retail locations, for all sales teams and for all individuals.

Sales to Plan should be monitored each month, each quarter, and each year, without fail. This allows you to react faster if the reactions of your team are falling short.

Many elements can cause a sales goal to be missed. A starting point is to examine the equation for required sales volume: Selling Opportunities x Close Rate x Average sale. Using this formula, you can see what you can do to immediately produce better results.

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  - 4) Formal Living Room
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For information on becoming an Agio° retailer, visit www.agio-usa.com/retailer.



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# SEVEN RETAIL DERFORMANCE INDICATORS YOU SHOULD TRACK

Average Sale. Simply put, if your sale size is bigger, you move toward your target sales levels faster. It takes fewer transactions to produce greater results.

### Average Sale = Sales Volume / # of Sale Transactions

Suppose your sales volume for a period of time is \$1,000,000. And 1,000 transactions occurred. Your average sale size is \$1,000 (\$1,000,000 / 1,000).

Since track average sales, you are able to increase add-ons by group pricing. This results in an average sales increase of \$100 per transaction. An extra \$100,000 per period is generated  $$(1,000 \times $100 = $100,000)$ .

Gross Margin (GM). Revenue keeps you in business but it does not pay your bills. Gross Margin dollars pay your bills. The Gross Margin percent is the portion of sales dollars that you have left to cover costs and make a profit.

(GM \$ = Sales - Merchandise cost

with freight; GM% = GM \$/Sales \$).

Recently, I have seen furniture businesses range from 40% to 75%. 55% GM which is doable if you execute properly. First though, you must track and set goals on this metric. Once that is clearly understood you can move on to acting. Here is a summarized list of six GM improvement actions that others are using (there are many more – be creative!):

- Use a combined "science and art" approach to pricing best sellers and new merchandise.
- Mark slow moving items down on a quick time schedule in a series of steps.
- Private Label and Self-Branding.
- Incentivizing high GM sales.
- Two or three tier pricing on long term financing.
- Group pricing.

4 Gross Margin Return on inventory (GMROI). This performance metric takes Gross Margin production a step further. It evaluates

"Recently, I have seen furniture businesses range from 40% to 75%. 55% GM which is doable if you execute properly."

how many GM dollars are produced for each Inventory dollar carried on average. From this, you can see your return on investment for your largest asset and consumer of cash. As you become more efficient in GMROI, you use less cash to produce greater margin dollars. In doing so, both cash flow and profitability increase.

### GMROI = GM \$ annualized / Inventory \$ averaged

Here is an example of how to use GMROI and a few actions you can execute to improve it. Let's suppose your goal is to keep GMROI at a minimum of \$2.5 overall each month, then your GMROI falls to 2.45. "Red Flag!" You should not just sit and say, "Well, let's just watch it and hopefully it will turn around next month." Instead, first seek to understand what caused the decline. Study the possible factors that could affect GMROI by asking questions such as:

- Were sales targets hit?
- Was the minimum performance standard (MPS) for gross margin achieved?
- Was average inventory at the budgeted level?

Now, suppose that sales to goal was above 100% and gross margin performed over minimum performance standard (MPS) at 52%. If your average inventory rose, causing a decline in ROI, you could then dig into why inventory on hand increased. Ask questions such as:

- Was receiving as expected?
- Were deliveries and pick-ups at the projected level? Capacity?





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"If you discover that balance sheet elements are causing a consistent cash drain even though sales and profits are increasing, here are some possible actions that you can consider."

you can act fast to focus on improving customer scheduling and filling trucks to capacity.

5 Net Income or Profit. At the end of the day there is only one way to be successful: to consistently be as profitable as possible. At the end of the day, cash is made from one area of the business: profit.

Net Income = Sales - Cost = Gross Margin - Operating Expenses = **Profit Before Tax** 

Financial statements are the only place to get this critical data. These

statements must be:

- Organized Accurate Timely
- Analyzed Acted upon

This may sound obvious. Believe me it is not. In the world of independent furniture businesses, financial statements often take a back seat. However, operations that perform constantly better in net income are most often the ones that use financial reporting as the key management report. Statements must be properly organized so they can be easily benchmarked to top industry performers. They must be materially accurate

You might discover that merchandise dollars in the warehouse grew due to a slowdown in delivery and pickups. Once you identify this issue,

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"I interviewed three or four different companies..."

### **Excerpts from Andrea Eller's recorded interview**

"The sale was very successful, and the amazing thing is, they were right on target with what the predicted outcome would be, so I am very happy with the results. When I was researching the company, I think I called probably eight or ten (references), I think there were probably 15 companies on that list, and that didn't even include all the companies that were already on the website. So, I called lots of people, and had nothing but positive answers. It was almost too good to be true, but I have to confirm, that they really are a company I would recommend...the top of the list. They would be the people I would go with that you would have no worries. ....so, I couldn't give a higher recommendation to anyone."

The flag is part of the store's history, listen to Andrea's testimonial for details.



Andrea Eller

President

Furniture World-Carpet One, two stores in PA



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### "Let's assume inventory

is at a good level to sales and that your product mix is efficient. Also assume that AP, AR, and customer deposits are at good levels."

and verified against supporting information so that the Businesses' Leaders can believe what they are looking at. They should be generated on a timely basis (by the 10th of each month for the prior month) so data is current. It's critical that the management team spends time every month analyzing performance. Finally, the information detailed in financial reports should be acted upon, focusing on areas of desired improvement and acting appropriately.

**Cash Ratio.** Cash is called "King" for a reason. It dictates what a business can and cannot do.

Even though all cash is derived from profit, it can be gained or lost in many ways. In fact, I have seen profitable businesses go out of business because they failed to watch their cash metrics as well as attend to all the items that affect cash flow.

Cash Ratio = (Cash + Marketable)Securities) / Current Liabilities (balances due under 1 year)

A cash ratio of .5 is fairly decent for a retail furniture operation. Regardless of what your actual number is, the most important thing is to know your cash ratio number. The next most important thing is that you know what affects it. Other than net income, the biggest factors that move this ratio under normal conditions are fluctuating inventory, payable, customer deposits, and accounts receivable.

Theoretically, if all these factors are maintained at the same balance each month, the only thing that causes cash to change will be profit. We know that in the real world this never happens. Inventory is often the biggest culprit on the balance sheet causing cash flow fluctuations at retail.

For example, if you discover that



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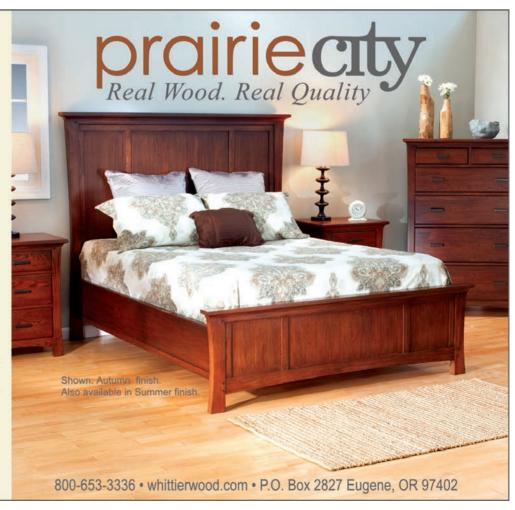
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## DERFORMANCE INDICATORS YOU SHOULD TRACK

balance sheet elements are causing a consistent cash drain even though sales and profits are increasing, here are some possible actions that you can consider:

- Keep tighter controls on open to buy for new merchandise. Reduce inventory to sales cap i.e., 15% Inventory to Sales from 17%.
- Maximize Customer Deposits. Ask for 100% down, require 50% down, Collect 100% before delivery.
- Extend Payables to the maximum point, especially on vendors without discounts. Evaluate any vendors requiring prepayment.

For an alternate example, let's assume inventory is at a good level to sales and that your product mix is efficient. Also assume that AP, AR, and customer deposits are at good levels. In this situation, you might focus on lowering operating costs to improve the cash ratio. Generally, operating costs in our industry range between 37%-43% of sales. I consider under 40% to be lean for most operations in my consulting practice. For evaluation purposes, your business should establish budgets that are based on common industry expense categories. They include: General Administrative, Occupancy, Advertising/Marketing, Selling, Warehouse, Delivery, Finance, and After Sale Service.

Having targeted budgets set-up properly will help you spot an issue that negatively effects cash flow, faster. Improvement actions can be executed sooner, saving you huge dollars.

Customer Feedback. Retail
performance indicators would
be incomplete without a customer driven element. You need to know what
your customers are saying about you

so you can seek to improve your service. Over time this is perhaps the most important factor determining

success and growth in the marketplace. The challenge is that customer's thoughts are outside any

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"Be a student of your business, not a victim of it."

report that you can process in your management system. There is no line item on a sales or financial report that says, "Customer Value Rating". So, smart retailers seek their customer's opinions.

Surveys are nothing new. The way they are being approached is different. Start by doing two things: Keep it simple. Ask after delivery. Here are three basic questions:

- How did we do?
- What could we do better?
- Would you recommend us?

It is important that results are tracked and reviewed. Any trends, good or bad, should be spotted. Ratings can be established for minimum performance standards. Actions to improve should be executed to improve the customer experience.

For example, suppose you notice that customers are reporting that they would appreciate a shorter time window and advanced notice on their deliveries. Bingo — an opportunity is realized to improve the customer experience. You could seek to implement faster routing and follow-up

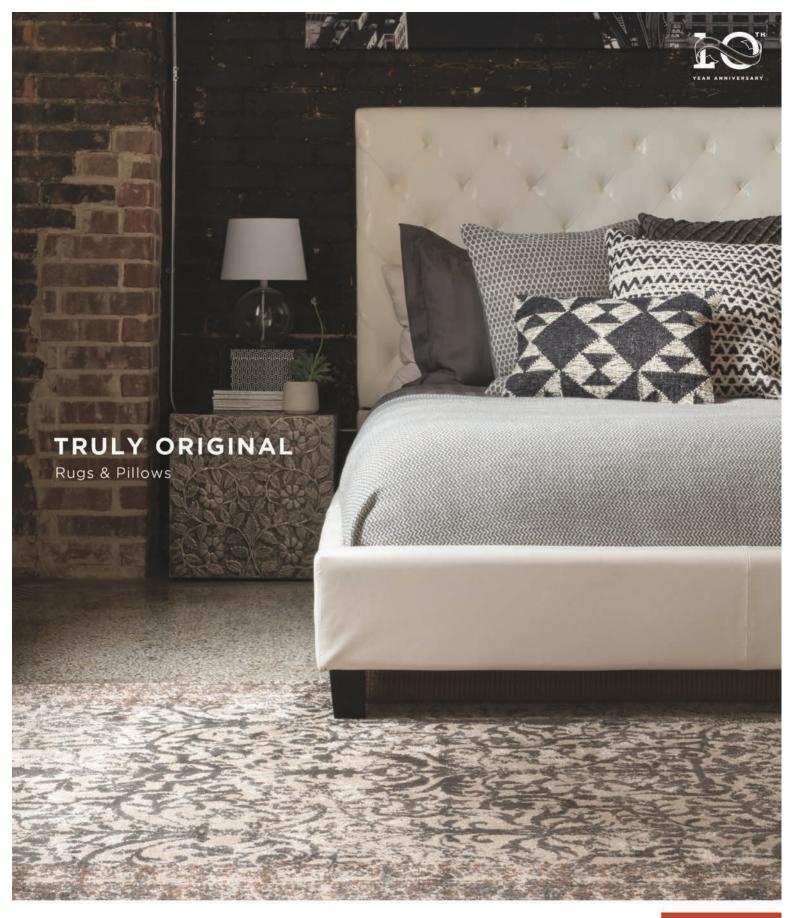
technology that is available today. This is just one example of hundreds of possibilities. But to really find the opportunity, you need to ask and to listen. The big thing to remember is that your ultimate performance judges are the people you do business with.

Be a student of your business, not a victim of it. These seven performance indicators will help you stay on top of your business from many operational perspectives. Sales to Plan and Average Sales focus on top line performance. Gross Margin and GMROI then hones in on what you make from transactions and your return on investment. Net Income, Profitability, and the Cash Ratio are concerned with what you have left after all your expenses and the strength of your cash flow. And finally, customer feedback gives you valuable indicators as to how you are performing in the eyes of those that purchase your products and services. Use these indicators routinely and continuously together to keep the pulse of your business strong. Seek to improve them by digging into what affects their outcome and take quick and decisive actions within your operation. Doing this better than your competition will give you the advantage.

About David McMahon: David McMahon, Director of PROFITsystems, Accellos Performance Groups is a management consultant and certified management accountant. He specializes in helping businesses grow profitability, sales, and cash flow. Contact David if you wish to discuss your business challenges at david.mcmahon@accellos.com.

See all of David's articles at http://www.furninfo.com/Authors/List.





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# \_ DESIGNS



# Surya

Zeus is hand knotted in India of 100% New Zealand wool. Suggested Retail Price for 5'6" x 8'6" is \$1,879.

Contact information on index page 96.



# Italdivani

The Altanova chair is a compact rocking and swivel chair that will accommodate any size person. The concave seating fits beneath the knees and its headrest will adjust according to height. Available in a wide variety of Italian fabrics and leathers. Made in Canada.

Contact information on index page 96.

# Elran

The Axel collection sectional features a casual contemporary design. It has chaise seating, an oversized box arm with an integrated headrest. Other features include optional power recliners, a wide, condo sofa on one side with a regular loveseat on the other as shown here. This collection also includes a wide chair, loveseat and condo sofa. Made in Canada.

Contact information on index page 96



# **Douglas Casual Living**

The Geneva dining group features a clipped corner table top in medium oak finish with medium oak "family friendly" high pressure laminate top surface. Chairs are covered in a heavy duty tweed fabric with painted metal frame. The base has wood caps.

Contact information on index page 96.



# Legends Furniture

The Manor 76 inch premium console features a perfect combination of solid wood, furniture board and premium veneers to ensure durability and longevity.

Contact information on index page 96.



# **Ashley**

With thick legs supporting the table top bathed in a weathered black finish and a framed detailed apron, the rustic Vintage Casual design of the "Gavelston" dining collection features four textured fabric chair color options.

Contact information on index page 96.

# BEST SELLING DESIGNS



# Loloi

Created in collaboration with Kris Ruff, the Nova Collection has bright colors and graphic motifs with 9 hand-tufted 100% wool rugs from India.

Contact information on index page 96.



These woven seat backless stools have cappuccino solid wood frames with basket woven pattern seats. The spacious seating and smooth weaving guarantee comfort. Suitable for indoor and outdoor uses.

Contact information on index page 96.





# Woodworks

This new Heartwood Pedestal table features unique construction with the end grain of the pedestals continuing through the table top for a distinctive contemporary look. Available in both Oak and Maple with a variety of stain colors and sizes available. This table is pictured with Torino side chairs, available with wood or upholstered seats in multiple fabric choices. Made in Canada.

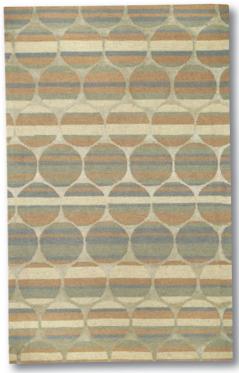
Contact information on index page 96.



# Capel

Tuscan Sun, winner of a 2014 America's Magnificent Carpet Award, features circles and bands of color from Kevin O'Brien's sketches of Italian sunsets. This hand-tufted 90% wool, 10% viscose collection is made in India. It is available in beige, grey, spa/cream and turquesa. Comes in 3' x 5', 5' x 8', 7' x 9' and 8' x 11'. A 5' x 8' rug may retail for \$673.

Contact information on index page 96.



# **Omnia**

Messina has a clean, contemporary look. It's functional adjustable arm allows personalizing comfort while utilizing the storage capability at the end of the chaise. Available in a wide selection of leather colors. Made in America.



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You are invited to view the entire Jaipur line up at the upcoming markets. Showcasing a curated collection of over 1400 rug designs, 400 pillow and pouf designs, and the newly launched line of accent throws you will be able to experience all Jaipur has to offer. There is a strong presence of all things blue with a feature focus on Discovering the Depths of Blue that you will see throughout both the Atlanta and Las Vegas showrooms encompassing all shades of indigo, sky, lagoon, and ink. Check out the new licensing partnership with designer Jennifer Adams in Las Vegas July 27-31 where the Livable Luxury collection will be featured. Stop in for the famous healthy vegetarian lunches, and award winning coffee from an award winning barista at the Jaipur Coffee Bar in Atlanta Building 1 Showroom 3-C-15 and Las Vegas Building B Suite 424.

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**Nourison** 

The lively and sophisticated design of "Ocean", from the Rhapsody Collection, presents flickering abstract shapes on an intricately striated ground. Made of 80% wool 20% nylon and power loomed in China.

Contact information on index page 96.

# Natuzzi

Re-vive features, Responsive Recline (a weight compensating mechanism that allows reclining with perfect balance), dynamic arms, full 360 degree range of movement in the base, and a tilting ottoman. Available in two sizes, king and queen, three styles and many color options. Premium leather is accented by delicate hand stitching, and each recliner is individually made to order.

Contact information on index page 96.



# Lane

The completely modular Brandon motion sectional is can be arranged using a multitude of modular pieces including a new lay-flat chaise lounge with infinite recline positions.

Contact information on index page 96.



# Horizon Home

This vintage server is a new addition to the Bombay line up. It has generous storage space, and a low maintenance galvanized top. Suggested retail \$599.00.



Contact information on index page 96.

# Aria Designs

Lauren, 96" sofa with down feather blend seating, super bonded leather and suede toss pillows.

Contact information on index page 96.



# Jaipur

En Casa is the design collection of Cuban born, Queens, NY raised painter and surface designer, Luli Sanchez. This collection is based on art that captures an organic and moody yet optimistic spirit.

Contact information on index page 96.

# Borkholder Furniture

From the Belltown Collection, this Rustic Cherry bedroom is shown in Royal finish. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 96.





July/August 2014 FURNITURE WORLD 43

# BEST SELLING DESIGNS



# **Thomasville**

Inspired by early 1900s' industrial progress, Reinventions features weathered woods, straight forward shaping and two finishes Weatherly and Loft that bring out the pronounced Elm grain. The Reliance Pharmacy has four drawers, a lift lid glass door in the center and two adjustable shelves in the curio top.

Contact information on index page 96.





The Venezia top-grain leather sectional collection features top-grain leather on all seating areas and armrests, with leather match on sides and backs. This 2-pc set includes sectional and ottoman in hand-rubbed, multi-toned brown.

Contact information on index page 96.



# Whittier Wood

The Prairie City Bedroom collection updates the American Craftsman design aesthetic that originates from the Arts and Crafts style. The Mantel Storage Bed not only offers a unique, comforting design but also comes in a rich Autumn finish (as shown) or a lighter Summer finish.

Contact information on index page 96.

# Broyhill

Introducing New Vintage, fresh interpretations of timeless classics. Antique-inspired pulls and knobs adorn drawers and complement the four authentic finishes: Vintage Brown, Timeworn Ebony, Vintage White and Vanity Red. The counter height gathering table has open cubbies while the server features sliding glass doors, removable silver tray and a hidden compartment for table leaf storage. The sideboard also has a removable silver tray and features a handy key holder with a vintage look.

Contact information on index page 96.



The 8825 modular sectional features adjustable ratchet-style head-rests and arm-rests with a tight-seat construction. Available in leather and fabric.

Contact information on index page 96.



# Sunset International

The Trento Collection features rich espresso-colored legs, leatherette front panel, rolled arms, superior frame construction, effortless operating mechanism, rust and corrosion resistant galvanized mechanism and fitting parts, and steel innerspring coils with wrapped foam fill.

Contact information on index page 96.



# M M

# September 4th & 5th, 2014 THURSDAY 9AM - 5PM • FRIDAY 9AM - 3PM

at the Lancaster County Convention Center

All American Furniture Expo Commits to Strong Economies in Local and Regional Communities

**EXPERT CRAFTSMEN • THRIVING MARKETPLACES • STRONG COMMUNITIES** 

September 4 & 5, 2014 are the dates of the 4th annual All American Furniture Expo at the Lancaster Convention Center in the heart of the vibrant city of Lancaster, PA. Building on the success of their first three shows, the Expo invites wholesale buyers to choose from a fine selection of American made furniture. Primitive, transitional, mission, modern, contemporary, and urban styles are featured in many styles and finishes on the 46,000 square foot trade floor space.

Wanda Gregg, All American Furniture Expo coordinator, and her team are passionate about raising the quality of life and boosting economies in the USA by offering American made products. Thus, this Expo is unique in the fact that no overseas furniture is exhibited at the show.

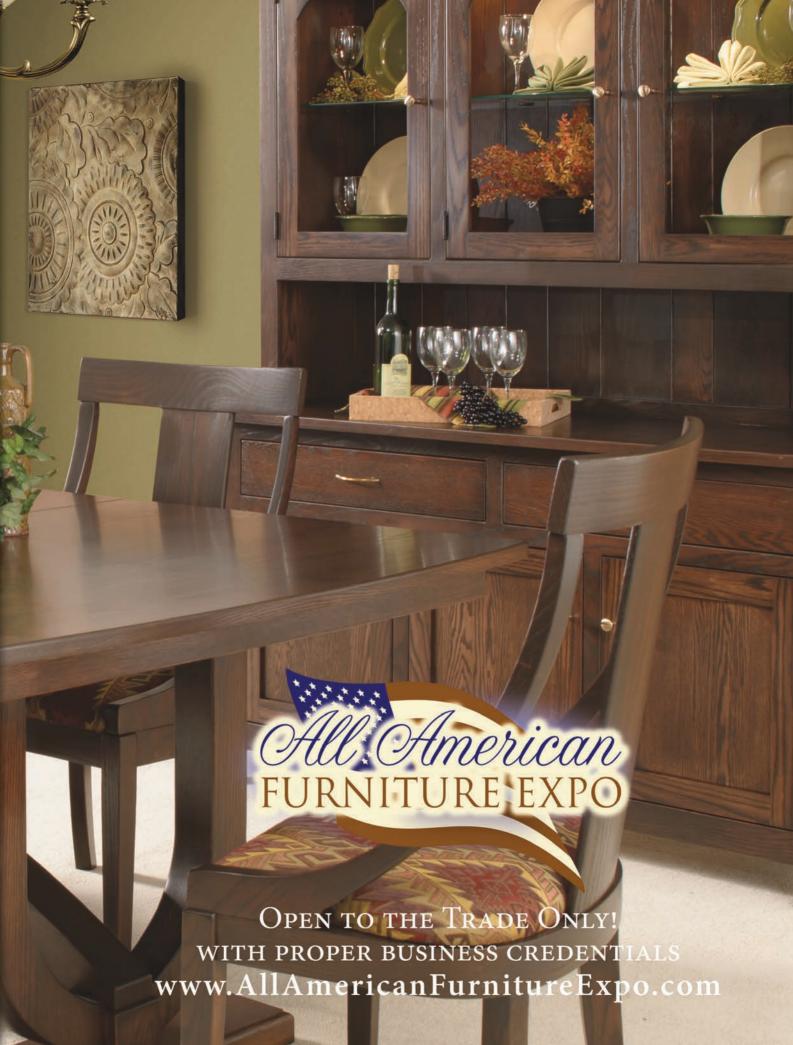
American craftsmen have a feeling of satisfaction, accomplishment, and pride in their work as they see a widening market for their handcrafted furniture. Especially positive is the trend of the younger generation toward supporting the concept of American made. Many young adults are committed to purchasing from businesses that offer products made in the USA.

"The All American Show in Lancaster has become the premier American made vendor/ retailer show on the east coast, in a city and in a market that is a hotbed for furniture," states J. Gregory Shenenberger, of CVW Investments, Ltd. "The show draws vendors from all over the east coast and the Midwest, and the convention center venue is a prime spot for the event. This is a must attend show for those of us who are big players in the American made and Amish handcrafted furniture world." CVW Investments, Ltd. is the investment company for Country Home Furniture, a Lancaster County based retail store that features one of the largest American made and Amish handcrafted displays in the country.

The Expo always features new and previous vendors with bright, fresh, new ideas. Cramco Dinettes, Naturepedic, Unique Wood Creation and American Baby Classics are some of the new manufacturers already registered for this year's show. The opportunity to interact and network in person with the American manufacturers about their upholstered and solid hardwood furniture is priceless and is a distinct advantage to retailers when they are working out the details of an order for furniture.

At the heart of the All American Furniture Expo is the promotion and marketing of American made, quality products that include a fine selection of Amish made products. The Expo team of Ivan Yost, Joyce Reed, Holly Keenen, and Wanda Esh Gregg are devoted to making this show beneficial for all who attend. They give exceptional service and run a well-organized show. Most importantly, they help American crafts people succeed by insisting on the "No Overseas Furniture" guideline for this show.

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# WHAT'S ON YOUR

Show enough beds, the right beds, the ones your customers want to buy.

by David Benbow

o you ever lose sales to the competition? Who doesn't, you might ask? More specifically, do you ever lose sales because of your showroom? And even more specifically, do you lose sales because you don't show enough beds, or show the wrong beds, or show beds the customer does not want to buy?

In this installment in the Better Bedding and Mattress Sales series, we discuss a lot of ideas on merchandising your mattress showroom, you may find useful.

How you set up your showroom depends on a lot of factors, some of which are:

- How much space do you have available?
- How serious a player are you in your local mattress market?
- How much investment do you have available for your mattress showroom?

## **HOW MUCH SPACE?**

Space, or lack of it, is often the number one constraint facing a store owner in developing a mattress gallery. Over the past few years, the bia stores and mattress chains have gotten a lot fancier in showing their mattresses. This has almost reached the point where the "presentation" seems to take on more importance than the merchandise. Of course, manufacturers continue to outdo each other in making pretty mattresses, so it is felt by some that the showroom ambience should match the elegance of the product they are selling. This evolution of presentation has naturally increased the size, in sheer square footage, of the up-scale mattress gallery. Where mattress galleries were once tightly packed with merchandise, now open spaces prevail with tastefully marked walkways. This type of presentation, of course, takes a lot more space. Some store owners, feeling intimidated by the "big mattress chain" showroom layout, worry about the dilemma of not looking as good as the fancy chain stores.

The real question is, what does the elegantly appointed chain store show-room speak to the customer? The first thing that pops into my mind is "High Prices." Somebody has to pay for that beautiful showroom with all the "wasted" space, and guess who it is?

So, the amount of space you need depends a lot on how you want to look. To be a serious "player" in an increasingly saturated and difficult market, anything less than 3000 square feet will compromise your merchandise selection. As we all know,

"Beds arranged by type of construction, tend to bias the RSA toward construction-type, rather than let the customer decide the comfort level she prefers."



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landlords and tax assessors charge you by the square foot, so the bigger the space, the more money you will pay. Some of the national chains are devoting 6000 or more square feet, and some highly publicized stores seem to have no upper limit to the size of their showrooms.

Therefore, the amount of space devoted to your mattress/bedding gallery depends a lot on the image you want to present, but anything under the above mentioned 3K square foot mark, and you may not be perceived by the customer (or manufacturers) as a serious retailer.

#### HOW MANY VENDORS?

This is a tricky question. Vendors (manufacturers) are a jealous lot. They want to be the only one on your floor, and they only grudgingly relent to other "inferior" vendors being placed beside their products. As usual, there are pros and cons to presenting multiple vendors, or at the other extreme, positioning your store as a single-vendor. As a single vendor store, you should get a lot more attention and support from your vendor than if that vendor was just one of many competing for space. The advantages of carrying multiple vendors are: you can offer a better variety to your customer, increase the competition between your vendors, and gives your store the appearance of being a more diverse competitor. Beware of the danger of too many vendors, however. Unless you have a very high volume store, the low volume vendors will quickly become disgruntled with your performance and the resulting consequences could be unpleasant.

# **HOW MANY MODELS?**

Before the surge in popularity of specialty bedding about ten years ago, the prevailing theory was that a showroom needed 36 to 37 models, at minimum, to cover all the important price/feel combinations. Today, that has changed. Before I offer a new number, we need to consider all the different kinds of beds that have become available in recent years, and their importance in the lineup of a serious mattress player.

In addition to the traditional innerspring sets, we now have specialty beds, which include memory foam, latex, airbeds, and then of course, hybrid beds, gels, and so on. All these innovations keep retailers scrambling to stay up with the latest thing, and not to fall short in the face of the compe-



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what does the elegantly appointed chain store showroom speak to the customer? The first thing that pops into my mind is High Prices."

tition.

To determine the showroom configuration, I suggest creating a grid with a row of prices on the left side of the page, and a column of "feels" across the top. That way, there is a blank form with all the possible combinations needed. By "filling in the blanks," this method ensures that you don't omit an important placement on the floor. Now, to the top column, the merchandiser needs to also add specialty models, and their "feels". In past years, most specialty models were in a much higher price category, but as promotional mattress companies have gotten in on the act, there seems to be no bottom for prices in the specialty bed category.

You might ask the question, "Why do I need all these beds?" My answer is, you only need them if you want to make sales. With the rapidly expanding diversity in the mattress market, somebody in your town will have the beds you decided not to carry. They will get the sale, and they should.

I always felt, as a retailer specializing in mattresses, especially in a modest sized market, that I needed to have at least one example of everything the market had to offer. This meant carrying, on my floor, every price/feel combination and every construction type; also, all price ranges from the cheap-

"Every mattress set with a price point above \$499, if the mattress is compatible should be displayed with an adjustable base." est twin to the fanciest, most expensive, luxurious king set. Note, I make this statement within reason. There are some very expensive European imports and their American counterparts that the careful store owner, especially in a small market, might want to admire from a distance, before spending a fortune to have that set collect dust on the floor. But, that is up to the store owner, of course. For a mattress specialist in a major market area, this may be a different story.

#### ARRANGING YOUR FLOOR

This subject is big enough to consume an entire article, if not a small book. There are several formats by which to set up and arrange your showroom floor. Among them are:

- By price point.
- By "feel" or comfort level.
- By vendor.
- By construction type of bed; for example: all specialty beds in one area, all innersprings in another area, all hybrid beds in a different area, and so on.

My personal preference is to arrange all models in the following format: "Feels within Price Point." This means arranging the floor by price point, in ascending or descending sequence, depending on your preference, from the front door to the back of the store or gallery. Then, all the beds representing every "feel" or comfort level, or vendor, or construction type with similar price points are displayed in the same area. For example, all \$799 queens, hard or soft, or memory foam, etc., are displayed together. Beds arranged by type of construction, tend to bias retail sales associates toward construction-type, rather than letting customers decide the comfort levels they prefer. Displaying by price point and feel gives them all the available choices within a price point comfort zone, right in the same general area, without having to bounce around all over the showroom to find the right bed.

When you set up your showroom, where do you place the promotional beds, the mid-priced beds and the super-premium beds? I have observed that a lot of stores place the superpremium beds to the front near the entrance, with the cheaper, more promotional beds toward the back. This placement is more a matter of choice, I think, than anything else. The advantage of having the premium beds on display as the customer walks in the door is, of course, that it makes the showroom look better. There are a couple of downsides. If price tags are easily visible, the customer could spot the high prices and turn away in shock, exiting the store before a speedy RSA can greet them. Another disadvantage of this arrangement, and I've heard of this happening, is that in a neighborhood that has a sizeable itinerant population, one of these individuals might pop in and make himself at home on a \$10,000 king set.

#### **ABOUT SIZES**

In what size should you display your floor models? This, again, depends a lot on how much space you have available. In my opinion, any set with a price of \$499 or above should be displayed in at least a queen size. Some studies show the most popular price range is still \$399 - \$699 for a queen set. If this is true in your store,







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"To determine the configuration of a showroom, I created a grid with a row of prices on the left side of the page, and a column of "feels" across the top. That way, I had a blank form with all the possible combinations needed."

> the better seller, are much easier to dispose of.

## **FOUNDATIONS**

Every mattress set with a price point above \$499, if the mattress

is compatible (meaning it will bend properly,) should be displayed with an adjustable base. Some will argue that this price is too low to try to "attach" an adjustable base, but my experience suggests that you have a better chance of attaching, or even better, upgrading the whole sale, if you show adjustable bases with any set that might be placed in a master bed room. Again, you may be saying, "Adjustable bases are expensive to 'floor', and awkward to set up and handle!" You are, of course, correct in saying that. But, they are also very profitable. Any set that is displayed on an adjustable base has a much better chance of "attaching" than if it is displayed on a standard foundation. With an adjustable base under every premium mattress, the RSA can incorporate an adjustable bed presentation with just about every mattress presentation.

The proliferation of manufacturers and models of adjustable bases gives the store owner an almost unlimited selection. At minimum, I would suggest at least a good, better, and best sales story. "Best" should be the top of the line with all features and benefits that can be built into an adjustable

## WHAT ABOUT BED FRAMES?

An often overlooked, but extremely

important question to ask when setting up your showroom is the guestion, "Which bed frame should I put under this bed?" Of course, if you put an adjustable base with every floor model, this is no longer an issue. For those floor models displayed with standard foundations, however, let me make a suggestion. Place all floor models on premium frames, period. Premium frames are stronger, better, last longer and should be promoted for ALL beds, not just master bed rooms. Floor models get a lot of use and abuse; and a mattress set sitting on a promotional frame will sooner or later crash or squeak at the wrong time and embarrass the RSA or store owner. Don't let this happen to you.

#### **BOOTS AND DISPLAYS**

Trying out a mattress should be easy for the customer. This means providing ample space between mattresses so the customer doesn't have to climb over anything. Pillow floor models should be available. Don't forget, you want to sell pillows, too. I like to see temporary, or throw-away pillow covers given to every customer. They keep your pillow models clean and most customers do not like to put their head on a pillow that thousands of other heads have touched. Most manufacturers now provide "boots," the wraparound cover at the foot of the bed. These help keep the ticking neat and clean, and they enhance the appearance of the bed and the store. Price tags, I think, should be made to look as clean as possible whether attached to the tape edge or placed in the slot in the "boot."

I also like to see educational

it is probably wise to also display the \$399 sets in queen size. Anything below this price can probably be safely displayed in full or twin without danger of losing sales. This being said, however, if you have an abundance of space, even promotional products look better when displayed in gueen or full. You may be saying, "But, I don't want to sell promotional products!" Well, yes you do, unless you promote your store as a "high end, top of the line, super quality only" establishment.

Many customers still buy promotional beds, for their own reasons, not yours, no matter how good a salesperson you are.

The customer should be able to see every industry-standard size bed somewhere on your floor. These include twin, extra long twin, full, queen, king and even California king. (Reverse these last two if your business is in the state of California.) It is a good idea, I think, somewhere on your floor, to display a queen set next to a full set, so the customer has a clear idea of the difference in the two sizes. Because of the large size of the showroom, many customers will lose perspective and insist that the queen you are showing looks like a full size to them. Promotional sets most frequently sold in twin size mattresses only or sets, should be shown in twin size. Full size floor models should be kept at a minimum, unless space demands otherwise. When you sell off your floor models, queen sizes, being



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posters on the wall, maybe at the back of the store, where they don't cheapen the look of the store. Some posters with technical information, such as comparative sizes, coil types and counts can be useful to RSAs in making sales.

#### **ADD-ONS**

Part of setting up any showroom is the display and promotion of add-on items such as pillows, mattress protectors, sheets, frames, headboards and footboards, etc. How and where do you display these items?

Unless you have space to waste, it is probably not a good idea to display too much bedroom furniture in your mattress gallery. Integrating the mattress gallery with a lot of bedroom furniture, in vignettes, probably will sell more bedroom furniture, but it is possible to disrupt a smooth mattress sales process with too much furniture cluttering up the area.

"Place all floor models on premium frames, period. Premium frames are stronger, better, last longer and should be promoted for ALL beds, not just master bed rooms."

Pillows, mattress protectors and sheets have become very important add-ons in the last several years. My suggestion is this: have a good selection, keep plenty of back-up, and make sure the display and inventory are far away from the exit door, near the sales desk, so they don't walk out un-noticed on a busy day.

Don't ignore bed frames. It is particularly important to upgrade the customer to the best frame possible. The mattress will perform better, the customer will be happier, and the store will have fewer complaints about problems that originate with a cheap frame. I strongly suggest a frame display with good, better and best cutaways and well trained RSAs who know how to explain the benefits of a premium bed frame

#### OLD FLOOR MODELS

For goodness sakes, don't keep floor models on display until they look like garage sale rejects. In a busy showroom, floor displays can become shopworn quickly. I suggest selling them off the minute they look anything less than brand-new. Customers are always looking for deals, and a neat and clean floor model makes a customer who is looking for a discount, very happy. I know the manufacturer will not give you a floor model discount every time you replace a floor model, but your showroom will certainly thank you for it.

# YOUR FLOOR LAYOUT

How do you know if your layout is working for you? This is a difficult question to answer. There is an old theory in retail that says eighty percent of your business will come from twenty percent of your merchandise. It is smart to stay on top of your sales, not only in each category, and price point, but also by every model on the floor. If a SKU is not selling, or is moving slowly, there is a reason for it. Either the customers don't like it, or the RSAs don't like it, or possibly both. In your sales meetings, discuss slow movers as well as fast movers. Find out why the slow stuff isn't selling. When you find a better SKU to fill that spot, sell off the slow mover and replace it.

### **SUMMARY**

Your showroom is the most important part of your business. It IS your business. Do not neglect it. The owner or manager should do a critical walkthru of the showroom every day. Look for anything out of place and anything that is missing. Check for dusty headboards, seedy looking covers, displaced boots and pillows; anything that degrades the order and beauty of the showplace. Look especially for liability hazards that can pop up unexpectedly. Evaluate the performance of every SKU. Stay on top of it. To neglect your showroom is to neglect your business.

About David Benbow: David 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

# "With the rapidly expanding diversity

in the mattress market, somebody in your town will have the beds you decided not to carry. They will get the sale, and they should."

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 purchased on-line at either http://www.bedsellersmanual.com or www.mat-

tressretailtraining.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.

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How Gardner's Mattress & More turned a fax offer into a profitable Sign, Sleep, Dream promotion.

by Jeff Giagnocavo and Ben McClure

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles by Jeff Giagnocavo and Ben McClure the authors of Mega Mattress Margins and co-owners of Gardner's Mattress and More located in Lancaster, PA. In this and future issues Jeff and Ben will share techniques they've used to increase mattress sales and margins.

o you ever receive faxes from your financing company offering promotional periods of financing at discounted rates?

At Gardner's Mattress & More we turn these offers into profitable events.

In this article, I am going to take you on a pretty deep dig of how you can also create events starting with these everyday financing offers to drive business into your store.

If you decide to do a promotion such as this, your goal will be twofold. You will want to increase your average sale by attaching items that customers would not normally purchase. You will also work to get customers to visit your store based on a "no money down, no interest for 50 months offer."

# THE OFFER

Last October we used a "50 Months No Interest Offer" that Wells Fargo

> developed to celebrate their 50th anniversary of offering consumer financing to create a "Sign,

Sleep, Dream" event.

The breakdown on this financing offer was a steep 11% discount rate, so we had to find a way to build into our promotion a way to cover that cost.

Our solution was to create an accessory promotion to attach to each sale that essentially covered the cost of financing plus returned a 20% margin on the accessories (see Chart 1 on the following page).

For those of you who are reluctant to offer long-term financing due to the cost, you will be interested in our experience. We found that 80% of the people who responded to our offer settled on the upper end package as shown. Regardless of purchase price of their mattress, they all wanted to add on premium accessories when it was only \$15 a month extra.



"We've found that it's important to include deadline dates with our offers that include a sliding scale of discounts on accessory packages."



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our sleep surface cooler and more comfortable. Plus, our unique manufacturing process and Octaspring Technology breakthrough produce 30% less CO2 emissions than traditional foams, making us environmentally friendly.





Chart 1: Financing Cost & Revenue Calculations

| Items Sold                         | (a) Total Sale | (b) Total Sales Dollars<br>On Ticket Without<br>Sleep Package<br>When Financed | (c) Average Cost<br>Of Sleep<br>Packages Written<br>& Delivered | (d) Avg. Sales Price On<br>Packages Written<br>& Delivered With<br>Finance Cost | (e) Total Sales Dollars<br>On Ticket With<br>Sleep Package<br>When Financed | (f) Total Cost Of<br>Financing<br>On Ticket | (g) Dollars Made On Package (goal to add on to offset financing charge) =(d)-(c) | (h) Difference In<br>Financing Cost<br>Versus Additional<br>Dollars Made On<br>Accessories = (g)-(f) |
|------------------------------------|----------------|--|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| Queen Tempurpedic<br>Cloud Supreme | \$2699         | \$1191   | \$282   | \$753   | \$1577  | \$379                                       | \$471  | \$92   |
| Queen iComfort<br>Savant           | \$1799         | \$771  | \$282   | \$753   | \$1242  | \$281                                       | \$471  | \$190  |
| Queen iSeries<br>Corbin Firm       | \$1299         | \$506  | \$282   | \$753   | \$977   | \$226                                       | \$471  | \$245  |

The dollars made on the accessories packages more than compensated for the financing cost. See the far right column (h) above. Promotional in store signage at right outline the options offered and the benefits of purchasing an entire package of accessories.

"The breakdown on this financing offer was a steep 11% discount rate, so we had to find a way to build into our promotion a way to cover that cost."

# ATTRACTING CUSTOMERS FROM "OUR WORLD"

Last October there were no vendor events going on and we weren't happy to just sit back and hope the door would open. That's how the Sign, Sleep, Dream event was born.

The event was promoted via email to a house list of contacts from "Our World". What is meant by "Our World"? These are customers who previously visited our store but haven't vet bought. Because contact information for these shoppers is collected, we are able to continue to market to them. And, these are people who have downloaded our book, entered our contests, or submitted their names, addresses, etc., via mail for information to be sent to them.

We also promoted the Sign, Sleep, Dream event in all of our newspaper ads plus followed up the emails with a three drop postcard campaign to "Our World" contacts.

To make the process of collecting information and promoting easier, we've created a CRM software package so all of this is done automatically, no licking stamps, no typing out singular emails. It is very powerful.

You may be asking why we email and mail? Simple, how many emails did you delete today? And, how many emails did you

delete, that you didn't read, from people you know? My guess is a few too many. And those are from people you know and care about.

We aren't so foolish as to think that just because we had a nice conversation with a prospect, we can rely on our clients saying, "Those Gardner's guys sent me an email. Let me put down my lunch and call them right back with my credit card!"

No, it takes more. In a time where we are subjected to upwards of 5000 advertisements daily (DM News July 2013), it takes more to corral the attention of a prospect, especially if you are selling to their need as opposed their want.

#### **DEADLINES**

We've found that it's important to

Add One of Our Sleep Easy Mattress Accessory Packages to Protect Your Mattress Investment And Wrap Your Self In Luxurious Comfort

| Sleep Easy Accessories                                    | Platinum Package                        | Gold Package                                  | Silver Package Ultra Tech               |  |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| Stain Proof Mattress Protection<br>Buy 1, Get 1 50% Off   | DreamCool                               | Aroma Therapy                                 |   |  |
| Premium Pillow Protectors  Buy 1 Pair, Get 1 Pair 50% Off | Healthy Sleep                           | Healthy Sleep                                 | Healthy Sleep                           |  |
| One Luxury Sheet Set                                      | DreamFit, Your<br>Choice Up To 7D       | DreamFit/Malouf<br>Choice Up To 5D            | DreamFit/Malouf<br>Choice Up To 2D      |  |
| Two Complimenting Pillows                                 | Your Choice Up To<br>Tempur-Pedic Cloud | Your Choice Up To<br>Tempur-Pedic<br>Symphony | Your Choice Up To<br>SofTex Dual Comfor |  |
| Full Retail Value   | \$1057                                  | \$738   | \$539                                   |  |
| Event Package Savings                                     | \$958                                   | \$653   | \$462                                   |  |
| \$100 Off Fast Action Savings*                            | \$858                                   | \$553   | \$362                                   |  |
| Approximate Monthly<br>Investment                         | \$17                                    | \$11  | \$7                                     |  |

Why Would I Need An Entire Package of Accessories?

Why two mattress protectors/sets of pillow protectors? Your mattress and pillows will always be protected and you never risk a stain or accident. Plus, you create a healthy sleeping environment for the life of your mattress.

Dream Fit Sheets are guaranteed to stay on and fit nice and snug! All of our luxury sheet sets are made to fit any size mattress we sell.

Pillows take up 25% of your mattress and support 20% of your spine, make your mattress a sleep system for a better nights sleep with new pillows

> include deadline dates with our offers (see the example on the previous page) that list deadline dates and a sliding scale of discounts on accessory packages. This creates an incentive for customers not to wait until the end of the event period to respond.

> Let's face it, without a deadline much in this world simply does not get done. So why did we choose not to offer discounts on the mattresses? Well first, we have more margin to play with on accessories than we do the main product, but second we are telling the customer that there are accessories to purchase, and they are in fact required to qualify for the "50 Months No Interest, No Money Down Sign Sleep Dream" event.

#### WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The next step is to make sure that

# Good night, good lookin'.











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**BOOTH** B-201-34

# Signature Mattress Protectors

Protect Your Sleep™ like never before.







"If we are able to book a Dream Room appointment with a customer responding to a promotion such as our 'Sign, Sleep, Dream' event, we know they will buy 100 percent of the time."

sales associates know what should happen when a customer walks in. and how to present sale packages offered with the Sign, Sleep, Dream event financing offer (monthly payment amount with accessory package included) to customers once they have shown an interest in this promotion.

So, your staff needs to be trained to professionally present your mattresses. accessories and the promotion, but more is required. In order to move the client from a need to a want mentality you must provide a singular in-store experience. You must think about and control how they experience you, your store, and your products.

At Gardner's we sell the same mattresses that most others do. But how we attach and sell at higher ticket prices is what separates us from the rest.

We make sure that what customers experience the minute they walk in our door is different. It's in how we greet them, how our store looks and the questions we ask.

We don't barrage them with information they don't care about like coil counts and foam densities. And, unlike most other stores, we are OK with them walking. That's because a robust follow up CRM mechanism releases the pressure (we feel and they feel) so we can relax with them and they can actually relax with us.

# MINDSET SHIFT

Now some inside baseball here. Our experience is that if we are able to book a Dream Room appointment with a customer responding to a promotion such as our "Sign, Sleep, Dream" event, we know they will buy 100 percent of the time even if they don't buy that day. A Dream Room appointment is a private mattress testing room designed to allow our customers to have a unique opportunity to "try before they buy" any mattress in a no-pressure, quiet environment.

We have yet to have someone not buy using the Dream Room. It may not be that day, but at last count the longest time lapsed between a presentation and a sale was three weeks.

That's because even if we don't sell them a mattress set today, we do sell them the benefits of buying from our store. In essence, we reframe their initial mindset that is, "who will I buy from?" to, "what will I buy from Gardner's?"

So what about those who respond to a promotion, but do not book a Dream Room appointment? And honestly, there are more of these than there are Dream Room appointments. Well, we are moving them forward in the sale too. By collecting their contact information for proper follow up that is both systematic and automatic, we begin the process of moving them toward doing business with us.

Certain customers, those that come to us via road signs and word of mouth, leave with our book and testimonial "fanbook." Price shoppers, who usually come to us without being referred or having done prior business, leave with our Ben Buck coupons and a shopping checklist.

**MONEY UNDER YOUR** 

**NATTRESSES** 

And those that come to us with rave reviews are often booked into the Dream Room, but if not, they leave with a very specific sleep assessment describing the best fit to their own individual sleep needs.

Today's customers command your attention, they need to know you want to earn their business and value it. The days of a one size fits all mattress are long gone, why sell and promote with a one size fits all approach?

About Jeff & Ben: Jeff Giganocavo and Ben McClure co-own Gardner's Mattress & More in Lancaster, PA a multi unit destination boutique mattress store. They also co authored the book "Mega Mattress Margins" and "Retail is Dead" as well as created the industry's only turn key, done for you, sales and marketina machine called Automated Mattress Profits that creates captures and converts prospects into paying customers. Questions on any aspect of bedding promotion can be directed to Jeff and Ben care of editor@furninfo.com. To get more information on their "Automated Mattress Profits CRM system visit www.AutomatedMattressProfits.com.





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# **ART VAN FURNITURE**

Success Story: Growth, persistence and hard work since 1959.

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

t was an historic first. An event to Inscribe remember Sunday. September 6th, 1964 on your perpetual calendar, one of those auspicious dates to celebrate and to emulate if you can. It was the day Art Van Elslander eclipsed the Beatles!

Consider for a moment those four

charismatic lads from Liverpool. On their first tour of the U.S, backed by high power promotion, with 5,000,000 posters distributed nation-wide plus every other media proven effective at that time, the Beatles packed Detroit's legendary Olympic Stadium's 15,000 capacity at both afternoon and evening shows. They'd come prepared to conauer. At least they tried.

But simultaneously, "Mr. Van", star entrepreneur, ran dynamite round-theclock radio commercials, inviting one and all to visit not the Beatles, but his magnificent pavilion furniture liquidation sale, staged at the Michigan State Fairgrounds that very same day.

He had reached a jumping off point. An economic downturn had precipitated a decline in sales. With seven stores, Art mark the 50th anniversary (1959-2009), "He knew as sure as sofas have cushions that he couldn't run the company 'business as usual'. The company was facing the possibility of bankruptcy."

He knew it was time "to get creative". Then and now, Art loved a challenge. He packed the 27,000 square foot space wall-to-wall with inventory. He knew he had serious competition and he "was worried we wouldn't have anvone at the sale because of the concert". But customers swarmed the pavilion in their thousands. Art and his team converted everything to cash, "Many of my peers in the industry came out to help with the sale, even those who worked for other companies. That was amazina." And he added, "It was extremely humbling. We were on our knees. Before that sale, we couldn't pay our bills." And, "It taught me an important lesson, do not expand beyond your financial ability."



Pictured at far left is Nigel Barker, photographer, filmmaker, celebrity judge and author with Mr. Van. Photo was taken at the Bernhardt Showroom, April High Point Market, the "Art of Style" promotion introducing the 2014 Spring Style Catalogue.

Also the opening of Art Van's newest store in Woodridge, Illinois.



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Retiree Clint Loren, who was Art's second employee back in 1961, worked at the sale "nearly around the clock. Times were tough. We had a lot of merchandise and no money."

And Al Hassan, Art's very first employee, said, "That sale was one of Art's most glorious moments. It was one of the greatest comebacks we had. That sale helped put us back on the map."

Now, circa 2014, a half-century later, Art Van Furniture is the top family owned furniture retailer in the Midwest and the fifteenth largest in the United States. Art Van Elslander, founder, now champions the role of Chairman. His sons work with him, Gary Van as President, and David Van, Vice President of PureSleep and Clearance Centers. The company currently employs close to 4000 people in its "family of associates". There are 37 stores in Michigan and seven more outside the state in Ohio, Illinois and Indiana. It also operates 40 Art Van PureSleep free-standing bedding stores in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana.

"We've found sleep stores are the

fastest growing specialty channels. Research tells us that bedding is purchased as a matter of convenience after a bad night's sleep or a bad back. People want to buy a new mattress right now! So we have added the free-standing stores as a matter of convenience." And with all the bells and whistles of advanced technology.

Paul's TV, "The King of Big Screen", found a home within Art Van stores. And in spring this year, the company acquired World of Floors, the largest specialty flooring chain in Michigan with 27 stores. Said World of Floors former CEO, Emil Pedick, "I envisioned a store within a store concept that leveraged the marketing and customer base" of the operation.

Born in Detroit to Achiel Elslander and his wife, Rosa, endowed with their sturdy, disciplined Belgian traditions, Art was inspired and motivated from his earliest days by his father's stability and strong work ethic. Art talks about his Dad's lack of formal education, that his independent spirit propelled him from hard

labour into the proud ownership of a Detroit bar. "He worked very hard but he always said, 'It's mine, and I can be in charge of my own future."

Undoubtedly he was inspired as well by his environment, by the City itself. A major great lake port connecting the Great Lakes System with the St. Lawrence Seaway, Detroit was and is one of North America's most fascinating, volatile and energetic centers of transportation, business, finance and culture. Sports legends rank high with the legendary Tigers and Red Wings, international sailboat racing and, once upon a time, the great boxer Joe Louis. The music of MoTown was and is enjoyed worldwide. Then there are the astonishing treasures of the Detroit Institute for the Arts, the enchanting Cranbrook Art Museum and the extraordinary Greenfield Village, where the origins of the automotive industry come alive. The City's history is lengthy and dramatic with potent memories of the Seven Years War and the War of 1812. In the 1920s, with Prohibition, Detroit



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Prospering the Global Furniture Trade Since 1995 "Bedding is purchased as a matter of convenience after a bad night's sleep or a bad back. People want to buy a new mattress right now! So we have added the free-standing stores as a matter of convenience."



There are currently 40 Art Van PureSleep free-standing bedding stores in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana

celebrated intrigue and infamy as the "rum running capital of the world". During World War II, no one disputes Detroit's role as the respected Arsenal of Democracy.

Growth, persistence and hard work were in the air and young Art caught all the passing breezes. He began life running. As a kid, Art sold newspapers on the streets of Detroit. Then one day his father took him to a haberdashery called Square Menswear, owned by Sarah and Abe Selikson. Asked Dad, "Do you have a job for my son?" The answer was "No", but Dad persisted and the Seliksons eventually hired the teenager.

It was about this time that Art changed his name. As a salesman he "wanted something more catchy and memorable" than Archie. And his surname was too long. So, to his world, he became Art Van.

One of the Selikson's relatives, Aubrey

Shapiro, another haberdasher, later hired the then 16 year old to sell suits and overcoats. Art's eldest daughter, Debbie, said, "It's a reminder of how closely fashion, style, clothing and furniture are related. The Seliksons and the Shapiros taught him every aspect of the haberdashers' trade to the refinements of men's shirt cuffs and fabrics," she said, "My father has always had an eye for style". And, said Art, "With that background it was easy to transfer into the furniture business".

The road leading to Art's encounter with the Beatles and beyond is lovingly detailed in the company's 136-page history in illuminating and entertaining chronologic order. He began his climb in 1951 when he joined Crown Furniture. By 1953, he had jumped the ranks to store manager. In 1954, Art left Crown and, with his partner, Jack Medvin, opened Shorewood Furniture as

St. Clair Shores. But his former boss at Crown called him back. He returned as operations manager of three of Crown's stores.

Success, yes. But with his Dad's words ringing in his receptive ears, Art still wanted his own business, to be "in charge of his own future". The first Art Van store, 4000 square feet, was located at Gratiot Avenue and 10 Mile Road. To finance it, Art, then a father of five, age 29, mortgaged his home. Unbelievably, he added two stores that same year in Warren and Detroit. In 1960, another store came aboard and, a landmark, Art hired his first employee, Al Hassan. You could logically ask, his first employee? How in the world could he have managed alone? Son Gary, Art's eldest child, explains. "There was a house set-up beyond the store showroom, and my Dad ultimately made that area a part of the store's showroom." Gary was seven years old when Art opened shop. "My Dad started by himself. When I say himself, I mean himself. If he had to go to the bathroom, he took the cashbox with him. He also made all the deliveries."



At left, management group standing in front of the first store (I to r) includes, Don Fox, Bob McEachin, Bob and Art Van Elslander, the management team. Their message to customers: "OUR DREAM CAME TRUE! Over the years we've enjoyed the continued patronage of those who like fine furniture at the best prices anywhere. Now, Art Van has four modern locations and we will open our fifth store on Ford Road. Let's get acquainted. There's no obligation to you."



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Ad (left) ran in August 1968, featuring "International" Decorator Mediterranean Velvet & Brocade Nylon, Plan-a-Room Grouping for \$599.95.

### **ART VAN FURNITURE**

Art reflects now, "I was very determined. I got married when I was 19 vears old and we had one kid after another." Today, he has 10 children. "If you don't think that motivates you, nothing will! I figured I'd better get out and move it."

In order to comprehend the family's dedication it's important to expand our overview of their home as well as their business lives, interminaled as they were. Gary and Debbie both got their first paychecks at an early age for sweeping and dusting as did Ken, at age 10, Art's training philosophy involved providing his children with a variety of simple responsibilities. Ken did officially join the company later; he retired in 2008. Debbie was Art's administrative assistant until her retirement in 2005. Other family members have been part of Art Van's over the years, grandchildren and others. A family affair.

Said Gary, "I've learned from Dad

that the family members who chose to work here are here because they are responsible and want to be here. It's a privilege and not something that's just given to you. That's important to me."

It wasn't all work, the kids had fun, too. After store hours and on Sundays, chores were accomplished around the house rewarded by trips to the local drive-in theatre and, in the summertime, the family rented a cottage at Caseville, Michigan. And the troop spent many hours driving around with Dad before or after the theatre looking for new store locations.

In 1961, another store was acquired, this one in Farmington. Clint Loren, employee number two came on board. A year later, Art Van Furniture acquired its first warehouse on Groesbeck Avenue in Warren. By 1963, seven stores bore Art's name. And then, of course, as we've seen, 1964 presented its own unique challenges!

After the fabled Beatles Bash, Art sold three of the stores to his partners and kept four. He bought out his partners eventually, and again became sole owner. The company grew steadily, and by the early 1970s, 15 Art Van stores graced the Detroit region. He was opening locations as competitors in the midmarket segment were closing, either downsizing or going out of business completely. Said Art, "From 1964 to 1970, I was pretty solid. I had made it pretty well. My key was to never extend anything – I either paid for it or had the I's dotted and the t's crossed so there was no chance of losing."

There's no doubt that Art's father was his primary mentor. But as Art matured in the business world he discovered Peter Drucker, the management consultant, educator and author who invented the concept of management by objectives.



"To finance his first store, Art, then a father of five, age 29, mortgaged his home. 'If you don't think that motivates you, nothing will! I figured I'd better get out and move it.'"

Art Van Furniture we do more for you!

Drucker drew attention to the emerging "information society" and the necessity for lifelong learning that featured the study of behavior and relationships. One of Art's distillations of Drucker's wisdom: "Take care of the customer and everything else will fall into place."

As the years went by, Art absorbed more of Drucker's wisdom. "His (Drucker's) position was that most successful people continue to do the things that brought them their success. If they continue to do that, they are doomed to failure. The reason for that is that things

continue to change and that you must change. I believed that. I understood it. I really took it to heart.

"But it's easier said than done. The words are very simple. Doing it is something entirely different. You have to make sure you have people who are aware of what's going on particularly in the style and fashion business that we're in. You have to be aware of what's going on in marketing. You have to continue to update your stores on a regular basis."

The chronology ride jumps off again at the 1970 acquisition of the Tech Plaza

store. In 1971, Royal Oak, Drayton Plains, Dearborn Michigan Avenue and Schoenherr turned on their lights. In 1973, Art moved the Tech Plaza store, corporate headquarters and the warehouse to the present 14 Mile Road location. 1974, '75 and '76 saw warehouse additions, the development of a training department and, year 1977, the opening of the Flint and Lansing stores. '78, '79 and '80 introduced the Art Van credit card, the active design department and the arrival of the Livonia store. The next five years continued the race,



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efficiently opening and closing stores, adding to the warehouse facility and centralizing the service department.

1985 also marked the advent of the first Clearance Centre. These Centers sold damaged or overstocked merchandise at 40 to 70 per cent off retail, allowing the company to increase its market penetration. Art's son, David Van Elslander, buyer for the Centers, said, "Art's thought was to draw clearance centre shoppers into the store. Whether or not they bought at the first visit, they were intrigued by the 'clearance' lure. We cast a wider web. Today, the Centers represent the starting price point for us. In fact, 75 per cent of the business that is done is brand-new merchandise, something I'm not sure many people are aware of. The remainder of the sales are comprised of slightly damaged merchandise, special order returns, special purchases and one-of-a-kind items."

The following year the video communication department came into being. No pause for breath! They soared into the '90s with massive additions to the warehouse, 13 more stores, more clearance centers, pioneered the mattress express service and the same-day service programmes, and somehow found time to rescue the great Thanksgiving Day Parade! (More about that later.)

Art Van's massive warehouse is "probably the largest furniture warehouse in the nation", said Manager John Schachermeyer. "You never know where we might ship to, Florida, Texas, Hawaii, Alaska, Canada or Beirut! We have a huge inventory and stock for immediate delivery. Of course, customers want it yesterday."

Said Art, "Our warehouse covers a million square feet today and that allows us to stock about 98 per cent of the furniture found in our showrooms." There is a European-inspired robotic retrieve and replenish system, and "a fleet of delivery trucks that treks more than five million miles per year through Michigan and Canada".

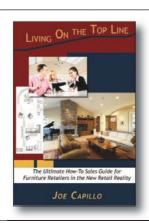
The warehouse is as green as can be. And so is delivery with the company's award-winning interest in alternative fuels for those trucks. Automation reduced the warehouse's footprint and utility usage with very little lighting, heating and cooling needed, 75 per cent less when compared with a traditional warehouse. And, working with a variety of charitable organizations, Art Van recycles furniture and mattresses, participates enthusiastically in Arbor Day treeplanting programmes, and recycles tons of cardboard, plastic, metal, office waste and wooden pallets.

Leading up to the Millennium, more stores and more clearance centers opened, lots of remodeling, computer systems were installed, public relations/communications joined the fray, and next-day delivery was initiated. In 2006, commercial credit was offered to "quests", and lifestyle presentations in the showrooms were staged. Feel a bit tired? Not Art. Diane Charles, Van Elslander's communications expert, said

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## "As Art matured in the business world he discovered Peter Drucker, the management consultant, educator and author who invented the concept of management by objectives."

"Mr. Van told the staff that the only thing that would remain the same at Art Van is the name on the building. You can choose to go backward or forward and we choose to go forward."

He and his colleagues are constantly on the lookout for talent. Recruiting methods are as varied as the candidates they recruit. "We utilize traditional recruiting methods, advertising in newspapers, on line and on the radio and occasionally television. We are also very active in the 'new media', advertising on social websites such as Linked-In, Twitter and Facebook. But we still find that the best candidates come from word of mouth and associate referrals. Our associates know what kind of talent works best and they want to attract and retain other talented associates on our team.

"We are very proud of our training program. We honestly believe it is the best in our industry. We know for a fact that many of our direct and indirect competitors would love to get their hands on our training materials because some have even asked to buy them from us. We offer a wide variety of training, ranging from instructor classes and workshops, self-paced materials and even video-supported training. Our next step is to deliver our training to associates right on their mobile devices, which we'll do this year.

"In order to attract and retain associates in any position you need to offer competitive salaries and benefits. Art Van associates receive commissions and can earn a six-figure income if they are good at what they do. Many of our management positions receive performance bonuses based on our company's performance, and every associate 'from stockroom to boardroom' receives an annual profit sharing award based on

company performance. This latter benefit is one we have been proud to provide for over 30 years. In addition, we have always maintained one of the best packages of health and other insurance benefits, no small achievement during these difficult times.

"We currently employ between 3500 and 4000 in our 'family of associates'. Over the past few years we have grown very rapidly, adding almost a 1000 additional associates in the last three years. We could not have successfully grown as rapidly if it were not for our care of long-term associates. Almost 30 per cent of our associates have been with us 10 years or more, a remarkable number in an industry where the average tenure is often measured in months, not years. We are especially proud of the fact that almost 150 of our associates have been with us 30 years or more, a veritable lifetime of dedicated service. These associates are family!"

Many Art Van sales associates are certified interior designers while others not in possession of design certification have "a dedicated and loyal clientele who look to them for design and style information. However, our Scott Shuptrine division employs only certified designers".

Independent designers are encouraged to bring their clients to the stores. "We know that many private clients of designers are looking for 'affordable luxury' and designers want to help their clients find ways to stretch their furniture dollars."

Design has always been a strong factor in Art Van's success story, "timeless elegance" with a top spin of au courant excitement. The Van Elslander's "eye for style" was showcased when Scott Shuptrine Interiors opened in Royal Oak, the \$3 million, 13,000 square foot flagship store, a product of more than a year and a half of planning. And there are two 5,500 square foot galleries within full-line showrooms at Art Van's Warren, Grand Rapids and Petoskey stores. It's actually a re-introduction for Shuptrine;





There is a European-inspired robotic retrieve and replenish system. Automation reduces the warehouse's footprint and utility usage with very little lighting, heating and cooling needed

"Every associate from stockroom to boardroom receives an annual profit sharing award based on company performance."

it was originally acquired in 1986 but closed in 2002 because of the company's need to focus on core business. Now the spectacular new studio will lead the company into luxury territory.

A website has been launched with a social media campaign that ties back into store happenings where photographs are taken, so "people get a chance to see themselves with their friends participating in social activities." Kim Yost, CEO, said, "It's a kind of Facebook, Twitter meets dotcom kind of social. There are amenities to entertain and serve quests, a piano at the foot of the staircase, a dining area and bar and a board room for group meetings or huddles between consumers and design-

The flagship store is uniquely structured, cleverly carved from a former parking space underneath the full-line store with its own special entrance as well as a dramatic interior entry into the 45,000 square foot Art Van showroom above. Exploring the new studio is an adventure: it features 60 outstanding room vignettes and about a third of the settings will change on a seasonal basis. Suppliers include Bernhardt, Drexel Heritage, Huntington House, Theodore Alexander, Curate, Elite Leather, Natuzzi Italia, Massoud, Heritage, Maitland-Smith and Nathan Anthony.

"Upholstery receives special emphasis," said Yost. "We want to own the living room. Our goal is for every luxury resident to have upholstered seating,

whether stationary or motion, bought from Scott Shuptrine, because it is the statement of the home." He added that the eclectic presentations are one of the ways Art Van is separating itself from competition. The connection with the strengths of Art Van lowers its operating costs and opens up more goods and services to the consumer. "All the back end is now shared with Art Van. Distribution, logistics, supply chain, the HR, payroll accounts payable and receivable. We're benefitting from all the synergies of the back end."

Promotionally, they have partnered with two local luxury magazines, The Hour and Ambassador. Store events will be hosted in conjunction with the publications and their mailing lists.

And Scott Shuptrine has become involved with area luxury realtors as well as independent designers for the store to become "their residence for events" and the go-to place for products, services and fulfillment.

There's an expectation when the "build-out" is completed to do approximately \$20 million in annual sales.

Kim Yost came to Art Van from The Brick, where he also served as CEO. Based in Edmonton, Alberta, The Brick is the parent company of a large Canadian chain. Both "Mr. Van" and Kim Yost have "leadership teams", and they've formed a brains trust. Said Art, "The operation of the brains trust is simple. The rules of the game are we don't have any rules. Whatever ideas the trust



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"Here at Art Van we go beyond welcoming guests to provide them with an experience that is so positive, so memorable, that they become clients for life and ultimately advocates for Art Van Furniture."

comes up with, if a majority says 'no', we don't go for it. But we've been doing some things that are really unusual."

He talked of a promotional pajama party for customers. "We used Twitter and Facebook, and two women at the



ABC television station in Grand Rapids as connections. It was held on a Sunday night in the super-cold of winter. We had 450 people sign up and 900 came! It was unheard of, different, never been done before and it's the kind of thing that gives you exposure. The women loved it. We're trying different things, it works." Peter Drucker would have loved it, too.

Art Van marketers are very well aware of the current growth of Detroit's population, a resurgence. Particularly interesting is the young professionals demographic, "the Millennials". Plans are



afoot for special promotions targeted to this energy-packed group. At the last High Point Market, in fact, an event that fit the bill admirably in its potential for outreach was staged. The Art Van Furniture's 2014 Spring Style Catalogue had been created in collaboration with Nigel Barker, internationally renowned photographer, filmmaker. author, celebrity judge in reality television and host of The Face of Oxygen. Art's 144page Catalogue shows "the flair and function of the season's stylish collections through Baker's high fashion lens". The event to preview the catalogue was



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### **ART VAN FURNITURE**

hosted by Art Van at the Bernhardt Showroom, a private "Art of Style" luncheon attended by both Alex Bernhardt Senior and Junior, Art and Nigel Barker, media and key industry leaders.

This gargeously conceived and printed catalogue themed to "capture what women want this spring, effortless style that reflects their unique lifestyles and creative spirits", was then presented to consumers at two special parties back on home turf and at the Chicago store. Guests enjoyed refreshments and music, and one of the highlights of the events was a "Supermodel Search" runway competition in which one grand prize winner at each store was selected by a panel of celebrity judges, including "Mr. Van" and Barker. The winners were featured in an Art Van Furniture advertisement, and received a \$1000 Art Van aift card as well as a framed, autographed photo with Barker as a momento of the fete.

The Catalogue was made available "as long as they lasted" at all Art Van locations in Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. Another "really unusual promotion"!

Preferred methods of reaching consumers nowadays obviously involve gorgeous catalogues as well as television, radio, print, Internet, social media and direct mail. "Mr. Van believes there is more than one way to sell a

sofa.

We are always creating new ways to get folks into our stores whether it's a ladies night out, Disney stars, catalogue parties or charity fundraisers."

Advertising was key to overcoming Beatlemania as round-the-clock radio proved. Television ads now are featured at strategic times of the day. "Newspapers carry a preprinted circular from Art Van regularly, and special announcements appear on other days of the week in newspapers." Every week TV and radio promote showrooms, bedding and the clearance centers. In the highly competitive 1970s, Art "kept up with the advertising." He was one of the first furniture retailers to use TV in the Detroit area. In the '90s, he leaned heavily on print with full-page full-color ads in the papers three or four times a week.

President Gary, "Always listens to or reads the ads, see where they are positioned, what time they come on, what precedes them. "

Celebrity ads have been and are used. "People tend to tie the personality with the company. If they like the personality, they will like the company."

On-line sales were initiated in 2000, iust in time for the new century. The incorporation of Paul's TV on-line as well as in-store combined with room packages is "one more way to find everything for your home at Art Van".

> Customer service to be proud of has always been key. "Every

sales associate has access to an on-line customer contact system we call their 'workbench'. This system provides them with a repository for customer information, lead and contact data and followup. The system will 'cue' the associate to make follow-up calls and contacts. Every associate writes a note thanking customers for their purchase and asking for referrals.

"There is a dedicated customer call centre, highly trained to help customers with any issues they might encounter with their purchases. After all, Art Van is all about creating a long-lasting relationship with our customers. The Central System was set up in 1985 with five associates. Now it has 230 associates. In total there are four departments that include the Call Centre, in-home service, the repair centre and quality control.

"We want our customers or 'quests' to feel as welcome as if they were in the home of a trusted friend. Here at Art Van we go beyond welcoming guests to provide them with an experience that is so positive, so memorable, that they become 'clients for life' and ultimately 'advocates' for Art Van Furniture. This is what makes us different."

Years ago, Art Van research revealed that "two income families with busy parents did not have the time to shop nor the desire to spend time away from their children. In 1998 an expansion of the



"Mr. Van believes there is more than one way to sell a sofa. We are always creating new ways to get folks into our stores whether it's a ladies night out, Disney stars, catalogue parties or charity fundraisers."

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Top:The Art Van Award of Hope given to individuals for "planting the seeds of hope" to Michigan families. David Van Elslander, VP of Pure Sleep/ Clearance Center, Sheilah Clav, Neighborhood Services Organization, Susan Goodell, Forgotten Harvest, Sherri Mark, North Star Reach Camp, Chuck Sauer, Conductive Learning Center, Cecilia Chesney, Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Northwestern Michigan, Kim Yost, Art Van CEO.

Second from top: Art Van donates proceeds from 2013 winter survival radiothon to THAW, the Heat & Warmth Fund that last year helped over15,000 Michigan residents in need, heat their homes.

Third from top: Mr. Van with former Mayor Dave Bing, donates mattresses to Detroit firemen.

Bottom: Art Van's Warren store volunteers at the Glaners Community Food Bank of Metro Detroit.

"Charitable events are a continuous activity. Other beneficiaries over the years have and do include St. Vincent de Paul, the National Cherry Festival, Toys for Tots, Focus Hope, Forgotten Harvest and many others."

flagship store in Warren was unveiled with the introduction of the first Kid's Castle. The tyke-friendly paradise within the store is comprised of 1400 square feet of play space that features climbina structures, a TV room and a ball-play area. Art Van staffers supervise children while their parents shop. Other Kid's Castles were developed and now there are more than a dozen. As the company redesigns its stores the programme will evolve, and Art Van will provide additional fun spaces for kids."

Delivery at Art Van also has a special panache. "We call it our 'Legendary Delivery'. That includes a friendly and personal greeting, a team that is considerate of the homeowner's home and property, making sure our furnishings are delivered in a 'ready to use' state, and treating every guest as if they were their own family member."

Van Elslander has invested heavily in his various communities. "Very simply, I believe that if you are lucky enough to be as successful as we are, I think it's a responsibility to give back to your community, and I think we try to give back in a sincere, honorable way." That Thanksqiving Day Parade? The beloved, nationally televised Detroit event began in 1924 but, by 1990, it was in trouble and in danger of being canceled. Susie Gross, former President of the Parade Company, a non-profit organization, said, "The lights were about to be turned out on a tradition, and Art Van rescued it by rallying financial support."

Debbie said, "They called Dad in the last hour for help. He brought it back to life operationally. That inspired other businesses to get on board." Art wrote a check for \$200,000 that enabled the Parade to go on, and the following year he announced that he would match the contributions of other businesses up to \$100,000. Art Van got into the action, too, by building its own float every year. Debbie remembers "our whole family walking beside the company float in 1990" as did the families of many Art Van employees. Themes ranged from "chomping crocodiles to friendly dragons, Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan, Aesop's Fables and Old King Cole. The special 50th anniversary float heralded "the Charitable Knights of the Round Table"!

Charitable events are a continuous activity. Other beneficiaries over the vears have and do include St. Vincent de Paul, the National Cherry Festival, Toys for Tots, Focus Hope, Forgotten Harvest and many others. Stores are offered as venues for blood drives and flu shot clinics, health fairs and pet adoptions. "In the latter part of the 1990s, we started a family foundation," said Debbie. "My parents have favorite places to donate, those facilities that have to do with children and hospitals certainly." The Million Dollar Charity Challenge is one of Art's concepts. Initiated in 2009 at the company's 50th anniversary, 50 local nonprofit organizations dealing with children, health and human services were invited to apply for grants that range from \$5,000 to \$50,000 that, in turn, must be matched by other donors. "We have people from all over the State writing to us and there's a Board that selects which are to get the money."

Mr. Van's activities have not gone unrecognized. The National Home Furnishings Association named Art Van Furniture the Retailer of the Year in 1998. He was awarded Humanitarian of the Year kudos by the American Jewish Committee. He was Goodfellow of the Year, and was also the Greater Detroit Outstanding Philanthropist. Environmentally, in acknowledgment of

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### "Art wrote a check for \$200,000 that enabled the Parade to go on. The following year he announced that he would match the contributions up to \$100,000."

their green efforts, the Michigan Retailers Association made Art Van Furniture the 2007 Green Tailer. Art and his family have been recognized by Angel's Place, the Michigan Cancer Foundation, the Catholic Youth Organization, the National Anti-Defamation League, and American Heritage. Art was inducted into the American Furniture Hall of Fame in 2001. And the Spirit of Life Award from City of Hope, and the Ernst and Young Lifetime Achievement Award lauded him.

The future, what does it hold for the company? "We see the future of AVF as healthy, continuing to expand throughout the Midwest from our Distribution Centre in Warren which will be well over a billion dollars. The big will continue to get bigger. It will be almost impossible for the smaller merchant to exist. It will require more areas of specialization that the small guy just can't keep up with, buying, advertising, freight and selec-

"Also, our targeted Millennials are arowing at a rapid speed and they will provide another big boost for the business. And financial people are becoming more and more interested in the furniture industry.

"I have been blessed with some very good people. I don't think there's any

one person who can take credit for building the size organization we have. I could say I was lucky enough, maybe wise enough, I'm not sure which, to surround myself with a good team.

"I'm always amazed when I hear someone say 'I've paid my dues, I've arrived, I'm done!' I think that's like telling me yesterday's box scores. Frankly, I'd rather talk about the upcoming game and what we need to do to win!

"One thing is certain. We will all need a place to gather for dinner, sit in front of a cozy fire, read to our grandchildren, and get a good night's sleep. We look forward to remaining an active supporter of our local communities and, as always, we will go where our customers lead us."

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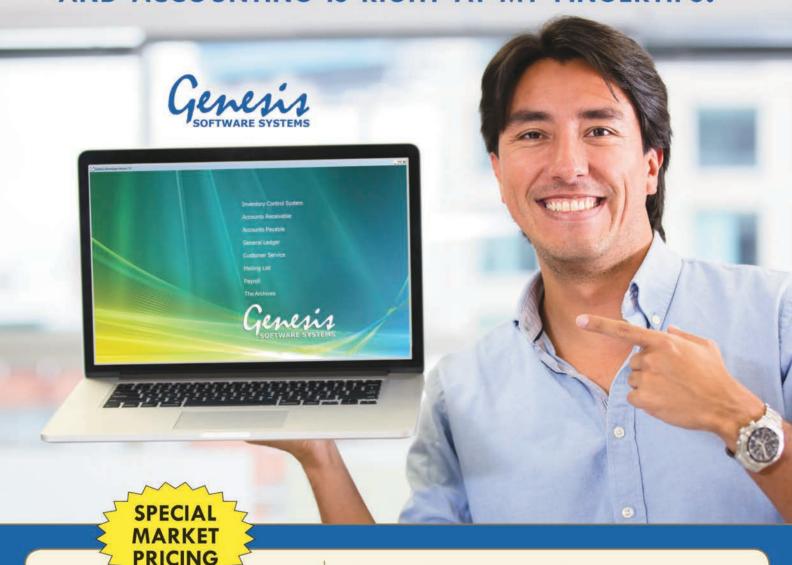
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# **RETAIL EDUCATION GUIDE**

### Part 2: Repair & Service

by Russell Bienenstock

his installment in Furniture World's leather guide builds on information presented in the March April issue that detailed the different kinds of leather, plus everything retailers need to know about leather durability, quality and

This time our panel of industry experts follows upon it's discussion of current leather trends with leather buying facts, advice on servicing and cleaning leather, plus warranties.

### REPAIR TIPS FROM BRUCE NURSE

The following are repair tips from

Bruce Nurse, President of Rocky Mountain School of Furniture Repair where he provides hands-on workshops in professional leather repair; wood repair and refinishing; upholstery repair; hardwood floor repair and renewal. He also owns the Guardsman FurniturePro franchise in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Headrest Staining: It would be beneficial for salespeople to receive education on cleaning and care of various finishes. For example, a significant issue with all finishes is sebum on the headrest and armrest. It seems to show up more on reclining pieces. This is where oils are absorbed, penetrating the leather of anilines and semi-anilines. Often times this looks dark and dirty and is practically impossible to remove and restore. In fully finished leather, sebum first removes the pigmented dye and then the oils penetrate the leather, making it difficult to restore. In the headrest this is usually caused by hair spray, oils in the hair or the oils from a bald head. Good advice to salespeople of high end reclining products is to adjust customer expectations by letting them know that leathers will develop a natural patina, as they use them.

Seam Finish Wear: Some manufacturers are having issues with finish



Wear on wax finished seat

## "If you sell light colored leather, make sure that no matter what, you offer

customers an extended warranty, and tell them why."

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



Imitation leather fabric cracks/ peels



Seem separation leather



Dye transfer from belt



## WARRANTIES

coming off along the seams; particularly on the seats and Generally, the manufacturer will repair this within the first year. However, customers are usually left alone on this one after that time frame. And stores are left to deal with it in some way.

Seam Separation: At least one person in a furniture store or warehouse should know how to do blind stitching. Seam separation is an issue that is common in stress areas, especially on attached inside back pillows and attached arm pillows. People grabbing the corners of the attached pillows to move the pieces around or even a pet constantly sitting on the top of a back can stress areas enough to cause a seam to unravel. appears to be more common on reclining pieces. An area often affected is the chaise to the footrest caused by people pushing their foot against the footrest in order to stretch the mechanism out into a fully reclined position. When top grain leather is sewn to top grain leather, usually the worst issue is just an unravelled seam that can be stitched back up.

"Some manufacturers are having issues with finish coming off along the seams; particularly on the seats and arms."

However, when one or more of the panels are split hide leather, a bonded leather or a vinyl; often one of the panels will tear instead of the stitching unravelling. This is worse because a more expensive repair may involve a new panel, if it is available.

Refinishing Services: Sometimes a customer will return to a store to inquire about having a leather piece they purchased several years before refinished. Perhaps dye is coming off or it is fading. It's best to suggest the customer purchase something new because the process is not only very expensive, the suppleness will be compromised giving the refinished piece a "harder" feeling, and the new finish may not last. Often times the new finish starts to crack and/or peel within a year or two.

Fix or Order Parts? Some very knowledgeable retailers don't try to fix their more promotional products. Other stores try to fix everything. They pull out markers and use little leather repair kits. Then they get a call from an unhappy customer three months down the road. And, I tell them that if they open up a carton and see damage on certain types of items, they should just order a replacement part because it's the best way to fix it. End of story. It's also a good idea to select suppliers that do a good job of engineering and sending parts because it makes the repair process faster, better and less costly.

Doing Home Inspections: When it comes to leather damage, Bruce Nurse continues to advise, "If I do a home inspection, I

go with the intention that I'm going to fix the problem. If I can't, then I order a part. So, if you find that you need to order parts 90 percent of the time, it can be more efficient to ask the customer to take photos, or send out a driver or a staff member to do an inspection. A good repair person can usually tell from a photo what needs to be ordered and should be able to give a quote on the repair. Not sending a skilled technician out twice on the same repair may be cost effective for many retailers."

**Vinyl:** There seems to be a trend for some manufacturers to use cheaper vinyl. It's something that retailers should be concerned about. With good quality vinyl, if an outside corner is torn, often times staples can be pulled out, the vinyl stretched, stapled up and it looks good. But lower end vinyls may actually tear instead of stretch. Also, a little heat applied to it will burn a hole, and using an iron in order to put a grain pattern back on, can damage the surface or result in an unnatural looking grain pattern. We're seeing this more often especially in vinyl panels used on bed rails, headboards, footboards and then sometimes on the outside arms and front rails on sofas.

Extended Warranties: We're seeing a lot of dye transfer from dark colored



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clothing, denim especially, belts or even from blankets on to light colored leather. Blues, greens and blacks just transfer right over and the leather either needs to be re-dyed which can be unwise, because chances are it's going to come off, or panels must be replaced.

So, if you sell light colored leather, make sure that no matter what, you offer customers an extended warranty. and tell them why. If you can give customers actual reasons for buying an extended warranty from the perspective of repair, it's much more believable and effective.

### **CARE TIPS**

Cleaning: Part of the reason why consumers like leather is because it is easy to care for. It is not, however,

indestructible. In general, the more heavily finished a leather surface is, the more resistant it is to spills and stains. Untreated leather, however, absorbs and is easily stained by oils. It can also be harmed by abrasive cleaners, powdered products and organic solvents. Soap and water is good for routine cleaning, but many commercially available leather cleaners also work. the latter often contain lubricating materials which are intended to keep leather supple. Really dirty leather may require the use of a mild detergent solution or professional cleaning, but care should be taken because some detergent solutions can contain compounds that may harm leather. Always recommend that your customers follow the manufacturer's cleaning instructions and that they test any cleaner on an inconspicuous area first. It is also a good idea to damp wipe rather than soak the leather with water.

Pets and Placement: Some pets love to chew on leather, urinate on it and scratch it. Consumers who suspect that their pets may damage their leather upholstery may want to avoid delicate leathers.

Placement out of direct sunlight, or near radiators which may dry out the leather is also recommended.

### Normal Wear and Colorfastness: Customers who anticipate that their sofa will see heavy or consistent use and are worried about dirt, stains and wear, might be well advised to purchase a sofa that is darker in color and has a heavier finish coat. More heavily finished leathers will maintain their original looks longer, but tend to be stiffer and show less natural character. Since heavily pigmented finish coats are often used to cover up less desirable leather, they will also tend to be used in less expensive upholstery applications.

Although a deep gouge or scuff mark may expose the interior of the leather and reveal a contrasting color if the leather is not fully struck through, normal use will rarely if ever wear through the grain enamel of the leather. If wear or abrasion exposes a contrasting color, this is almost always due to the pigmented finish being a different color than the aniline dyed leather crust. Sometimes this is done purposely to achieve tonal effects. The most uniform color and wear will be achieved by leather which has been dyed and finished in the same shade.

You can tell if the final pigmented finish coat is a different color than the



Bicast finish cracking



Sebum causes finish to lift on arm



Dye wearing off seat



Finish coming off from dog usage

## "It's a good idea

to select suppliers that do a good job of engineering and sending parts because it makes the repair process faster, better and less costly."

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

dyed leather by examining a leather sample or patch found under the seat cushion. Just compare the pigmented surface color with the color of the opposite suede side.

Some suggested methods of cleaning leather surfaces follow. Always suggest that consumers first try any cleaning method in a hidden area.

**Spills:** Wipe up excess liquid immediately with a clean cloth or sponge. If necessary, use clean lukewarm water and let the leather air-dry.

Spots and stains: Apply a mild, nondetergent soap solution with a clean, wet sponge. Rinse well and let air dry. Especially stubborn dirt may require a detergent solution, but care should be taken.

**Butter, oil or grease:** Wipe the leather with a clean, dry cloth and let the remainder of the oil dissipate into the leather. Do not apply water or try to wash a grease spot.

Professional cleaning services: There are specialized services that clean, condition, restore, repair and spot refinish leather furniture in consumers' homes on a regular basis. They say that this kind of routine maintenance extends the useful life of leather upholstery; keeping it clean and in top condition.

Repair of holes, cuts and burns: Although it seems unlikely; holes, cuts and burns in leather surfaces, wear and fading can be repaired to likenew condition by skilled leather craftsmen.

### **NEXT ISSUE**

Part three will include advice on

leather marketing and advertising, tips on best sales practices, a leather ID chart and a glossary of leather terms for retail training.

### **Leather Buying Facts & Tips**

- Panels with gross imperfections should be absent or positioned on inconspicuous areas such as outside backs and sides or near the bottom edge of the upholstered piece. Furniture manufacturers generally try to choose leather having consistent natural markings for the seat and back cushions as these areas are the most noticeable.
- •Leather should be free from scuffs or stains introduced during the upholstering process.
- Attention to upholstering detail is an excellent indicator of quality in leather upholstery. Stitching should be straight, even and uniform.
- •There should be no lumps or sharp edges under the cover, or visible staples or nails.
- •Arms should be symmetrical and welts fastened tightly and without twists. The leather should be pulled tightly without unwanted tucks or dimples.
- Tufting should be even and symmetrical.
- Ever wonder why you can find leather strips hanging under the seat cushions? It is meant to be used by the consumer as an aid in finding a matching dye lot should they need to order additional leather to cover another item.
- •All cows are not created equal. Natural markings are inherent in leather.
- •The heavier pigmented (protected aniline) leathers are easier to care for and clean.
- Leather is durable, but it does scratch, fade, rip, show wear and get dirty.
- •Leather placed in heavy traffic areas, such as TV rooms and family rooms, does show wear and soil more quickly than leather placed in light traffic areas, such as formal living rooms.
- •Leather can be repaired, cleaned, refinished and restored.
- •The bottoms of leather cushions are not completely covered with leather to allow proper breathing of the cushion. Air is permitted to escape, preventing splitting of the seams. This also stops the cushion from sliding out too easily.

# **SWEATING THE**

Part 1: Read how what you may consider normal business ups & downs can make the difference between huge profits or crushing losses.

By Hal McClamma & Tommy Miskelly

ome sector retail excellence is a quest that takes enormous amounts of energy and unrelenting focus. For many retailers this quest or hunt can take years if not a lifetime. And unfortunately many of them never achieve what we would consider to be true business excellence. Since so much is riding on the details of your business, I want you to consider the ramifications of either staying completely and utterly focused, or taking your eyes off of the ball.

In this tepid economy, 90% is NOT good enough! And the difference between 95% and 100% can be staggering. Small differences in focus can make the difference between profit and loss and positive or negative cash flow.

As an owner or manager, you must be continuously and consistently focused on all key areas of your business. And, the ultimate magic trick is

> that you must maintain this intense focus in each area simultaneously.

In this day of immense competition and fast paced change in our industry, retailers that are unable to maintain the requisite focus and expertise in all areas will find themselves at a huge disadvantage. In fact, those lacking the knowledge, drive and desire to be the best may find themselves irrelevant in their marketplaces.

This article is among the most significant and important home sector articles you may ever read. To grasp and fully comprehend what we are discussing here, I recommend you read and reread the article several times and do the following "Math" exercises with your store numbers.

When we speak with furniture retailers we ask questions... lots of questions. That's what teachers and analyst's do. The responses from retail owners and managers to the following

are discussing here, I recommend you read and reread the article several times and do the following "Math" exercises with your store numbers."

"To grasp and fully comprehend what we



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six questions never cease to amaze. Often the answers are absolutely confounding, overwhelming or downright depressing.

### THE SIX QUESTIONS

If your traffic were down 5% • would you be concerned? Most say no. Just ripples, ups and downs in normal husiness

2 . If your average sale were to . decrease 5% would you be concerned? Most say no. Just ripples, ups and downs in normal business.

1 If your close percent declined 5% • would you be concerned? Most say no. Just ripples, ups and downs in normal business.

4 If your margin fell 5% (5% not 5 points) would you be concerned? Most say no. Just ripples, ups and downs in normal business.

**F** If your inventory increased 5% • would you be concerned? Most say no. Just ripples, ups and downs in normal business.

6. would you be concerned? Most If your expenses went up 5% say no. Just ripples, ups and downs in normal business.

You see, alone these little changes mean very little. However when they all occur at the same time, watch out!

The point of this article is that THE LITTLE THINGS MATTER. A friend of mine, Zig Ziglar once said, "Tell your wife she looks like the first day of spring and she will eat it up. Tell your wife she looks like the last day of a long hard winter and she will eat you Again, THE LITTLE THINGS "!qu MATTER.

Let me explain. There are two principles you should become familiar with. The first is amplification and the second is attenuation. Amplification and attenuation are effects or consequences that are guaranteed to happen or occur based upon certain antecedents, causes or actions. Quite simply, these two principles are based upon the law of cause and effect.

Herein lies the danger; laws are certain and laws work for or against you whether you want them to or not. And, laws work for or against you whether you know it or not.

### **AMPLIFICATION**

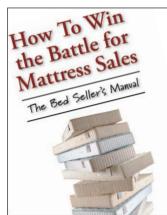
Amplification is a good thing. Amplification is where the desired end

results are magnified by making small, seemingly insignificant but powerful changes in several key areas of the business. This amplification means that sales will increase and/or profitability will increase. When several positive things align or converge at the same time, they create very nice increases in key performance measures such as traffic, sales, margin and profitability. Certain causes create desired effects.

Amplification occurs by doing ALL the right things the right way at the right time.

#### **ATTENUATION**

The opposite of amplification is attenuation. Attenuation is a bad thing. Attenuation is a decrease or weakening of desired end results. For example, If you take your eye off the ball in several critical areas of your business, the results can have devastating consequences. Rather than having the law of cause and effect work for you, it works against you. With attenuation your causes have undesired effects. When several negative things align or converge at the same time, they create very bad decreases in key performance measures such as traffic, sales, margin and profitability.



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### **SWEATING THE**

## RETAIL DETAILS

### AMPLIFICATION EXAMPLE

Consider a make-believe retailer with the following performance metrics.

Sales \$300,000. Gross margin 44%. Expenses 40%. Net pre tax profit 4% or \$12,000. Also lets consider that traffic was 600. Tickets written were 200 and the average sale was \$1,500.

Now our make-believe retailer takes his or her business very seriously and has an incredible focus on ALL of the HVT High Value Targets in several key areas of the business. Here is what this retailer does to change the end results.

Through proper advertising and marketing, traffic is up 5%

Through proper merchandising, 🖊 • margins have increased 5%. Not 5 points, but 5%.

3. Through proper, merchandising, sales training and coaching, the Through proper, merchandising, average sale increased 5% and the close percent increased 5%.

reduced by 5%. Not 5 points, but 5%.

NOTICE: Everything works together!

These seemingly insignificant positive changes due to increased focus, training and knowledge have amplified the retailers end results. Here are the revised numbers based upon these small changes.

Traffic is now at 660. The close percent is now 35%. The average sale is now \$1,575 and overall sales are now \$363,835. Expenses are now \$114,000. Margins are now 46.2%.

The whopping "Amplification" difference in the amplification example is that sales are up 21.2% Net pre tax profit is now \$54,091 or an increase of 350%.

### ATTENUATION EXAMPLE

So what happens if this makebelieve retailer takes his or her eyes off the ball? Small seemingly insignificant decreases in focus can create immense downturns in key numbers especially bottom-line profitability.

Now our make-believe retailer takes his or her business LESS seriously and has a diminished focus on the HVT High Value Targets in several key areas of the business. Here is what this retailer does to change the end results.

Through poor ineffective adver-• tising and marketing, traffic is down 5%.

Through weak merchandising, 2 margins have decreased 5%.







Not 5 points, but 5%.

3. Through poor merchandising, sales training and coaching, the average sale decreased 5% and the close percent is down by 5%.

Through poor financial management, expenses increased by 5%. Not 5 points, but 5%.

These seemingly insignificant changes due to lack of focus, poor training and perhaps not having required skill sets have amplified in the negative, creating attenuation of the retailers end results. Here are the revised numbers based upon these small changes.

Traffic is now at 570. The close percent is now 31.6%. The average sale is now \$1,425 and overall sales are now \$256,671. Expenses are now

"Here is the whopping
"Amplification" difference:
Sales in the amplification
example are up 21.2%
Net pre tax profit is
now \$54,091 or an
increase of 350%."

\$126,000. Margins are now 41.8%

Here is the incredible attenuated difference: Sales in the attenuation example are down 14.4% Net pre tax profit is now actually a loss of \$18,711.

This focus or lack thereof, knowledge or lack thereof creates a swing in profitability of \$72,802 for this small retailer.

The small differences will work for or against you, whether you want them to or not, and whether you know about them or not.

Here is your homework: Take your own stores' performance numbers and insert them into these two scenarios. Work out the math and see what happens. It will blow you away.

Now consider cash flow rather than profitability. What if you experience an increase in inventory along with these little slides in close percent, margin, traffic etc., combined with increases in expenses? All of a sudden you have the recipe for spiraling or non-existent cash flow. Unless you have deep pockets, this is a dying business model. And, if you don't care because you have deep pockets, this is an ignorant business model.

Do it now... Look after the little things. The HVT High Value Targets

of a successful home sector retailer.

#### **NEXT ISSUE:**

In the next issue we will discuss the top 10 HVT High Value Targets you must master to make amplification work for you.

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 teaches: Sales training, sales coaching, marketing, advertising, managed internet search, 21st century marketing, leadership, team building, financial management, business administration, operations, warehouse & delivery, customer service, security, risk management, merchandise planning, inventory control, merchandise management, business & HR law.

Integrity Business Coaching also helps retailers with cash raising, business expansion, succession planning, retirement, GOBs, selling the business and more.

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

INVENTORY
AVERAGE SALE

XPENSES

# GETTING BEYOND YOUR

The secret to selling more, earning more and improving lives.

by Joe Capillo

ver twenty years ago Tom Search Peters (In Excellence) told our industry that our problem was that we sold too much furniture and not enough dreams. We didn't listen. He also said that we don't do better because we set our goals too low. We didn't listen. Around that same time. Steven Covey told us all that "Sometimes, the way we see the problem, is the problem." (Seven Habits of Highly Effective People). We didn't care.

Around that same time I was doing a lot of research about how people buy furniture, but was stymied (because there was none) until around 1997 when a study funded by Lexington Brands helped me understand what was happening in our business and explained why we suffer from 20% conversion rates. I always wondered what

"Oh great, a new bedroom set! We have lots of them for you to look at. Do you have a particular style in mind? Blah... blah... blah..."

happens to those 80% (or so) who don't buy and finally figured it out after studying retail furniture store sales metrics for an extended period.

A friend of mine used to say to salespeople: "The be-back bus doesn't stop here." This was in response to salespeople's response when asked about their customer who just left without buying - "Oh, they'll be back." We didn't listen – but we should have.

I began tracking customer traffic by salesperson in 1976 in Norwalk Connecticut because Nathan Ancell, the founder of Ethan Allen, told me that, as a store sales manager I had only two things to worry about: Close Ratio and Average Sale. He said: "We'll take care of everything else." And, they did.

Way back then, we built our business on high-service selling. Our main selling purpose was to sell house calls and room design to our customers. The early Ethan Allen Gallery stores were set up in room settings. Bedrooms looked like bedrooms, dining rooms like dining rooms, and living rooms like living rooms. There were few "lineups" and a lot of walls. Our customers loved it because they could "see" how their room might look all decorated up.

#### WHAT DOES SHE WANT?

We knew something then that has woven through all my subsequent work.

There's one thing she wants in the end: A beautiful home. And, along the way, beautiful rooms - one room at a time. This hasn't changed since then, this foundational need for feeling good about their home, their "nest', their family place, or even just their personal place, and their ability to make it happen.

### WHAT DOES SHE WANT FROM US?

Simple: Help getting there. But first, there has to be a common, shared understanding of those goals, those needs.

### WHAT DO WE DO?

We mostly try to connect shoppers to products. "Oh great, a new bedroom set! We have lots of them for you to look at. Do you have a particular style in mind? Blah... blah... blah..."

The result is that many customers tell us they want to "browse" or will say "I'm just looking for ideas" and, in many cases, that's the end of the interaction between the salesperson and the prospective customer.

In other cases, there is a higher-level interaction involving product presentations, that still don't result in a sale. They result in things like: "Well, I have to think about it" And "Thanks, we'll be

For the most part, we deal with trying



Image of Nathan Ancell from a guest editorial in a 1965 edition of Furniture World, "America's First Furniture Publication" founded 1870.

"Nathan Ancell, the founder of Ethan Allen, told me that, as a store sales manager I had only two things to worry about: Close Ratio and Average Sale. He said: "We'll take care of everything else." And, they did."

to connect people to products. What we should be doing is connecting ourselves to their projects and to them as people first – then helping them get what they really want: a beautiful room!

Forty years ago we learned that the "problem" wasn't in our store or in our products. The problem was in the room – in her home, and if we didn't have any knowledge of that room, we were flying blind. Our customer knew everything about her room, and we knew nothing – so, we had to find a way to get the "picture in her mind" out of her

mind and into ours. This led to my favorite selling tool – sketching the room – which allowed us to connect to both the person and to the room (the project) where the "problem" really lies. Then, we can achieve our "noble purpose" of helping our customers achieve their goals for beautiful rooms and homes that make them feel good."

Today, with the availability of room planning software, it's possible to take the idea of sketching the room to a new level and to involve customers in the process, thereby enhancing the interpersonal relationship and "connection" to the customer in the role of "problem solver" or partner in achieving the final goal – that Noble Purpose: Enhancing our customers' quality of life.

### THE IDEA OF A

I have now encountered the work of Lisa Earle McLeod whose idea regarding the importance of basing all selling initiatives on your Noble Purpose instead of only "the numbers" and I can put all of my work experience into connecting the past to the present. In short, the Noble Purpose that lies inher-

## How Larry Mullins Helped us Exit with Three Times More Cash in Our Account.



Riemenschneider

"Larry's time-tested plan for going out of business is detailed & laid out so there is no question what the next step is or when it will take place. He got to know us and our business and I am convinced that there is no one in the industry that could tell our story to our customers the way he has. He provided everything, print, air media, signs, and daily telephone support. With nervous anticipation we prepared for the opening day and when it came we were absolutely blown away! For the first three days customers poured into our store and sales were beyond our

Riemenschneider wildest expectations! I am writing this on the fourth day of the sale and already our 7000 square foot store in a rural town of 1200 people has grossed over \$90,000. We are so glad we chose Larry rather than the hired gun who wanted three times more! Thanks, Larry, for all you've done for us!"

Dave & Alisha Riemenschneider, Kingsley Home Furnishings, Kingsley, IA

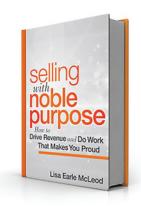
• NOTE: Dave and Alisha continued their blistering sales pace. When their eight-week sale ended on Thursday, May 8, 2012, they had achieved sales of \$573,000, with an advertising cost of under 5%. To my knowledge, this is the largest sustained volume of home furnishings per square foot recorded in recent history.
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## 'McLeod shows how

the Noble Purpose gives salespeople some things you don't give them - the realization that their work matters to their customers."

ently, but usually unacknowledged, in your company culture should become the focus of your company's customer engagement strategy.

McLeod shows how the Noble Purpose gives salespeople some things you don't give them - the realization that:

- Their work matters to their customers.
- There is something beyond the numbers to be acknowledged.
- Salespeople add value to their customer's lives by offering products and sales services.

The outcome is that when you concentrate on something other than sales

"Elevate your thinking to include the things your salespeople actually do for your customers when they help them have more beautiful homes, and rooms."

and profits, you get more sales and profits. The other good outcome for salespeople is that when they sell more, they earn more and the quality of their work, and their lives, improves.

### **DEALING WITH THE METRICS**

This has been my "thing" for over 40 years: measure everything and use the numbers to help you know what to do. This goes back to that early assessment by Mr. Ancell regarding close ratio and average sale. I knew that in order to "manage" those things, I had to know their values, and guessing wouldn't help me make the right decisions. I also knew that, as a retailer in a one-to-one personal selling environment, I had to know all these metrics by individual salesperson – because virtually all my revenue passed through them on the top line on its way to the bottom line.

There are many ways available today to track this data including some very sophisticated software, but even if you have to do it by hand, it's worth doing. Here are some reasons why for you to consider:

• Every group of salespeople has a range-of-performance among the salespeople in the important metrics: number of customers, close ratio, average sale, and revenueper-customer served. In my experience with groups of 6 or more people, there is a 15% improvement in revenue by simply bringing your below average performers to the average level in each of the two metrics: close ratio and average

• If you have a salesperson with a 30% close ratio and another with an 18% close ratio with a similar variance in average sale, are the customers you provide to the lower performer receiving the same level of service as those who work with higher performer?

These are just two good reasons to use your metrics to manage your business, but this only has to do with our Noble Purpose insofar as they affect the level and nature of service provided to every customer.

Elevate your thinking and your vision to truly include the things your salespeople actually do for your customers when they help them have more beautiful homes, and rooms, and build stronger, more long-lasting relationships. You're going to need this going forward.

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 Joe Capillo's articles on Furniture World's information rich website at http:// furninfo.com/Authors/List.



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