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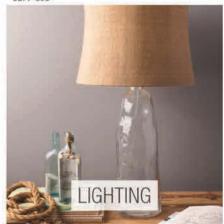
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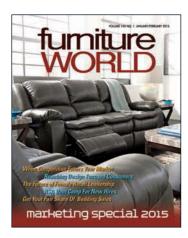
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FURNITURE WORLD MAGAZINE

The Business Solutions Magazine For Furniture Retailers
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Cover Image: The plush contemporary design of the "Long Knight-Gray" upholstery collection from Ashley Furniture features thick padded arms and contoured pillow top seating surrounded with rich faux leather upholstery adorned with stitched details. See more information on Ashley on pages 3,4,5 of this issue or visit www.ashleyfurniture.com.

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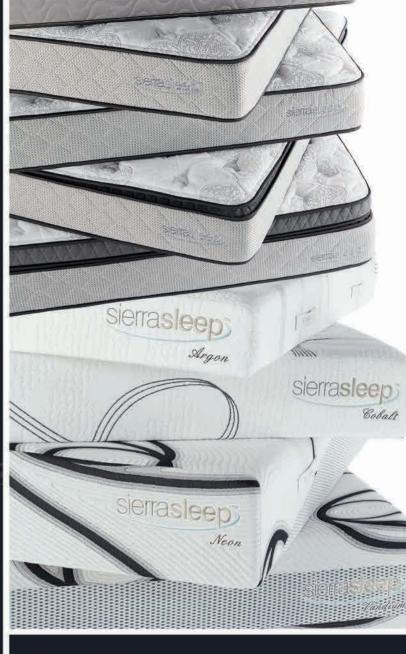
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EDITOR'S CORNER
A Positive Tipping Point
For Furniture In 2015?

re we as an industry approaching a positive tipping point? Sure, a case can be made that many home furnishing retailers and manufacturers are rife with sameness and lack of innovation. It's also true that most retailers are going into 2015 with modest expectations for growth, accompanied by a dearth of breakout styles and trends capable of catching public imagination. However, there are reasons to be very optimistic. Business is improving, and among our (mostly female) customers, interest in style and design is huge and growing. Better yet, it is now possible to connect to our (largely female) customers in ways that were never before possible. For most retailers, addressing these opportunities in more than a superficial way requires substantial effort. Fortunately, this edition of Furniture World can help.

Here we focus on the most important challenges and opportunities facing home furnishings retailers in 2015. You will find practical advice about how to better understand, reach out to and serve more women and design oriented customers. These are probably your best customers as well, so we've included practical ideas on how to keep new competitors from stealing them away, to engage them in creative ways, and exceed their expectations. It's the 2015 recipe for success.

Regards, Xusul Russell Bienenstock Editorial Director

furniture WORLD

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by David McMahon, CMA, EA

xpanding competition has been a common concern recently. Retailers across the country are asking what they should do to prepare for well known chain stores and others that enter their market-places.

First, stop worrying about what you can't control. Next, start preparing for the inevitable.

Let's suppose you have 500,000 people in your primary trade area. There are likely several stores already who directly and indirectly compete for your customer's attention and disposable income. Those that compete directly against you are in the same market segment. You are likely selling a similar product and possibly a different mix or range of price (Ashley Furniture, Ikea Furniture, Restoration Hardware,

"The absolute worst thing that can happen when a direct competitor comes to town is that they entice your best customers to buy from them instead of you."

and family owned store fronts, all compete directly). Those that compete indirectly are those that sell a different product altogether but ask for a similar investment (home improvement stores, furniture retail, and auto retailers all compete for the consumer dollar). Most vibrant regional markets have these various degrees of competition.

A direct competitor moving into your market may even be less of a threat than indirect competitors. It, at least, keeps the money in the family. A direct competitor will add buzz for what you sell. They sink marketing dollars and public relations investment into your region. An indirect competitor steers consumers' disposable income away from your industry segment altogether.

FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

If you are a full line home furnishings retailer and a big box comes to your area, they will stir it up. After all, they are entering your market because they feel that it is worth their investment. This may be a good thing. Often times, the best place to be is where businesses are entering into a marketplace rather than leaving. If your marketplace is expanding, then congratulations — business minds believe there is growth potential in your area. This is normal in

a healthy economy. These companies coming to town also believe that you and those like you cannot fill your market needs alone. They feel that there is a gap in your area that they can capitalize on. They probably believe that they can do a better job serving your market than you and your current competitors.

HANG ON TO YOUR BEST CUSTOMERS

The absolute worst thing that can happen when a direct competitor comes to town is that your best customers buy from them instead of you. Don't let your customers, become, your competitor's customers.

This is an area where you have control. It is easier and much less costly to keep existing customers than attracting new ones. This is where you have a distinct advantage. Your competition will try to entice your customers through various marketing initiatives. They will spend a lot of time and money in an attempt to lure buyers away from you. Knowing this, you can limit the effect that their solicitations have.

HOW TO PREPARE

Here are some ways to stop your new competitor from taking your customers.





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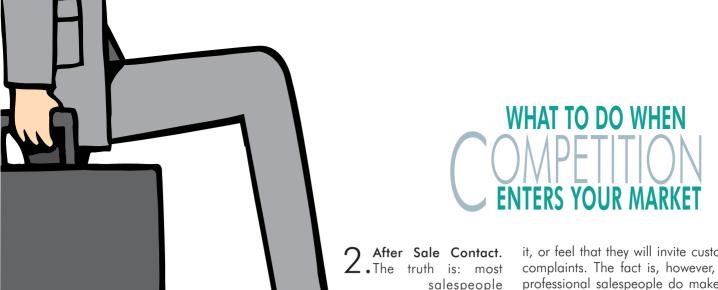
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Top 20% Contact.
Realize this: The majority of your revenue and profit are produced by the minority of your customer base. These are the people you need to stay loyal to your brand. Do you know who these people are? Where they live? What they do? Are they just numbers in a database to you or have you really connected with them? If your salespeople cannot recognize their

top customers on

the street, then

you are probably disconnected. Whether you are in touch with your best customers or not, you should seek to engage them on a routine basis to keep them from leaving you.

Open up the conversation. That doesn't necessarily mean repetitively sending them anonymous direct mail pieces or mindless email blasts. You need to really connect. Pick up the phone. Send a hand written card. Compose a personal one-on-one email. Send flowers or tickets to the movies. Make something up that you would do for a good friend — be creative and show your appreciation. If you make a friend, you have a customer for life.

tomers after they buy.

Most salespeople (and their retail managers) are conditioned to focus on closing one customer then immediately move on to the next Up. They totally miss the huge upside potential for making subsequent sales from prior ones. They are oblivious of the notion of a lifetime customer.

fail miser-

ably at fol-

lowing

with their cus-

"Do you know who these people are? Where do they live? What they do? Are they just numbers in a database?"

Here is a true story: I have some clients that don't spend much on selfpromotion - under 3% of sales on advertising. These businesses are also some of the most profitable, producing over 15% net income, each year during the last 3 years. They have been able to do this because they provide a remarkable customer experience - before, during and after the sale. They personally keep in touch with all customers at various times: after the sale, before the delivery, during the delivery, right after the delivery, 3-6 months after delivery, and 1 year after. Many furniture retailers resist doing this because they believe they don't have the time to do

it, or feel that they will invite customer complaints. The fact is, however, that professional salespeople do make the time and don't hide from their customers. Not making the time and hiding from customers are a sure fire way to hand customers to your new competition on a silver platter

VIP Rewards Club. Customers **5.** frequent businesses that give them something extra of value back. Reward points have been proven successful in numerous industries. They are used by airlines, credit card issuers, sporting goods retailers, supermarkets, and countless others. Yet, in segments such as home furnishings retail, True Reward Clubs are not yet common. Establish a rewards program based on dollars spent. There should be no expiry date and they should be fully transferable to friends and family. Points must be just like real cash. Here is how it might work: For each one dollar spent, customers receive one point. You decide on what one point can buy. One point may be equal to 10 cents at retail, for example. That means that if someone spends \$10,000 they have 10,000 points. That equals \$1,000 of spend. This is 10%. Or, do what the retail chains like Performance Bicycles and REI do: Accumulate a 10% credit on all purchases to be used after 24 hours on a different product. This will help you build and keep customers.

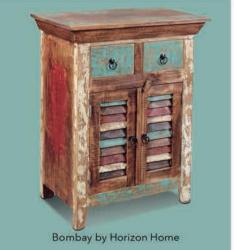
A speak to Your Customers' Needs.

If you want a greater chance of re-selling your current customers, find out what their future needs are. Implement a next purchase system that keeps track of details about what customers may be interested in purchasing at a later time. Use this information as a targeted follow-up tool to increase

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"Establish a rewards program

based on dollars spent. There should be no expiry date and they should be fully transferable to friends and family."

the odds that your top customers will stay with you, instead of shopping your competition.

Make sure you have a working CRM (customer relation management) system that integrates with your POS (point-of-sale) system and that you know how to use it. Mining your customer data produces leads for salespeople and value for your customers.

5 Referral Programs. All customers have friends and family members who have not shopped with you before.

By tapping into your customers' personal networks you can encourage them to act as your promoters. Actual and social word of mouth are some of the most powerful and inexpensive marketing tools. Create a referral program that encourages people to talk about you. Examples might be a "Friends & Family"

"Understand why employees leave: poor training, not feeling appreciated, poor hours, bad management, environment, pay and benefits."

discount card or a "priority delivery time" in return for Facebook page posts. Be creative.

Improve on Product and Service 6. Offerings That Your Customers Want. One reason why people may shop your competition is that they believe your competitor is offering something better. It might be faster service, a greater assortment of product, more enjoyable sales staff, a better price, or anything else. Well, it is hard to be all things to all people, but you need to decide on what you will be to your customers. Then you should seek to improve what you are. For example, if you have evidence that your customers shop with you because you have the highest quality wood products in your market, expand and improve on this offering. Then continuously communicate this important advantage. If a competitor enters your marketplace with something similar, you don't need to change your strategy and become a price competitor.

Don't Sell Commodities. If you sell generic me-too items, you will not be able to differentiate your product offerings in the minds of your customers. That may be fine if you have a big advantage over your new competition in terms of buying power and overhead, but if you don't have this advantage, you will need a different strategy.

When a competitor comes to town it is important that you expand your line-up of suppliers to allow you to be different. You likely cannot compete long term selling the same products as a chain with 10 times the marketing spend and rock-solid business processes. Establish a loyal base of committed supply chain partners and have your own private label brand.

Keep Your Team on Board. The O. best teams usually win. Expect your new competitor to go after your best customers and perhaps your best salespeople as well. Understand the reasons why people leave: bad management, not feeling appreciated, poor training, poor work environment, they are not having fun, poor hours, poor pay and benefits. It's a good idea to have management, schedule routine one-on-one sessions with the people they supervise to acknowledge good work, get feedback/ideas, and provide helpful direction. If you expect your team to improve their communication skills with customers then you first need to ensure that you and your managers communicate better with your team.

If you can hang on to your best salespeople and further improve your team when a competitor enters the market, you will have the opportunity to grow your business.

Competition coming to your market is normal in a healthy, economy. You may all win, you may all lose, or some may win and some may lose. But your best strategy is to stop worrying about what you cannot control and start taking actions to improve the value you provide to your customers and the quality of the relationships you have with them.

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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#1 Best Place to Work N 2014

by Paula S. Fogarty improved with more female leadership. For over a year, I have been conducting research for a book on female leadership roles in furniture manufacturing. Furniture retail has

-TO-WOMAN
Can the furniture

industry benefit from more female leadership?

ducting research for a book on female leadership roles in furniture manufacturing. Furniture retail has more female leaders than the manufacturing sector, and this may be because this is where the rubber hits the road with the female consumer. In 2013, there were 80,000 women employed in furniture retail stores and 133,000 men according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retailers are

approach to product development and an inherent lack of understanding about what women want and how they shop differently from men.

still challenged by the primarily male

In a 2010 article in Furniture World, "A Theory of How Women Shop," Joe Capillo argued, "Our female consumers see only how things will work for them in their homes, and if they can't see it, they won't buy it." This visioning of use, function, scale, proportion, color, and how objects will fit into a setting distinguishes the female home furnishings consumer from the male. A recent info-graphic on www.Social4Retail.com reiterates the gender differences in furniture shopping habits and shows that men are more likely to focus on the furniture itself than the design scheme of the entire house. 74% of the women interviewed for this survey said they think about shopping all of the time; the men were most occupied with thoughts of expenditure 50% of the time, football 25% of the time, and beer the other 25% of the time. Whereas this infographic may not be the most scholarly result—and is cheeky to be sure—we get the point.

RETAIL OPPORTUNITIES

So where are the opportunities for women to help the \$100 billion U.S. furniture retail industry serve its primary consumer, and how has gender affected the careers of its female leaders? I caught up with two female retail veter-

"Most of the over 30 young female graduates I have spoken with have being turned away from, or simply turned off by, the reality of the male dominated manufacturing sector."

Marshall Field knew the importance of the female consumer in the 1860s when he coined the retail mantra, "Give the Lady What She Wants." The furniture industry has long been known for its fraternal order of male domination and its primarily female consumer since the turn of the twentieth century. In 2009, the Harvard Business Review published "The Female Economy" demonstrating that 94% of global home furnishings purchase decisions are made by women. Having grown up as the daughter of an industry titan, and being one of a small handful of female Presidents in manufacturing, I can reasonably speculate that at least 94% of the leaders in manufacturing are male. I can also rightfully say that the industry network of good old boys is already starting to push back on my position with some of my dearest male colleagues questioning Harvard's number; okay, let's say it is 91%, or even 80%. Who am I to guestion Harvard? In any case, the furniture consumer is overwhelmingly female and is being served by primarily male leaders. The question I am exploring is whether or not the industry can be





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ans to explore these topics.

Kris Kolar, A.S.I.D., Pro Member N.C.I.D.Q., and Vice President for Clive Daniel Home, has spent a long career as a female furniture retail warrior. Having an undergraduate degree in interior design and an MBA, here are the highlights of her career path:

- Interior Designer, Federated Department Stores' Rike's store in Dayton, Ohio
- Federated's Rich's division in Atlanta as Assistant Manager of all 10 Interior design studios
- John Wanamaker, Philadelphia as the Manager of the Interior Design Studios
- John Wanamaker as Divisional Vice President of Home Fashion

Throughout her career, Kris Kolar has felt that women have to work harder for the same recognition and equal pay. Sadly, female corporate executives in the U.S.A. today make 20% less than male executives doing the same job. Kolar said,

"I have witnessed inequality through my entire career. I remember one time, midway into my career, when I needed to go to a male senior vice president for some advertising money and I felt like I had to be sweet and girly to get what I wanted. I hated that because I always play it straight and let the chips fall where they may. I could feel this shift in my brain that said, 'you are stupid if you don't take what people give you because you smile.' Even down to what we wear, women are so scrutinized; there is a lot more for us to think about than what men have to."

As a buyer, Kolar has had to deal with far more men than women. She also used the term 'good old boy network' to describe the industry. The critical thing she notices with male-driven design and manufacturing is the lack of connection with the female consumer. She explained that women are more practical when it comes to buying a piece of furniture and said, "They are more practical in their buying decisions and think about if a

piece fits into the overall

scheme, specific space, and whether it performs the functions it needs to."

Male-driven manufacturers often consult with Kolar and the Clive Daniel team before coming to market with products. In too many cases, the night-stands are too low for mattress heights, dining tables have legs in the wrong place to sit properly, or drawers are just empty, without storage compartments. Kolar sends them back to the drawing board and wonders why there are not more female furniture designers who pay attention to such things.

In the course of my research, I have found that furniture design schools are, in many cases, graduating more females than males. Most of the over 30 young female graduates I have spoken with, have been turned away from, or simply turned off by, the reality of the male dominated manufacturing sector. I can only speculate that companies would do well to bring in more female design talent that would in turn help retailers reach their target audiences. Kolar pointed out that there is also a gender disconnect with the consumer when it comes to scaling sofas, "They are too large for most women."

Generally, she has seen the industry shift slowly toward the female con-

"I couldn't work in furniture because they said I couldn't lift furniture! We have come a long way from there, but there is still a long way to go." - Kris Kolar.

RISING AND SHINING

BORKHOLDER FURNITURE BEGINS A FRESH NEW ERA IN SOLID WOOD STYLE

It's a new day at Borkholder Furniture, where the company's talented American craftspeople are busy exploring the energy created at the crossroads of heirloom quality furnishings and clean-lined, mid-century design.

Just four years ago, Ola Yoder, chief executive officer of Kountry Wood Products, purchased the furniture firm based in Nappanee, IN, eager to restore the Amish company's long-standing reputation as a respected man-



ufacturer of quality, solid wood furniture. To lead the revitalization, he tapped industry sales and marketing veteran Tom Halvorsen as vice president.

Today, Borkholder Furniture is in the midst of a renaissance, fueled by consumers' increasing desire for American-made, high quality, solid wood

products, and a line that is quickly expanding beyond the company's traditional roots with fresh, transitional and soft modern styles.







Long known for its Arts and Crafts-influenced bedroom, dining and occasional furniture, Borkholder hinted at Yoder's ultimate vision—to become an industry leader in furniture for the whole home—with the introduction of coordinated upholstered goods in two new collections at the most recent High Point Market. Subtle shifts in style direction were also in evidence in new case pieces, most notably with the Transitions Collection, inspired by the clean and sophisticated lines of mid-century Scandinavian design, ideal for casual, though style-conscious lifestyles.

AWAKEN TO THE POSSIBILITIES

As the company grows, what will not change is Borkholder Furniture's dedication to producing quality products, handcrafted in America by Amish artisans using time-honored techniques passed down through generations. "We believe that there are ways to make a company successful while maintaining our values and integrity," Yoder says. "Our goals for Borkholder are simple: Ship on time, ship complete, and satisfy the customer with excellent quality at a fair price."







"When you shop this line at Market, it's so impressive," comments longtime retail customer Marty Darvin, partner at Chicago-based Top 100 chain Darvin Furniture. "When you touch it, feel it, open a drawer or take a leaf out of a table to see the sliding mechanism, and you learn about how they produce the furniture, you feel very good about carrying it.

BORKHOLDER FURNITURE

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Borkholder builds a beautiful product and they really put forth the effort in trying to please us a customer. Of course, with furniture like they make, that's easy to do."

"Everyone here is very hands-on and responsive to dealers and vendors," Halvorsen says. "I'm not sure whether it's a cultural thing, or just because it's the right way to do business, but the bottom line is that Borkholder is a company with a clear appreciation and understanding of where it has been and where we want to go."



WOMAN-TO-WOMAN | FADERSHIP

sumer and credits the fact that the industry has realized that furniture is fashionable. Fashion provided a critical gateway for women in the early days of furniture retail.

"Normally, retailers have been happy to hire women because they know about fashion. As more women entered, the product became more fashionable. When I first applied to Rike's, I couldn't work in furniture because they said I couldn't lift furniture! We have come a long way from there, but there is still a long way to go."

Caroline H.S. Hipple, Founding Partner in HB2 Resources has been a leader in both retail and manufacturing. Highlights of her career include:

- District Manager, This End Up Furniture
- Regional Sales Manager, This End Up Furniture
- Vice President, Marketing and Merchandising, This End Up

Furniture

- Executive Vice President, Sales, Marketing, and Merchandising, This End Up Furniture
- President and COO, Storehouse Furniture
- Co-author, A Pathway to Profit: Culture Impacts Performance

Caroline Hipple admits that her experience has always been meritbased, and a network of smart, talented women supported her successful career at This End Up. "Company founder, Stewart Brown, had great foresight about the female consumer and he wanted women selling to women," she explained. Hipple survived at This End Up through three different owners and became a major shareholder. "Because we sold what looked like shipping crates, people thought we were low-end and just cheap; we had a marketing and communications challenge," she stated.

She led the company to be the first

furniture store to open in regional malls all over the country. Next, she came back from the field to lead the marketing division at the Virginia headquarters and claims that she was ready for this big next executive step. Hipple said, "I had performed every job I was expected to lead and supervise, so I was very comfortable; You have to have that confidence to be a leader." Her next step, however, was not so comfortable.

Hipple's long experience, successful track record, and knowledge were not enough to land her the company's Presidency. The board was searching for a new President and the female Human Resources consultant they hired told Caroline, "You know, if you were a man, they would hire you to be President." They hired a man; he lasted 3 months.

In her six-year run as President of Storehouse, Hipple grew sales from \$89 million to \$150 million and expanded the chain from 42 to 72 stores. The revolutionary sales training and management development programs in creating a collaborative culture she developed at Storehouse feature prominently in her book, A Pathway to Profit.

When asked why there are more females in furniture retail than in manufacturing, she opined, "My experience has been that divisions mirror their consumer; the retail process is more unpredictable and perhaps women are better at multi-tasking. It is not a linear



"The future will be all about space planning with a collection of objects, and that is where women excel." - Caroline Hipple



WOMAN-TO-WOMAN LEADERSHIP

process. In retail environments, you are dealing with color, space planning, and design. We had many talented female and gay male consumers and I think it is more acceptable for them to be playing with lines and color."

Perhaps the linear, predictable, highly structured manufacturing environments are less appealing to women.

One female furniture designer she credits with giving objects features that are important to women is Jenna Hall, recent inductee into the Furniture Hall of Fame. "When Jenna was at Aspen Home, she added great female features to the items and it really got noticed," Hipple said, and added, "The

"Don't send a generic
e-blast to her, but
customize your messages
according to her tastes.
For example, don't
send her an offer on
traditional designs if she
is a modern girl."

industry can benefit from more female designers who understand how objects function; merchandising has totally changed from being suite-driven to being object driven."

Like Kolar, Hipple strongly urges manufacturers to consult closely on product development with top retailers. because they are closest to the female consumer. As for the future of the industry, Hipple said, "We are lucky to have the 68 million children of the baby boomers going into their prime spending years. They do not want their parents' furniture and they are more informed through the internet when they walk in a store than the consumer of 15 years ago. The future will be all about space planning with a collection of objects, and that is where women excel."

This inquiry begs questions about gendered designs; is there such a thing as feminine furniture and masculine furniture, and does the gender of the furniture designer affect their designs? As an art historian, I argue that gender has nothing to do with the ultimate design. Let's look at all of French Rococo period furniture; by today's vernacular understanding most would call it "feminine," yet it was all designed by men. In an article I wrote

on the furniture designs of Alexa Hampton, she claimed that she has a "butch," or more masculine approach to design. There are plenty of gay men making contributions to the furniture industry and one wonders if they have a more "feminine" sensibility, whatever that means. This topic is far too great to properly explore here, however, it is one that will be explored in my book at length because it goes to the very heart of the question of how more female designers might improve the industry; perhaps it is not about the overall look of a design to which women will contribute, but to the functionality and scale, as Kris Kolar observed.

It is reasonable to conclude that women have great contributions to make in both furniture manufacturing and retailing; that 94% number is just too big to ignore. Leadership positions are not for everyone, only alpha male and females. It indeed seems to be the case that alpha males may be doing the female consumer a disservice by limiting the advancement of alpha females. Perhaps we should take a note out of Hipple's book on creating collaborative cultures to encourage more female participation in the industry; the collaboration of manufacturers, retailers, and consumers may attract more





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What do you all think? I welcome your feedback here at Furniture World and on my blog at http://www.furniturefactorygirls.com.

About Paula Fogarty: A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Wofford College and art history honors M.A. graduate of Savannah College of Art and Design, Paula S. Fogarty's professional career has focused on upper-level management in marketing, design, finance, and operations. As President of Kindel Furniture Company, Paula innovated product lines and streamlined operations for greater profitability.

As owner of her own marketing and strategic consulting firm, Paula Scott Unlimited, Paula assists both established brands and start-ups in creating consistent communications across all channels. She is currently developing furniture collections that address the needs of the female consumer.

Currently a freelance writer, Paula's blog for Metropolis Magazine follows her book research on the role of women in the American furniture industry. She has written for Chair Culture, Connect Savannah, and served as Managing Editor for South magazine Paula has served as Board Chair of the Irish Georgian Society, The Center for Environmental Study, and The David Wolcott Kendall Memorial Foundation. She is a current board member of the Bernice Bienenstock Furniture Library, American Society of Designers, Rape Crisis Center of Savannah, Coastal Jazz Association, and Emergent Structures. She lives in Savannah with her Jack Russell Terrier, Charles.

Questions or comments about this article or any aspect of her research can be directed to Paula Fogarty at paula@paulascott.net.

"The industry can benefit from more female designers who understand how objects function; merchandising has totally changed from being suite-driven to being object driven."

TIPS FOR SERVING FEMALE CUSTOMERS

So, what can the furniture retail community do to better serve the female customer? Here is my checklist:

Engage her in an inspired dialogue about her home through social media, blogs, and your website, all of which should offer visual cues and suggestions about planning spaces.

Profile her individual needs and do NOT lump her into a box with all of your customers. She should be treated like an individual with her own personality and lifestyle she is expressing through her home. Therefore, don't send a generic e-blast to her, but customize your messages according to her tastes. For example don't send her a promotion for traditional designs if she is a modern girl.

3 Thank her for her purchases—a lot! Send personalized thank you notes and even a gift of flowers or a plant for larger purchases.

Ask her what she wants! Don't be afraid to ask for feedback in the form of written surveys. Ask about style, quality, service, delivery, color, pattern, and more.

5 Consult with her on what kind of products she wants to see in your stores; she should be your primary source of innovation!

Conduct focus groups of 10-12 female customers on a regular basis to get feedback on your assortments before you go to market to shop for her. Buy them lunch, show them pictures, take a tour of the store and treat the ladies like the partners in your enterprise that they are. As Peter Drucker opined, "The purpose of a business is to create a customer."

7 Collaborate on designs with your suppliers before they bring out new products. Manufacturers are woefully lacking in conducting market research with the consumer in developing products and this severely limits their offerings.

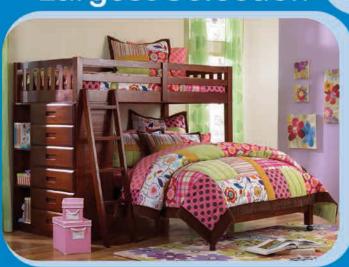


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REPLACE... REPAIR

How I achieved 100% first time perfect deliveries, and so can you!

by Peter Schlosser

hink about the retail furniture business today. When I was new to the business, China was just starting to gain a foothold. It wasn't until the end of the century that domestic casegoods all but evaporated from North Carolina, where I lived, and everywhere else in the United States. High-end furniture, while still coveted, became further and further out of reach for most Americans, while the quality and aesthetics of import furniture continued to improve. Major players began to consolidate market influence, styles began to homogenize ("sea of brown"), and furniture became more of a disposable commodity rather than heirlooms. I miss how it used to be. But that can't be an excuse to ignore the fact that customers are customers, money is money, and we all want more of both.

I remember arguing with reps about charaebacks back then. Dents finished over, shade variations, little things that we had to repair in order to deliver perfect-quality furniture (can you even imagine delivering a Henkel-Harris dresser with a scratch on it?). Today, chargebacks are factored into our invoices and we've essentially become what I like to call the "final mile of manufacturing". It has become increasingly important to look the furniture over closely and correct any imperfections you find

before delivery. One constant remains even after domestic production shifted overseas: Hers. That's right, your customer may have accepted the fact that it's virtually impossible to find affordably-priced eighteenth-century reproductions, but she'll nitpick chocolate brown furniture like she always has.

I've been a consultant since 2004. These days I work a steady job. But I've been to many stores where the belief is that this is mass-produced furniture, and it's not worth fixing or sweating the details. This statement makes absolutely no sense to me, and yet I've heard owners say it themselves. Now, before anyone concludes that this is an exercise in self-preservation, think again. I'm writing this article because I have helped to

achieve 100% first-time delivery for the company I work for, and so can you. But, you're going to have to change.

WHY 97% PERFECT JUST ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH

I recently visited a distribution center that shipped 2400 pieces a day, with a 97% first-time delivery rate. While their attention to detail was highly commendable, 3% of everything came back. Put that into perspective: Three percent of 2400 is 72. Shipping six days a week, that's 432 pieces per week. Consider the costs of a failed delivery. What options do you have? Replace, repair, refund. Each one costlier than the next. Replace, and you have the effort to open, inspect, wrap, load, deliver... plus return, repair, send to clearance or rewrap. Repair, and you have some pretty expensive people in a van hoping to appease the customer and make it right. Refund, and you lose



"Repair, and you have some pretty expensive people in a van hoping to appease your customer and make it right."

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REPLACE, REPAIR, REFUND 2015

money in a big way (see "Replace" but subtract all the money she spent).

Where I work now, we don't handle nearly that volume. But our market is much smaller, and quality is relative. You can consistently put out a poorquality product or an excellent-quality product, it's your choice. If you are interested in 100% first-time delivery, read on, but note: Unless you and your managers are willing to demand nothing less than perfect, don't bother trying.

Factory standards mean nothing to your customer. Maybe finished-over dents and scratches are acceptable to you, because your selling agreement means that you're the final mile of the manufacturing process, but that does not mean that you can force this standard on your customers.

2 Stop saying something "isn't worth fixing." Employees cannot and will not discern a difference in

your words and will apply that mantra to any and all products in your warehouse.

3 Seriously consider closing your clearance center. If there is a way out for your employees, they'll take it. People are people.

Only order parts as a last resort. It's easy to get caught up in the practice of ordering a part for every little problem. But that does several things—it clogs up your inventory, it reduces the need for a repairman when an assembler will do, and it dumbs down your repairman's skills by not challenging him.

5 "Pull another one" only as a last resort. What tends to happen is that the damaged one will end up in a holding area and stay there. Or they'll order a part.

6.911. It should be addressed as such. I call the customer immediately,

schedule the call or order the part, and make resolving the problem my concern for her, not what's good for me.

MAINTAIN URGENCY

The rubber meets the road the minute the delivery truck shows up from the factory. Some manufacturers have available some very helpful videos showing how to, among other things, properly unload a truck. At this warehouse, we insist on using one such model for the way we unload trucks. Result? Very, very few crushed edges. Never a broken mirror. Hardly ever a bent mechanism or rubbed-through corner. It just doesn't happen.

Locating is done by picker or by hand, and we watch each other closely. If someone is being a little rough, or can't handle the weight due to a lack of strength, we quickly reassign the person elsewhere. We use the same philosophy during pulling as well, never letting a box hit the floor. Managers here are constantly circling, watching the floors, making sure the product is handled appropriately and carefully. Once the product is opened and staged, the quality team that I manage begins the inspection process, usually three or four hours each day. The lighting is very good, the product is spaced well so we're not tripping over each other, and we use rolling repair carts, one for casegoods and one for upholstery and leather.

Deluxing is the process of making sure the piece is clean, presentable and operational for the customer upon delivery. But there are different schools of thought regarding how much should be done to a piece. I judge a piece like this: If I don't like it, she won't like it either. It's just that simple. Most repair technicians, refinishers and restorers know full well





what is acceptable and what is not.

One of my sayings is that, "Those who have mastered the art of work avoidance have a boss whose clearance center is full."

TIPS FOR DELUXERS

Consider sharing these highly-successful tips with your deluxers if you'd like 100% first-time delivery.

"Refund, and you lose money in a big way (see 'Replace' but subtract all the money she spent)."

Good enough is not good enough. A repair can look "muddy" if too much pigment is used to mask the damage. Using smaller amounts of glaze, or dye-based toners, and thin amounts of wax-pigment blending sticks, reduces this effect. If you block out the grain, put it back.

Reep the repair area small. When repairs spiral out of control, the chance of a re-pull is high. If you have to relacquer an entire top using aerosols, be sure to use a flow-out like blush eliminator to reduce tiger striping and orange peel. Lacquers that are already thinned with

these solvents have low build, so if any scuffing needs to be done before lacquering, it takes several coats to finish the job. Conversely, one coat of a high-solids lacquer followed by a coat of blush eliminator nicely levels the finish. Of course, nothing is as good as a coat of lacquer from a cup aun.

3. thing. I like things to look crisp and clean. The edges of tops rarely look uniform. The back edges of drawer faces almost never look uniform. Using a marker, make sure to edge not just the top edge of the





drawer, but also the two sides. Check for finish shadows as well; these are areas typically found beneath mouldings and trim that are missed by the shaders in the factories.

4 Wax wash works well. Paper finish furniture (what we call "print" finish) is notorious for two things: Glue smears, and white edges. Glue smears are so bad, that they can look like scratches, which are the kiss of death on print finish furniture since the manufacturers themselves will tell you that their finishes cannot be topcoated permanently. Wax wash removes these smears, and you should remove any excess glue along edges like the back panel, or where panels connect. Further, if the finish is, for example, weathered grey, the edges should be grey, or one of the darker colors in the finish like dark brown, NOT RAW.

Bounce a quarter off a back panel. Sagging or puckered fabric panels look bad. For cloth fabrics, a simple steamer will tighten them up quickly—so quickly, in fact, you'll laugh. For polyurethane fabrics, a steamer can relax creases and dents too. Don't use a steamer on leather, though, pull those panels tight if you have to by removing staples and adjusting the tension.

6 • easy fix these days. Companies like Leather Solutions offer velour

"Replace and you have

the effort to open, inspect, wrap, load, deliver... plus return, repair, send to clearance or rewrap."

fibers that you can "puff" onto a rubthrough and hide almost immediately. It literally takes just a few seconds to repair something we used to spend a half-hour fixing. They even exactmatch the fibers to the furniture most of us are selling these days. They sell leather and polyurethane pigmented touch-up that way, too.

Don't send trash to customers'. homes. One of my pet peeves is Styrofoam, or plastic sheet, or those irritating desiccant bags being left in the drawers. Remove all trash. If you have a drawer that won't close all the way, pull it out and look behind it—chances are there is a desiccant bag back there!

Signification Fix it or not? Distressing marks are a deluxer's best friend, provided they look like other distressing on the piece, and are shaped like other distressing marks. If a dent looks eccentric, it doesn't count. Burn it in. Which leads me to another point...

For heaven's sake, learn how to burn in. Top-notch repairs are made with burn-ins. I've seen guys use everything else under the sun to avoid making a burn-in. To wit: stick epoxy, plastic filler, clear liquid epoxy, lacquer drips, wax stick, wax blending stick, melting wax sticks... Properly using a burn-in means that if you do it right, you won't have to sand.

1 O. No one likes a saggy back. Oftentimes the top corners of back cushions are underfilled. Make sure to unzip the bottom and manipulate the fiberfill up into the corners so they look plump. Don't use a regulator—they can and will leave small

holes in the fabric that in some cases are irreparable.

1 Test every piece of motion. Make sure the mechanisms recline fully. Plug up and operate the massage, motors, lights, USB. Sit in the piece and listen for creaks or groans.

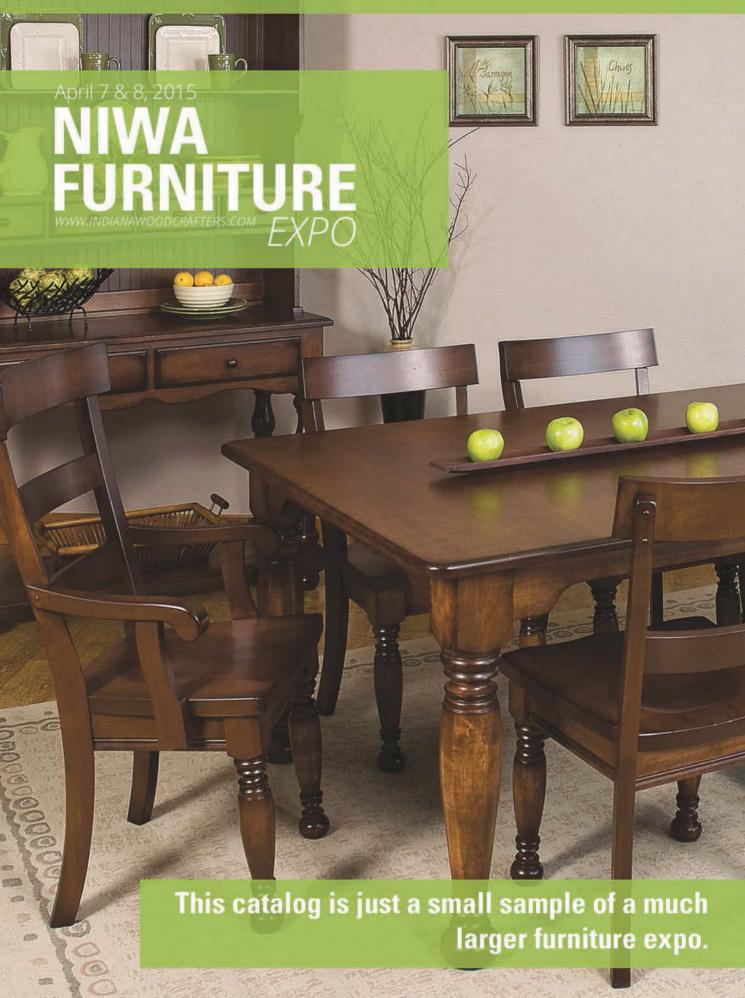
12. Please use a straightedge. If you have a crushed corner, don't trust your eyes to tell you that your repair is good. Excess sanding can destroy moulding profiles and create dipped-down corners. Speaking of corners—make sure to repair the underside of the edge too, not just what you can see. Drivers can't hide everything!

CURSE OF COMPLACENCY

The basic premise is that one needs to apply urgency and a deep sense of commitment to one's profession to produce a truly great product or service, regardless of what that product or service is. Complacency is the killer of any business. My grandfather, Bill McCloskey, used to tell a story about a farmer who wanted to save money, so in his horse's feedbag, he would take some of the oats out and replace them with sawdust. The horse didn't seem to notice, so little by little, he added more and more sawdust. Eventually the poor beast died. You see the point.

About Peter Schlosser: Peter Schlosser is a Quality Manager living in middle Tennessee. He has a frequent contributor to Furniture World Magazine. Questions on any aspect of this article or furniture repair can be directed to Peter Schlossser at pschlosser@furninfo.com.

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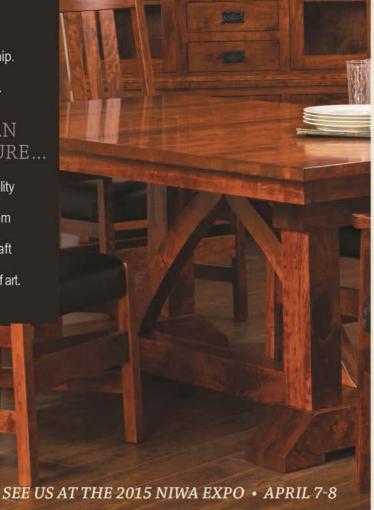


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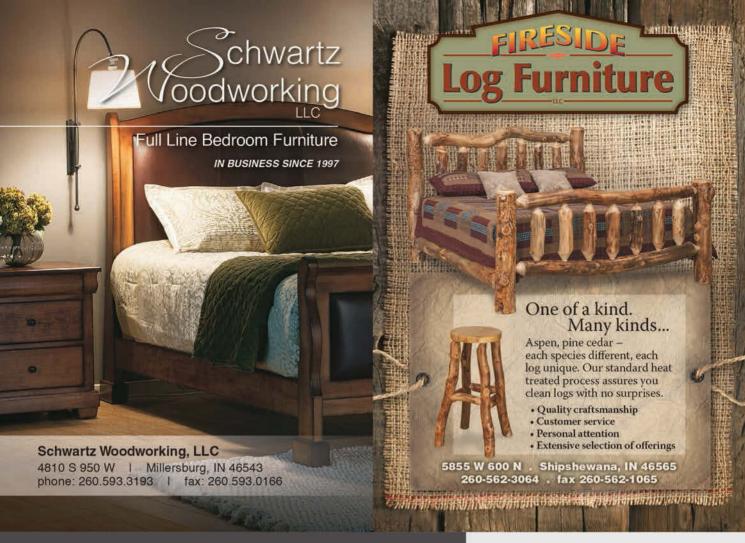
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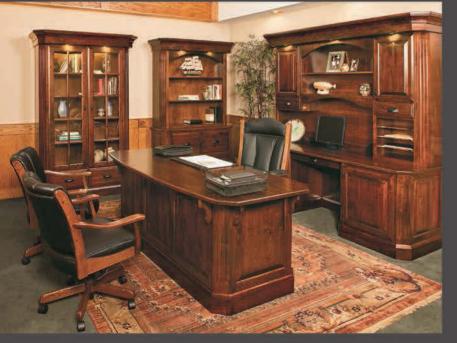


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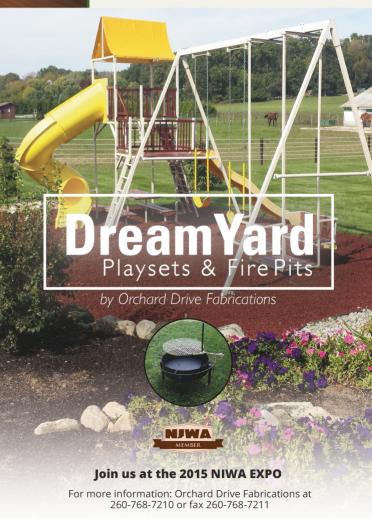


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Custom Woodfinishing - Finishing P: 574-642-1213 F: 574-642-4680

D&E Workshop - Living Room P: 260-593-0195 F: 260-593-2480

D&K Clothes Dryers - Home Accessories P: 574-499-0335 F: 574-499-4946

E&I Woodworking - Office Furniture P: 260-761-3308 F: 260-761-3059

E&S Wood Creations, LLC - Bedroom P: 260-768-3033 F: 260-768-3133

F&N Woodworking, LLC - Dining P: 260-463-8938 F: 260-463-4946

Fireside Log Furniture, LLC - Rustic Furniture P: 260-562-3064 F: 260-562-1065

Fork's Valley Woodworking - Case Goods P: 574-825-0495 F: 574-825-1011

Gingerich Leather-Leather Accessories P: 260-768-7074 F: 260-768-3107

Glens Lawn Furniture - Outdoor Furniture P: 260-593-0029 F: 260-593-0106

Green Meadow Houses & Feeders - Outdoor

Accessories P: 260-768-7863 ext.1 F: 260-768-7861

Heartland Mattress - Bedding P: 260-768-7875 F: 260-768-7099

Heartland Wholesale - Home Accessories P: 574-642-4360 F: 574-642-3557

Heritage Wood Designs, LLC - Case Goods P: 574-825-4700 F: 574-825-4740

Hilltop Hickory Furniture - Rustic Furniture P: 260-593-2421 F: 260-593-0705

Hochstetler Lawn Furniture - Outdoor Furniture P: 260-593-0105 ext.2 F: 260-593-0134

Honeybee Furniture, LLC - Home accessories P: 260-593-0567 F: 260-593-0568

Hoosier Crafts, LLC- Case Goods P: 574-642-3796 F: 574-642-3780

Hoosier Home Furniture - Bedroom P: 574-773-0148 F: 574-773-0464

Indian Trails Furniture - Bedroom P: 260-562-3815 ext.1 F: 260-562-2317

Integrity Woodcrafting - Dining/Case Goods P: 260-562-2067 F: 260-562-2047

Interior Hardwoods, LLC - Occasionals P: 260-768-7048 F: 260-768-7749

J&F Woodworking - Home Accessories P: 260-463-8382 ext.1 F: 260-768-8002

J&R Woodworking - Bedroom P: 260-463-4257 ext.1 F: 260-463-8197

K&M Finishing - Finishing P: 574-825-0752 F: 574-825-5514

L&L Woodworking, LLC - Bedroom Furniture P: 574-535-4613 F: 574-773-9005

L&M Woodworking - Case Goods/Dining P: 574-534-9177 F: 574-533-2463

L&N Woodworking - Office Furniture P: 260-768-7008 F: 260-768-7011

L&R Woodworking - Home Accessories P: 260-761-2195 ext.4 F: 260-761-3059

L.A.M.B. Woodworking, LLC - Case Goods/Office P: 260-768-7992 F: 260-768-4792

Lambright Aluminum - Outdoor Furniture P: 260-593-0520 F: 260-593-3859

Lambright Comfort Chairs - Living Room P: 260-768-4820 F: 260-768-3087

Lambright Country Chimes - Home Accessories P: 260-768-9138 F: 260-768-9183

Lawn Creations - Outdoor Furniture P: 574-536-1546 F: 574-642-0408

LRM Woodworking - Home Accessories P: 574-642-4534

M&M Enterprises - Home Accessories P: 260-593-0593 ext.0 F: 260-593-0192

M&V Finishing, LTD - Finishing P: 260-463-5253 F: 260-463-8312

M.D.M. Weaving - Home accessories P: 260-768-8199 ext.3238

Maple City Furniture - Finishing P: 574-642-9951 F: 574-642-0354

Maple Lane Woodshop, LLC - Home Accessories P: 260-593-2634 F: 260-593-0355

Meadowview Backyard Furniture -**Outdoor Furniture** P: 260-768-8173

Nature's Lawn & Patio Furniture -**Outdoor Furniture** P: 574-642-5167 F: 574-642-0507

Northern Woodcraft Products - Dining P: 260-768-7726 F: 260-768-7701

Northwood Finishing - Finishing P: 260-768-4454 F: 260-768-4685

NuTech Woodworking, LLC - Bedroom/Dining P: 260-463-5253 F: 260-463-8312

Old Town Oak, LLC - Bedroom/Cribs P: 260-593-0003 F: 260-593-0004

Orchard Drive Fabrications -**Outdoor Accessories** P: 260-768-7210 F: 260-768-7211

Orchard Lane - Living Room P: 574-825-7568 F: 574-825-0829

R.H. Yoder Woodworking, LLC - Dining P: 574-825-6183 F: 574-825-3868

River Woodworking, LLC - Office Furniture P: 260-593-3005 F: 260-593-3007

Schrock's Furniture - Bedroom Furniture P: 574-642-5079 F: 574-642-3010

Schwartz Creations, LLC - Entertainment P: 260-768-7478 F: 260-768-7361

Schwartz Woodworking, LLC -**Bedroom Furniture** P: 260-593-3193 ext.1 F: 260-593-0166

Shadylane Woodworking - Bedroom Furniture P: 574-825-3135 F: 574-825-3196

Silverline Inc. - Game Room Furniture P: 574-825-7756 F: 574-825-8060

Simple Treasures - Handbags P: 260-214-0867 F: 260-593-0265

Sonshine Baskets - Woven Baskets P: 574-642-9973 ext.1

Southedge Furniture - Bedroom Furniture P: 574-642-3894 F: 574-642-4227

Spectrum Finishing - Finishing P: 260-463-7300 F: 260-463-7320

Streamside Wood Shop, LLC -**Bedroom Furniture** P: 260-768-7887 F: 260-768-7374

Sunrise Cabinets - Bedroom Furniture P: 260-463-2023 F: 260-463-2033

Superior Woodcrafts - Home Accessories P: 574-825-4692 F: 574-825-4594

The Country Woodshop - Dining P: 574-642-3681 F: 574-642-2657

The Finish Touch - Finishing P: 260-768-8155

The Hoosier Heirlooms, LLC - Dining P: 260-562-2220 F: 260-562-3698

The Wood Shop - Rustic Furniture P: 574-642-1300 ext.4007

Topeka Innovative Concepts - Fireplaces P: 260-593-0264 F: 260-593-0265

Townline Furniture - Dining P; 260-463-0113 F; 260-499-4876

West Point Woodworking, LLC - Dining P: 260-768-4750 F: 260-768-3176

Wingards Custom Plastics, LLC -**Outdoor Furniture** P: 260-562-2852 F: 260-562-2855

Woodside Woodworks - Dining P: 260-499-3220 ext.3 F: 260-499-3221



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GET YOUR FAIR SHAR LIN 2015

Eleven reasons why furniture stores don't get their fair share of mattress sales.

by Gordon Hecht

his article is designed for owners and managers of furniture stores that sell mattresses.

Mattress Specialty retailers - you already know this information, and are welcome to read on too.

A couple of decades ago, multi-line furniture stores ruled the retail mattress world. Those stores were the #1 choice by consumers to shop and buy a mattress set. It's a different landscape out there today. Mattress specialists, warehouse clubs, internet, and even people selling mattresses by advertising on telephone poles have reduced the share of bedding sales for full line stores. Furniture Retailers may never again be the dominant force, but can regain part of their share. The secret is-STOP being a furniture store that sells mattresses, and become a mattress destination.

There is an overwhelming majority of your shoppers that represent the

greatest opportunity for you to increase your business. You can call them The 96 Percenters, because they are comprised of the 96% of people that shop in your retail store and walk out without buying a mattress. Every retail furniture store has a different value for the 96'ers. Do the math for your store, and you may be surprised! Think about a typical retail furniture location that converts 25% of their shoppers into buyers. If Bedding sales are 15% of total sales, then multiply 25% times 15% (.25 x.15 on your calculator). The net result is 3.75% (.0375) of shoppers buy a mattress, leaving more than 96% not buying one. Now both YOU and YOUR SHOPPER should be losing sleep!

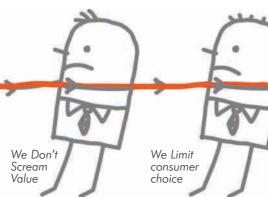
While your team will never reduce the 96% to zero, there are some ways that you can reduce the number. First, examine the reasons shoppers are not buying beds in your store.

FIVE REASONS SHOPPERS DON'T BY YOUR BEDS

Most RSAs Are Reluctant to • Introduce Bedding. Sure, you coach your team to introduce bedding on every bedroom sale. But, does your team talk about your Sleep Department products with Dining, Living Room, and Recliner Shoppers? Statistics show that over 85% of people sleep on a substandard mattress resulting in a decrease in their daily performance and lifestyle and an increase in weight and other health issues. That translates to 85 out of 100 people walking into your store could benefit from the health benefits of a new sleep surface.

Train your team on the benefits of good sleep and the impact that a new sleep system can have on their shoppers' lives. Remind them that most shoppers are not furniture buying

"First, examine the reasons shoppers are not buying beds in your store."





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"Don't allow or encourage RSA prejudices to affect your sales.

If you can't get the \$1499 mattress sale today, take the \$799, \$599, or even \$399 sale-before the guy down the street takes it."

experts and need guidance in learning about all that your store offers. And most of all don't put up with, "They didn't ask for one" as an acceptable response for not showing a mattress set to every shopper.

RSAs Limit Consumer Choice. **L** . It's a fact, despite comfort tests, product knowledge, sale promotions, and best options, many shoppers purchase the mattress that the RSA wants to sell them. Sometimes it's because of price-high and low, other times it's spiffs, and still other times, it's because it's the mattress that the RSA sleeps on. However, with 96% of your shoppers leaving without a mattress, you need to ensure that shoppers are shown ALL mattresses that suit their needs and comfort levels. Don't let your team sink into the practice of not selling a brand that you display, and don't let them become Whale-Hunters and only show multi-thousand dollar bedding. Every mattress model has a place on your floor, everything is for sale, and every sale counts.

"If your bedding sales are 15% of total sales... then 3.75% of shoppers buy a mattress, leaving more than 96% not buying one."

The Be-Back Mattress Bus Will Not Return! Most of what full line stores sell may be considered "Be-Back" merchandise; sofa and bedroom set shoppers often need to check color, size, and scale in their home before making a purchase. The mattress is a "Now-Today" purchase, meaning that if your shopper leaves your store without a mattress-they will buy one at your competitors TODAY. Don't allow or encourage RSA prejudices to affect your sales. If you can't get the \$1499 mattress sale today, take the \$799, \$599, or even \$399 sale before the guy down the street takes it. When it comes to the Be-Back Bus, remember that it stops at every store in town, and does not make a return trip!

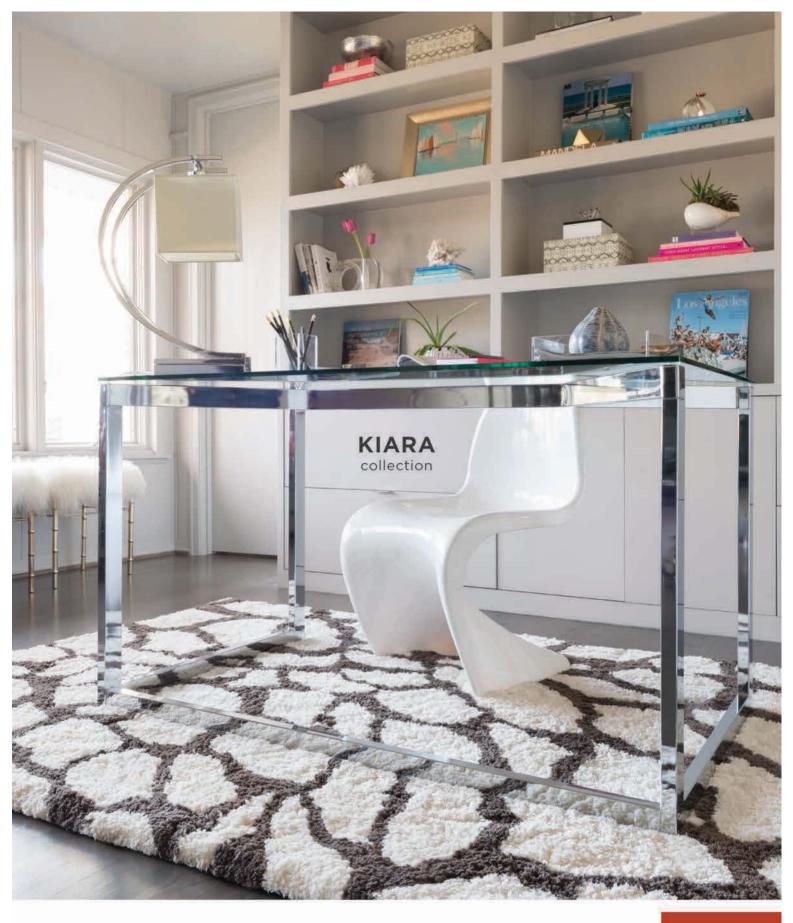
Customers Aren't Told That Each Mattress has TWO Prices. My contacts at GE Money, a major player in furniture consumer financing, tell me that the average approval amount for new shoppers is \$4400. Further, the average first time purchase totals \$1400. Your RSA's job is NOT to load up buyers with things they don't need and can't afford, however they are responsible for assessing shopper's total needs, presenting products, and encouraging them to select what they want to buy today.

Many shoppers think of a new mattress as a commodity item, and are comfortable with utilizing Free Financing to pay for it, just like a washer and dryer or refrigerator. Think of a \$1199 mattress and foundation

as a \$19.95 additional payment on a 60 month contract. Adding a basic \$599 set costs less than ten bucks a month. When quoting the installment cost for that new Living Room or Dining Set, remind your buyers that for a small amount more they can upgrade their sleep, health and wellbeing. Furniture retailing veteran Gil Colon says that every mattress set has two prices, the cash price and the monthly installment cost. Make sure that your sales team knows both.

5 . Bedding Department in almost any furniture store in the US. I simply walk in the front door and go to the back hidden corner. And when I get the Sunday newspaper and study furniture store circulars, I flip to the back page to see the mattress promotion. When you keep mattresses in the back of the store, and promotions on the back of the ad, the result is that it is Back of the Mind for your sales team, managers and shoppers.

Not Showing Value Up Front. The upside of consumers viewing bedding products as a commodity is that shoppers know a (perceived) Hot Deal when they see it. Just as Wal-Mart or Target can make a value statement by promoting front page hot buys on coffee and cola, furniture stores can scream value by promoting hot buy bedding on Page One! Once in your building, shoppers make up their minds about your store within about 20 feet of the front door.



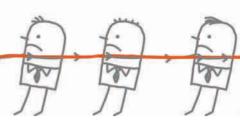
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GET YOUR FAIR SHARE



Imagine how they would perceive your overall pricing if the first thing they saw was a triple-choice comfort promotion at \$399 Queen. Although your shoppers may not have any interest in purchasing a mattress, when it comes to prices, they know that the store that starts out the lowest ends up the lowest.

"It's hard to get to 20% in Bedding Sales Volume when you spend 5% of your ad budget on standalone bedding advertising."

O. You'll get out of it what you put into it. Floor space, signage, and advertising is an investment. It's hard to get to 20% in Bedding Sales Volume when you spend 5% of your ad budget on standalone bedding advertising. Simple as it sounds, if you want 20% bedding share in sales, you need to give it a 20% share of the space in your advertising.

Pailure To Show The Right Beds. It's possible to get 20% in sales when bedding is shown in 10% of your floor space, if you have the right beds. Ask your bedding vendors which models and technologies are selling well in your market, and adjust your selling space to that every 90 days. Be sure your beds and test pillows are clean enough that your

mother would want to sleep on them. Cut pricing on clearance and shopworn merchandise to the bone, even 50% of cost, to move them out. Dead beds take up live selling space.

Not Visiting Your Neighbors, Shop your neighbors, because they are already shopping you. Know their offers, standards, practices, and their exceptions to the rules. Know how you are beating them, and how they beat you every single day.

Failure To Count. Lastly, measure results and set goals against your standards. Coach your team to show and sell-every day. Knock out your two lowest selling SKUs every ninety days-and perhaps your lowest selling RSAs every 120 days.

CONCLUSION

Your store does not have to be a victim of shrinking bedding sales. Think and act like a mattress destination and reclaim your share.

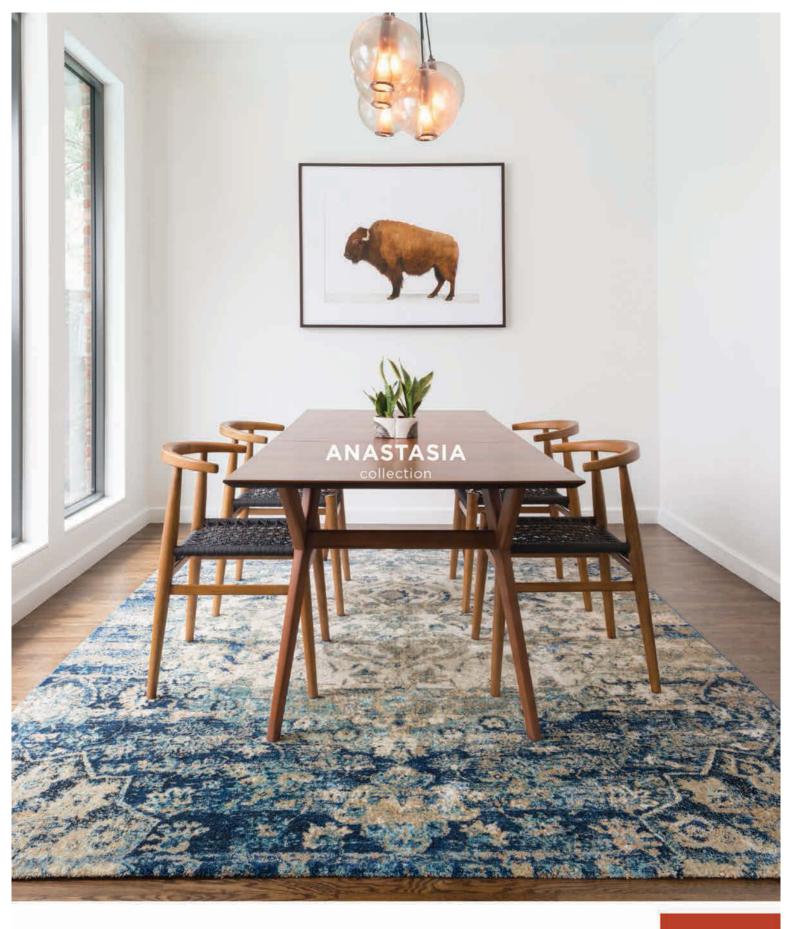
Gordon Hecht: Gordon Hecht is a Growth and Development Manager for National Bedding Company's America's Mattress stores, nearly 400 mostly locally owned and operated bedding stores across the country selling Serta-branded and America's Mattress-branded mattresses. He started his 30+ years experience in the Home Furnishings industry in Las Vegas, NV as a delivery helper and driver. From that ground level start he started his sales career and passion for our industry, while in college.

He has been recognized for outstanding sales and management achievement with several organizations including Ashley Furniture HomeStores, Drexel-Heritage, RB Furniture, Reliable Stores, and Sofa Express. He has served as Store Manager, Multi-unit manager and National Director of Sales. With his first-hand knowledge of our industry's front line, Gordon has devoted his career to guiding others to exceed their goals.

Joining National Bedding Company in 2014, as part of the Serta Retail Concepts Group, his goal is to grow America's Mattress stores into one of the fastest growing bedding retailers in the country.

Co-author of the "Better Bedding Selling Tips" featured on Furniture World Online, Gordon has been a frequent contributor to company newsletters, and contributing writer for industry magazines. Gordon is based in Columbus, OH and is married with one adult son. He can be reached at ghecht@serta.com.

"Think of an \$1199 mattress and foundation as a \$19.95 additional payment on a 60 month contract. Adding a basic \$599 set costs less than ten bucks a month."



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_DESIGNS



Tayse Rugs

From the Capri Collection, hibiscus and tropical foliage combine to fashion a bold, dramatic transitional area rug. This rug comes in various sizes and also in round. machine made of polypropylene. Suggested retail for a 5'x8' is \$219.

Contact information on page 120.



Horizon Home

New additions to Horizon Home's popular Graffiti Collection are a 48" Bar and Barstool and a 76" upright display cabinet. Unique landmark stencil design makes a bold statement. Made of Pine solids with a distressed lacquer finish. Features include full extension drawer glides and decorative metal corners. Collection includes bedroom, dining, entertainment, occasional and home office.

Contact information on page 120.



Kincaid

Banquette dining with richly styled seating. The build-your-own custom upholstery program has approximately 600 designs including about 50 Sunbrella® fabrics for interiors.

Contact information on page 120.



Kas Rugs

The Syriana collection Midnight Kashan is hand tufted in blended New Zealand wool. Available in six sizes including round and 9'x13' large options. Suggested retail for a 5' x 8' is \$399.

Contact information on page 120.



This round ottoman features a tufted top and nail head trim on the sides. The curved legs add charm.

Contact information on page 120.

Omnia

The St. James by American Elegance, a division of Omnia Leather, showcases Omnia's ability to integrate both fabric and leather for a gracious transitional look. With numerous fabrics and leathers to select from, the options are unlimited. Down and Feather is standard.

Contact information on page 120.

Greenington

Crafted in 100% solid bamboo, the new Azara bedroom collection features modern architectural lines and the natural beauty of exotic tiger bamboo.

Contact information on page 120.







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- DESIGNS



Jaipur

Every design in the Fables Collection tells a story. Crafted in machine-tufted polyester and ultra-soft chenille, this broad collection brings any space to life with its fashion-forward color palettes. The sharp-scaled shapes melded with graduated grays create a faultless geode flair.

Contact information on page 120.



Loloi

Bohemian Chic Collection features designs made from recycled sari silk and spaced dyed yarns. These ethnic patterns include both a warm orange and neutral color palette, as well as a bright blue-green palette.

Contact information on page 120.

B.Pila Design

The Ambrosia Chair features a waterfall curve seat of acrylic that flows from a back plank of thick Walnut. A vintage, over-dyed rug serves as a loose cushion anchored to the frame by a leather strap and lock-like metal fastener. Also available in counter height.

Contact information on page 120.



Flash Furniture

This Brick Microfiber Sofa features designer padded rolled arms and bustled pillow cushions. Its back cushions are filled with high resiliency polyester fiber providing maximum comfort. Seats have No Sag sinuous steel wire seat springs on five inch centers.

Contact information on page 120.





Four Hands

The Marlow Wing Chair is from the Kensington collection. Each piece is handmade of Oak, crafted with soft curves and detailed carving. The collection features several upholstery and leather options.

Contact information on page 120.

Phillips Collection

Tilt Console Table is hand crafted by an Indonesian artist. The unique wood console base invokes the look of stone while showing beautiful wood grain.

Contact information on page 120.



The Dauphine lamp with faceted crystal and brushed nickel base is topped by a crisp fabric shade.

Contact information on page 120.





Broyhill

The new Cascade™ bedroom features sculptural concave bedposts. The relaxed satin Arid Brown finish on acacia veneers provides the perfect balance of classic, yet unique style.

Contact information on page 120.



BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Capel

Berkeley is flat woven of 60% wool and 40% viscose to deliver a silk sari look. The rug features a repeating pattern and is made in India in six colorways. A 5' x 8' rug may retail for \$449.

Contact information on page 120.



The Hidden Treasures contemporary bar cabinet features brushed metal and opens up for specialty glasses, wine and spirits bottle storage. Contact information on page 120.





AC Pacific

The mid-twentieth century inspired silhouette of the Logan Chair includes straight geometric lines in a minimalist design with architecturally sculpted arms. This accent chair, tailored in bonded leather compliments decors both modern and traditional.

Contact information on page 120.



Arthur W. Brown

This real wood corner cabinet is available in Maple and Oak. Available in twelve standard finishes and custom paint colors.

Contact information on page 120.



The "Shayneville" home office collection features a rich rustic finish that compliments the gun metal color finished tubular metal X-brace frames.

Contact information page 120.

Thomasville

Inspired by Hemingway's legendary wanderlust, the Ernest Hemingway® Collection is designed for consumers who live a relaxed lifestyle and love adventure. Traditional elements blend with indigenous natural materials for a spirited take on refined, casual living.

Contact information on page 120.



BEST SELLING DESIGNS







Wallbeds

The natural simplistic style of the Nantucket with its bead board accents and crisp molding will add classic styling to any home.

Contact information on page 120.

Nourison

The Dynasty collection includes an array of rugs with all the color and flavor of a fine Asian art collection. All rugs are 80% New Zealand wool and 20% nylon, powerloom woven and hand finished.

Contact information on page 120.



Douglas Select is a collection of 8 swivel tilt caster dining chairs available in oak or walnut finishes. Features include memory foam seating and an assortment of optional upholstery fabrics.

Contact informationon page 120.



Whittier Wood

This heritage quality bedroom group is from the Stonewood Bedroom Collection made of real wood.

Contact information page 120.

Legacy

Harmony by Wendy Bellissimo features fluted glass knobs and custom designed ring pulls accented in a lightly distressed white paint. The light natural "Tea Stain" woven fabric on the upholstered (headboard/footboard) ads a touch of sophistication.

Contact information on page 120.



Control Brand

The Patras lounge chair has a unique external frame design made from grey tubular aluminum. Cushions are upholstered in durable Sunbrella fabric. Suitable for both indoor and outdoor use.

Contact information on page 120.





The Cassley Sun Lounger is shown in Burnish Brown/Black multi-shade finish. Fabrics are all either Sunbrella or Outdura solution dyed acrylics. This collection includes deep-seating, occasional and dining.

Contact information on page 120.

Donco

The new, Industrial collection, for boys is made from solid/veneered hardwoods, with accented nuts and bolts.



93% of mobile shoppers make a purchase - most of 75% which happen in a brick & mortar store of consumers check out the retailer online after a traditional Outbound Marketing Campaign Today, technology is impacting consumer shopping habits. 76% of all furniture shoppers rely on the retailer's website 75% of consumers who find your store in local search are more likely to visit your store 71% of consumers expect to see your store inventory and pricing online

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A structured, two-week training program for new bedding (and furniture) RSAs.

by David Benbow

oes your store have a structured, pre-planned training program for new bedding and furniture sales hires? How much should a new-hire know before he or she goes on the sales floor? How do you know if a new-hire is ready to start taking those hard-earned "ups?" Do you have a lot of walk-in traffic that you can squander, so the new-hire can "practice" learning how to sell?

better bedding

While there is no consensus on the answers to these questions, a two-week training period seems to be widely used by a lot of stores. Why two weeks? I don't think there is a scientific reason. Two weeks is really not enough time to fully prepare the fledgling Retail Sales Associate (R.S.A.) to stumble out in front of their first "up." Most stores just don't want to risk more than two weeks training and money before finding out if they hired the right person or not.

Can two weeks of training alone produce a productive R.S.A? Probably not; I have said many times, that it takes months, maybe even years, to produce a truly great Retail Sales Associate. But,

you've got to start somewhere.

So, in this article, rightly or wrongly, we'll start with the idea that we have two weeks to get the new-hire ready for the sales floor. What do we do with that first two weeks?

Before we proceed with what I will call the "Boot Camp" approach, I recommend that the reader go back and read two previous articles that I wrote for Furniture World. The first is entitled "Shorthanded Again?" It can be found on p. 58 of the September/October 2013 issue, Volume 143 No.5. The second is from the most recent issue, November/December 2014, entitled "What to do about the RSA – 2015". Both of these articles can be read online at www.furninfo.com/authors/list (click the View all articles by David Benbow link).

In the "Shorthanded Again?" article, I proposed the idea of a "structured environment" for training the new-hire. This structured environment consists of a pre-defined training plan that covers all the basics. It is intensely organized to keep the trainee so busy that the designated trainer only needs to devote

part-time to training. In this article, we will introduce a prototype for a structured, two week boot camp. If successful, this boot camp should go a long way to preparing your new-hires to take their first up.

Note that although bedding examples are used throughout this article, the basic format will work well for any home furnishings category.

WHAT DOES THE TRAINEE NEED TO LEARN?

To repeat passages from the "Shorthanded Again?" article, the trainee must gain a basic grasp of two fundamental sets of information. These are:

- The Five Groups of Knowledge
- The Sales Process (The Steps of the Sale).

THE FIVE GROUPS OF KNOWLEDGE

When we say the "Five Groups of Knowledge," we refer to a concept for organizing store information. This con-

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cept was developed by the late John F. Lawhon in his book, *Selling Retail*. Mr. Lawhon defined these knowledge aroups as:

- Knowledge of your products and the competition's products
- Knowledge of your policies and the competition's policies
- Knowledge of your advertising and the competition's advertising

- Knowledge of your financing and the competition's financing
- Knowledge of your inventory and

"You don't want to employ lazy RSAs. Keep them busy. The hard work will eliminate the dead wood."

the competition's inventory.

Notice that I included knowing what the competition is doing in all of these important points.

THE SALES PROCESS (STEPS OF THE SALE)

When we say the "Sales Process," we mean a pattern or road map by which the R.S.A. makes his way from the greeting to the close. For example, if you drive from Miami to Seattle, do you just get in the car and "go with the flow?" If you do, you probably will never get there. Selling works the same way. A great salesperson knows where he is starting from, where he is going, where he is along the way and how he is going to get there in a reasonable amount of time. You won't have a GPS for this trip, but most successful sales follow a similar pattern and this pattern can help the RSA stay on track. Is this road map memorized and strictly followed? Not necessarily. No two sales ever proceed exactly the same way. Just as with our "drive" across country, there may be detours, road blocks and route changes. But without that road map, you probably will become irretrievably lost and never find your way back.

WHY DOES YOUR STORE NEED A TRAINING PLAN?

Most stores do not have a full time trainer. The job of trainer often falls to either: the store owner, sales manager, or an experienced R.S.A. In my experience, no one of these people has the time to devote full-time to training. Training has to be squeezed in between all the other every day chores. Without a pre-defined plan, the designated



"Trainees should memorize

the name, manufacturer and comfort level of as many mattresses as they can. Divide the list into hard feels and soft feels to make memorization easier."

BOOT CAMP

trainer usually doesn't know where to start or what to do next with the new trainee who is eager to learn. How many times have you seen the trainer hand the new-hire a thick manual and tell him/her to "go read this and if you have any questions, I'll answer them tomorrow." There is a better way.

Every store needs a training plan that is carefully designed and in place before a trainee is ever interviewed. This plan must stuff as much information into the trainee as possible during the training period. It must keep the trainee busy all day and every day without having to interrupt the designated trainer. And, this plan must test the new-hire regularly (daily or more often) to ensure that progress is being made.

"If you drive from Miami to Seattle, do you just get in the car and "go with the flow?" If you do, you probably will never get there. Selling works the same way."

WHAT DOES THE BOOT CAMP PLAN LOOK LIKE?

We call this two week training program a Boot Camp because it needs to be a very intense learning session. No one can learn everything they need to know about retail sales in two weeks, but the RSA needs all the information

he can absorb before he takes that first up. The reason for such intensity is to make it hard. You don't want to employ lazy RSAs. Keep them busy. Don't let up. The hard work will eliminate the dead wood early, before you waste time and money. Successful completion of the program will give the ambitious trainee a sense of accomplishment.

SYLLABUS

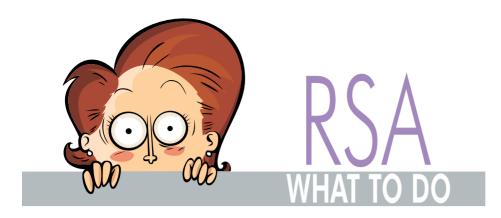
In college, the instructor distributes a syllabus (class plan) to each student

before the class starts. The sales trainer should also do this. Let the trainee see the plan for the next two weeks, day by day, hour by hour. They should know what is expected of them.

TRAINING MATERIAL

The trainee must have training material to study. Each day should have its own set of training material that must be covered, tested and completed that day. The designated trainer must have all this material "at the ready" before





the class starts.

THE TEN DAY CLASS SCHEDULE

Feel free to arrange this schedule however you like; remembering not to omit any of this material in your plan.

DAY ONE. After the government mandated forms are completed, conduct a short orientation class so the trainees know: store hours, days open, break times, where the break room, etc. is located, where to park, etc. Orientation should also discuss dress code, personal conduct, cell phone usage, etc. As soon as the orientation is completed, I start with Product Knowledge, which is, in my opinion, the most important of the five groups.

The first hand-out should be a list of all mattresses displayed on the showroom floor. This list should contain the following detail about each mattress:

- Complete name of the mattress
- Manufacturer
- Comfort level (hard or soft) I know there are degrees of hardness and softness, but it is helpful to assign a definite "feel" to each mattress.
- Queen price-point (the REAL price, not the sale, or regular price)
- Specifications these include:
 - a. coil count and type, if applicable)
 - b. specialty type, if applicable
 - c. foundation type
 - d. Warranty.

For the first two hours, the trainees

should memorize the name, manufacturer and comfort level of as many mattresses as they can. Divide the list into hard feels and soft feels to make memorization easier. The trainees should also try out the mattresses as they memorize. Every RSA should become VERY familiar with every product. After the two hours, test each candidate. After a short break, continue the memorization for another two hours. Test again. For those candidates who excel at memorization, when they complete the task, let them move on to memorizing price point and specifications. After a break, the trainer should discuss the various brands the store carries. After discussing the in-store brands, talk about the brands carried by the competition and how they compare to your store.

The next handout should be a detailed list of all other bedding products the store carries. This includes sheets, pillows, mattress protectors, etc. This list should include prices, manufacturer name and specifications. Let the trainees spend the next two hours examining the products and memorizing name, manufacturer and price. Test them again.

These exercises should have pretty much exhausted the first day.

DAY TWO. We won't go into as much detail about the remaining days, except in outline. You should already get the idea that they should have plenty of material and work assignments to keep them busy and out of trouble. The tests should show if they are learning or not. I recommend a very low tolerance of failure. Candidates who are not picking up the material probably should be

warned and then if no improvement is forthcoming, terminated.

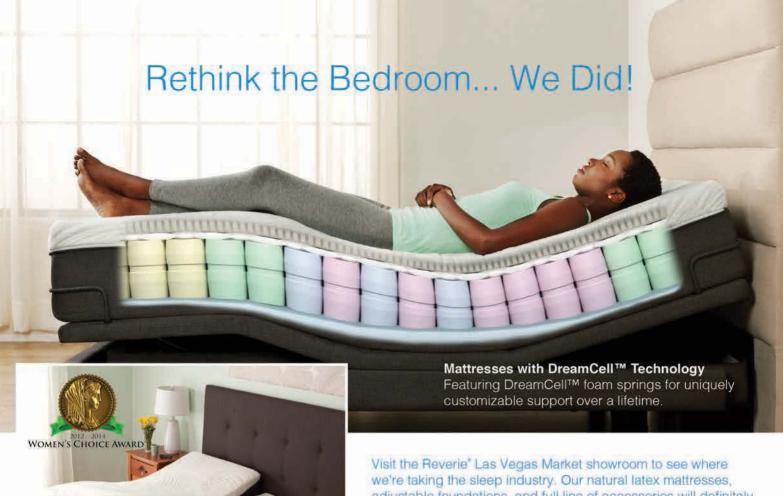
It is important to remember to RE-TEST the same material over several days. Some candidates may memorize quickly for tests and then forget everything the next day. The point is to learn, not to pass tests.

At the beginning of day two, re-test the entire first day's material before proceeding. Those with weak scores must go back and do more memorizing and trying of beds. Everybody else can go on to studying the inventory control system. This should include a tour of the warehouse and introduction to warehouse personnel. Test after two hours.

With every group of knowledge, the trainer should discuss the competition and how they handle each of the groups. This means discussing what you know about each of your competitors' inventory control systems.

The second half of the day can be devoted to learning about the company's advertising and the competition's

"The second half of the day can be devoted to learning about the company's advertising and the competition's advertising. Again, give a test after two hours of study."



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advertising. Again, give a test after two hours of study.

DAY THREE. This is a good day to get into the company's and competition's finance programs. Break the training up into manageable 2 or 3 hour segments. If you have a finance manager, ask him or her to explain the various programs. Test after every training segment. If this is completed before the end of the day, give a re-test on the entire product knowledge package.

DAY FOUR. Review the company's advertising and the competition's advertising. Re-test. Discuss the competition in detail, especially their products, advertising and finance programs.

The second half of the day, start a discussion of the company's policies. Policies cover a lot of territory. They include:

- Ticket writing
- Document storage
- Security of customer's sensitive information. Your store receives and archives a great deal of credit information on many of its customers. It is critically important to stress the necessity of protecting this information. Do not be guilty of carelessly abetting the crime of identity theft.

- Delivery and customer pickup
- Comfort exchanges (if applicable)
- Handling warranty situations
- The "up" rotation system and turnovers (if applicable)
- Merchandising policy
- Pricing policy
- Sales policies, such as special orders, layaways, refunds, etc.

DAY FIVE. Continue with learning policies and re-test on product, financing and advertising.

In the second half of the day, introduce the Sales Process (The Steps of the Sale.) By this time the sales trainee should have been thoroughly drenched in the Five Groups of Knowledge. Now is a good time to start learning how to use this knowledge. Go over the steps of the sale in general. Test the candidates on Steps of the Sale, financing and product knowledge.

The reason that we save the Steps of the Sale for the last half is because the Five Groups of Knowledge are tools that are used in the sales process. You need to know your products, etc. in order to sell correctly.

STEPS OF THE SALE

The steps of the sale, in the sequence they are executed, follow the general

"See how many
questions have to be
asked and how many
beds shown before the
RSA gets it right. It is
like role-playing but in
a more realistic setting."

pattern of:

- (1) Meet and greet
- (2) Qualify
- (3) SELECT the right product
- (4) DEMONSTRATE and PRESENT
- (5) Close and write up the ticket
- (6) A productive Good-Bye.

DAY SIX. The trainees should know enough about the five groups to get started covering the first two steps of the sale, the Greeting and Qualifying. The trainer may need to spend more time lecturing and teaching in this segment. Unless your students are experienced salespeople, just reading about Greeting and Qualifying may not click much with them. The trainer needs to "sell" the idea of proper greeting and qualifying so that these steps will make sense to the trainee.

After discussing the Meet and Greet, and a discussion of Qualifying and its purpose, have the trainees spend two hours memorizing a printed list of qualifying questions. If you need a primer on qualifying questions, my book How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual lists and discusses fifty-six different qualifying questions in the sixteen page chapter "Qualifying Questions" beginning on page 235.

"Have the trainees

demonstrate the features and benefits of each bed. This can also be turned into a game, or fun exercise. The trainer should keep an eye on all these exercises."









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RSA WHAT TO DO

After memorization, ask the candidates to list as many questions as they can in a ten minute quiz. Discuss qualifying and re-start the memorization again.

DAY SEVEN. Start the day with a test of the Five Groups of Knowledge. This should be long and thorough enough to take at least twenty minutes to complete. By day seven, the trainees should know their beds (products) well enough to begin studying the Selection Step and do the Selection exercises we will describe.

The Selection step is, in many ways, the most important of all the steps of the sale. This is where the RSA helps the customer pick out the CORRECT product. To Select correctly means the RSA must know ALL the products on the floor, in great detail. This is the only way the customer will have a chance to find the RIGHT bed (product) for them.

The trainer, after discussing Selection and its fine points, can turn the trainees loose on an exercise to sharpen their qualifying and product knowledge skills, give them practice in the selection step and have some fun in the process. Here is how the exercise, or game, works. Two trainees play. One plays the customer and one plays the

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greeting R.S.A. The designated "customer" picks out a certain bed on the floor but doesn't say which one it is. steps out the front door and re-enters as the customer. The designated RSA areets the customer and asks qualifying questions, the object of which is to discover which bed the "customer" picked out. See how many questions have to be asked and how many beds shown before the RSA gets it right. It is sort of like role-playing (which I don't like) but in a more realistic setting. Trainees can occupy themselves with this game for several hours. The non-participants can watch and then have a round-table discussion after each exercise.

DAY EIGHT. On the first half of day eight, discuss both Presentation and Demonstration. Have your trainees demonstrate the features and benefits of each bed. This can also be turned into a game, or fun exercise. The trainer should keep an eye on all these exercises. Make sure they are productive and don't degenerate into a free-for-all or gab session.

In the second half, repeat the Selection exercises and retest on Products, Advertising, Policies and the Competition. Have separate tests ready for each.

DAY NINE. Time to learn something about Closing the Sale. If your store has copies of my book, have the trainees read the chapters on closing. This will dispel some myths and hopefully enlighten the trainees about what closing really is. All trainees need to understand how to close, but that does not mean trainees are going to be good closers at the end of the Boot Camp. When they start taking real "ups," it might be best to have them turn over reluctant customers to more experienced RSAs or sales managers.

After 3 hours, administer a test on closing techniques.

The second half of the day, re-do the Selection exercise for two to three hours. Re-test on Selection. Then retest on Qualifying questions.

DAY TEN. The trainer should be available for most of the morning to discuss concepts and answer questions. The promising applicants should have a lot of questions, because they will be going on the floor the following day, if they pass the final test.

In the last half of the last day, let the trainees study, practice, discuss and prepare for the demanding final test. This test should take at least one hour for even the smartest candidate, so allow two to three hours for everyone to complete. This test should cover every detail that has been covered in the preceding ten days.

SUMMARY

I hope that whoever reads this will notice that, in this plan, the burden of training has been placed squarely on the shoulders of the trainee, and less so on the trainer. Notice also that at least twenty to thirty tests have been given prior to the final test. This "structured" setting should keep the trainee busy with real work and be less bothersome to the trainer, who probably has a million other things to do besides being trainer.

The benefits are:

- the results are measureable the tests will tell you who is succeeding and who is failing.
- Poor candidates are eliminated early – once again, the tests tell who is progressing and who is not.
- Reduces the burden on the trainer.

• The successful candidate will be far more capable on the floor than they would otherwise.

For this program to succeed, it must be developed and ready before any trainee candidate is hired. Take the time to have a plan ready to go. As long as your store is open and in business, the job of training new-hires will never end. Don't re-invent the wheel with every new training class.

One more thing; training just begins with that first two weeks. Advanced training is next.

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 retail guidance; from small store management to training retail sales associates. His years of hands-on experience as a retail sales associate, store manager, sales manager/trainer and store owner in six different metropolitan areas qualifies him as an expert in selling bedding. David is the author of the recently published book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual", a complete, text book for mattress and bedding retail sales associates, beginner and experienced "The trainer should keep an eye on all these exercises. Make sure they are productive and don't degenerate into a freefor-all or gab session."

professional alike. The book can be purchased on-line at http://www.bedsellersmanual.com or www.mattressretailtraining.com.

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

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





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ALINE IN THE SAND

Dramatically increase sales by focusing on your best customers.

by Jeff Giagnocavo and Ben McClure

ecently in my retail business, Gardner's Mattress & More, we drew a line in the sand. After much thought, admittedly too much, we vacated selling certain price points in our main store location (Plaza Blvd.)

Our showroom floor previous to this line in the sand being drawn included more than 18 mattress models all under a \$999 price point. The issue for us was that these models represented less than 8% of our business, yet covered 20% of our showroom floor.

My business partner and I resisted this change, in spite of the numbers, because of the following "what if's".

- What if a customer came in looking for these products. Would we turn them away without a solution to offer?
- How would we feel about this?
- How would they feel about this?

What permitted us to pull the trigger and draw the line in the sand was the opening of our second location (Outlet) in an outlet center shopping area of town. This store, while offering goods at all price points is now used for clearance, discounted, discontinued, previous year's floor models and scuffed items.

With the opening of this second location we now have two very clear and defined, or manipulated, messages to communicate.

For our Plaza Blvd. location the message is helping customers to wake up happy and pain free by investing in a premium sleep system and better sleep solution.

At our Outlet location the same can be accomplished but, there is a specific reason for the discount, and likely customers give up something in exchange for the discount.

We have never been the price oriented mattress store. It's actually one of the many reasons for our success and why we attract a higher-class clientele. But still we struggled with actually drawing this line in the sand.

By having two different locations with two different messages we actually have two very defined messages, or two "line in the sand" stories to tell.

So why look to draw a line? First it makes life much easier to construct marketing messages when you don't have to placate any one audience or group of people. Advertising for Plaza Blvd is laser focused now, even more so than before. And, for the Outlet location we can be specific there too, but in a different way.

Truthfully it is very "freeing" to have finally put this plan into action. We have had many a customer come to us simply because they see the word mattress in our advertising or outdoor signage. They think, and by no fault of their own, that all mattress stores are



"Who in your existing client list are the 20% that give you 80% of your revenue? These are your real moneymakers and those that should dictate who and where your line in the sand is drawn."



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A LINE IN THE SAND

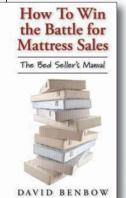
"All told, Gardner's Mattress & More uses measures on over 3,000 different psychographic touch points."

the same when in fact they aren't, at least in our case.

These conversations when people find us by accident looking for inexpensive price driven solutions are how do I best say this? Awkward.

But now with an Outlet store that is focused on values and discounts

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http://www.bedsellersmanual.com

along with a legitimate reason for the discount and not because of price games and deceptive practices, we can now direct them to our Outlet location for the savings and price points that they are looking for.

HOW TO DRAW YOUR OWN LINE IN THE SAND

So how do you draw your own line in the sand? How do you manipulate the marketing message to best benefit you and the customers you seek to serve?

First you need to be clear on what you want to do, what you want to offer and how these goals line up with your personal and business goals. As I highlighted above, we knew the products we wanted to offer, at which price point and at which location. We also developed a well defined marketing plan for each location.

Only you can answer these questions as the business owner. If you let your customers decide this for you, they will lead you around by the nose over the years.

There is nothing wrong with choosing how your business is run, how you promote it, and whom you choose to do business with. I am in no way saying you should discriminate or act unfairly, rather dedicate your efforts to the demographic with whom you want to do business 100% of the time.

In our example, the costs of fulfillment (short of actual inventory) are all the same. Whether I sell a \$500 mattress set or a \$5000 mattress set my costs to deliver it remain static. It's the same operations person that orders it. The same warehouse crew that unloads it. The same rent per square foot to store it until delivery day. And finally, the same dollars per hour to deliver it.

Only the costs of inventory and post

sale marketing change.

It's up to you to decide where your line in the sand exists. I suggest finding it by the math. Emotions, desires, and wishes can be misleading in drawing your own line. First be clear on what you want and then look at the numbers.

Who in your existing client list is the 20% that gives you 80% of your revenue? Yes, the 80/20 rule exists here too. Focus on this most profitable group and work to bring more customers like them into your store. Fine tune your merchandising, display, sales presentation and follow up to meet their needs. Then apply the 20% rule again and again to find and cater to the real moneymakers; those customers who should dictate the focus of your business and where your line in the sand should be drawn.

This can be done through a number of different methods.

REACHING YOUR MOST PROFITABLE CUSTOMERS

Facebook's look alike audience **generator**: The least expensive way and immediately available for free at your fingertips is to upload your 20% best customer lists (names and email addresses) into Facebook's look alike audience generator and create a look alike audience that you can market to on Facebook.

Post Office EDDM: You can also use the US Post Office's Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) program. With EDDM you can focus direct mail into neighborhoods where customers who are most similar to those on your 20% customer list live. Using the EDDM program you can even mail to gated communities that would otherwise be expensive to reach. Find out more about EDDM by visiting http://

www.USPS.com. Keep in mind you can mail catalogs and mailings up to 3/4" in thickness providing the mail has no other dimension that measures larger than 12" x 15". (If you have questions refer to USPS.com or visit your local post office before you mail).

Use a demographic & psychographics company: And lastly, use a demographic and psychographics company that completely replicates your 20% list. They can provide you with a ready to use list of customers in your marketing area that are just like your 20% list, but haven't bought from you yet. This new customer lead list will be comprised of those that have the similar home values, marital status, children, zip code and income characteristics. Even more important than this list is the psychographic information you will receive about your target customers including how your how they purchase (credit card or financing) so you can better prepare marketing messages. You will also find out what magazines they subscribe to, if they have pets and what kinds of cars they own. With this information you can better understand who your best customer leads are and how they prefer to purchase home furnishings.

Gardner's Mattress & More uses measures on over 3,000 different psychographic touch points. There are 37 different measurements related just to how people use their credit cards!

This "drawing a line in the sand" process is not for everyone. It's a sobering task and one that makes some uneasy. But, for those seeking a change and looking to take control of their business, it is a must do exercise.

About Jeff & Ben: Jeff Giagnocavo

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. And, to get more information on their "Automated Mattress Profits CRM system visit www.AutomatedMattressProfits.com.

"The least expensive way

and immediately free at your fingertips is to upload your 20% best customer lists into Facebook's look alike audience generator."



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GREAT AMERICAN HOME STORE

Success Story: A passion for the industry and attention to detail.

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

ehind every dramatically winning concept you can be sure to find fixation on focus, an all too rare discipline. Add to that a border-line obsession for thinking/acting both inside and outside of the proverbial box.

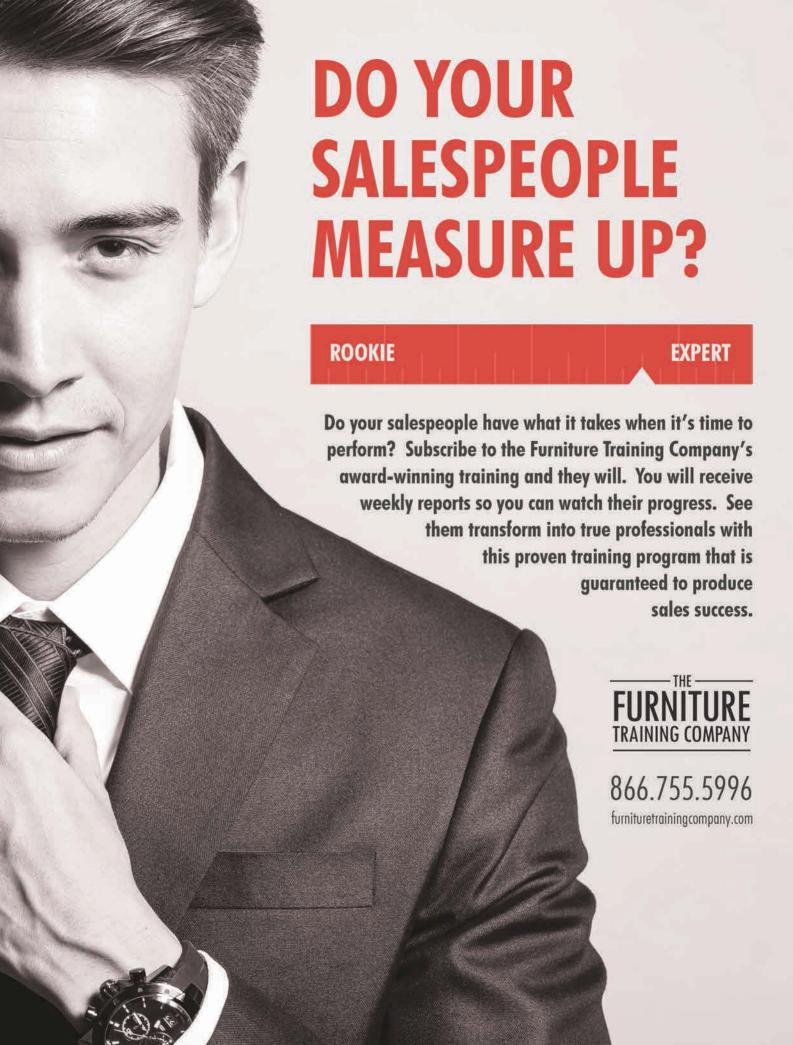
In September 2004, right at the pinnacle of founder and General Manager Ron Becker's major concerns was the erratic business climate, the distinct chance "that manufacturing would eventually go completely off shore". It was "the right time" to focus on the formation of the Mid-South's Great American Home Store, "a truly exquisite One-Stop Home

Furnishings" experience, located at Southaven, Mississippi. And, by November 2007, with a secure foundation of success, GAHS also became reality at Tennessee. Ron was convinced that enormous opportunity was waiting for "generations to come" if and when it judiciously, strategically approached. "We knew that in order to serve the community and distribute costs effectively, we would need two locations." Now there are three, "Two full line stores, and one new sleep shop at Memphis Cordova, with more sleep shops in the works". Future plans include development at Little

Rock, and possibly markets like Louisville, Lexington, Kentucky or Nashville. "We are always looking for the right opportunity for expansion."

"There have been changes" over the intervening years, said Ron, flexing to that ever-shifting economic scene. Again a pivotal focus, Ron believes in finding, keeping and nurturing partners and co-workers whose talents add important elements to the corporate mix.* "Jack Wells came on board in 2011 to create and steer our inhouse advertising department," and











with his multi-media credentials, Jack was and is the right man at the right time.

"Matt Klinger has been with the company since the beginning and has become a key player in our merchandise department with his 20 years of experience in the industry. Briana Spence was very instrumental in defining the personality of the store with her merchandise and buying skills, and we have brought on Allison Ocampo to help take us into the next generation of merchandise level with her department store merchandising and visual background.

"And there is continued progression with the training and education of our sales staff." With 100,000 square feet of retailing space and 155,000 square feet of warehousing, GAHS now has 90 employees.

Ron's philosophy of business and principles of governance have strong roots. His early inspiration, Abraham Lincoln's approach to leadership. Ten qualities have been identified.

- His capacity to listen to different points of view
- His ability to learn on the job
- His willingness to share credit for success
- And his willingness to share blame for failure
- He was aware of his own weak-

nesses

- He developed the ability to control his emotions
- He knew how to relax and replenish
- He frequently went out into the field and managed directly
- He had the strength to adhere to fundamental goals
- And the ability to communicate goals and vision

Ron's modern mentor is James C. Collins, business consultant, author and lecturer on company sustainability and growth. An award-winning Stanford MBA, his five books are immensely popular, more than four million copies sold in 32 languages. "Good to Great", is one of Ron's special resources, useful to add to your personal library. Collins defines "greatness" as "financial performance several multiples better than the market average over a sustained period". He finds the main factor for achieving the transition to be "a narrow focusing of the company's resources on their field of competence".

Collins lists some characteristics of companies that went from "good to great": "They have leaders who are humble but are driven to do what is best for their companies; they find the right people and try them out in differ-

ent positions; they confront the brutal truth of situations but never give up hope; with colleagues they seek to discover their passion, what in the world they would be best at and what is their driving resource; they develop a culture of discipline; they use technology to accelerate growth and employ the additive effect of many small initiatives and act on each other like compound interest".

GAHS has invested in The Trax system and "certification program" with The Furniture Training Group and with the guidance of Mark Lacy and his staff. Said Jack, "The Trax system is our up system and video door counter that lets us monitor traffic. We analyze traffic and bore down to actual close ratio, cost per visitor as well as cost per sale.

"The certification program enables us to test every sales person on every product category in our showroom. They must be able to pass tests to demonstrate they know enough about each product category to properly inform the consumer about the product. We met Mark Lacy several years ago when I attended a seminar about education specifically designed for the furniture industry. The seminar was held at the Resource Center during the High Point Market. Through Mark's programs, we train all new employees in every aspect of our industry from sales techniques and

"Every new employee

is required to work through every department within our organization, in the warehouse and on the delivery trucks."

product knowledge, ending with how to perform customer service.

"Also, every new employee is required to work through every department within our organization, in the warehouse and on the delivery trucks, even the women.

"The Furniture Training Group certifies that all new employees have been trained and tested for certification. They carry the certification with them even if they leave our company. Yes, even if they choose to work for our competitor!"

Months before GAHS opened to the public, Ron conceptualized a strategy of checks and balances. "As we started the process of building our company I decided we would structure the business model around customer service, the consumers' wants and desires. Usually furniture companies are built around sales and they worry about service later. I decided that our sales volume would be controlled by our service people. We would

increase advertising only after meetings with the service people and it was confirmed that we could successfully handle more sales volume.

"Bill Gill, operations manager, would have to send me notification and approval that he and his staff were ready.

"Mark Carson also would send me notification that his staff was ready for delivery.

"I would then notify the advertising department to spend more money on advertising and our sales volume would grow with controls in place.

"During this process, our sales department and merchandise department were notified to start their process of preparing their staffs for the increases in volume.

"All deliveries go through three phases of preparation before the merchandise is ready to be loaded onto the trucks. Each driving team is held responsible for their load. Once they accept the merchandise, all charge-

backs for damages are the driver teams' to pay. Each driving team is paid a commission on delivered merchandise that meets the customers' approval. Every customer communicates with the service department that they are either completely satisfied or they are not completely satisfied. This delivery completion process is done with I-pads and cell 'phone apps with every delivery. We pay all sales people and delivery people on a weekly commission on delivered sales.

"The same process is in place for our service techs who are assigned out for customer service calls. All service calls are in an open status and are followed closely by service reps until we receive the words, 'Yes, I am completely satisfied'. Service orders must be closed out within seven working days unless parts are needed. If indeed parts are needed and the parts must come from overseas, the max a service ticket can remain open is 30 days. If we have the items of purchase





in inventory, we will take parts from our inventory and satisfy the customer immediately. It is everyone's goal within the company to strive hard for perfection and complete customer satisfaction. We are very, very serious about customer happiness within our company. Sometimes we will allow the customer to return the merchandise after several years of use if we cannot make them happy. Excuses are not allowed. If you are a person with excuses you will not work for The Great American Home Store.

"We have daily meetings regarding customer service issues, and every manager receives daily reports on delivery completion percentages. All issues are reviewed by the managers and consultation is held with every employee who was involved in the transaction and delivery process. In customer service, all calls are recorded for managers to review. If there are questions or concerns, we go back to the incoming calls which are recorded

to see if our people did everything correctly. If mistakes were made, we retrain immediately with the employee involved in the transaction.

"Service and damage reports are kept on every skew by every vendor in our system. We know by skews which items are a potential problem for us. The manufacturers' reps are made aware of these issues and are given an opportunity to correct their issues. If the factory refuses to correct the issue, we will drop that skew from our inventory. In the past, the skew in several cases was our best seller in that category. The factory could not believe that we would drop the item. In several instances, we required the merchandising team to stop buying from certain vendors with high service issues. This sometimes becomes a battle amongst our team! We are never hard on our vendors, we just quit doing business with those we feel do not have the same mission as we do, COMPLETE CUSTOMER SATIS-

FACTION.

"Our goal for 2015 is a 98 per cent completion rate."

High on the GAHS focus list is marketing, both concept and product line. When Jack Wells joined the team in 2011 "to facilitate advertising through an out of town agency Ron had just hired" he was asked to "come on full

"Usually furniture companies are built around sales and they worry about service later. Therefore, I decided that our sales volume would be controlled by our service people."





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time. I had convinced Ron the company could save money by bringing advertising and marketing in house. We started with print and moved toward doing all of our TV ads recently. Last year we spent a good deal of time researching and developing our on-line marketing strategy. Building the team was top of the list. It currently consists of three and one-half people including myself, all either crosstrained or in the process of on-going training to make sure everyone can do everything in my department, print, television and the ever-increasing use of Internet marketing. And the first step in this process is to ensure they understand the furniture business!

"We do not currently sell on line but should go live in the first quarter of 2015.

"We have added new tools in our on-line development to help us advance to a sales funnel approach of moving customers from our web

"We are never hard on our vendors, we just quit doing business with those we feel do not have the same mission as we do, Complete Customer Satisfaction." presence to our showroom to a sale and, in the future, on-line sales. We feel that about 85 per cent of our current floor traffic has visited our website prior to coming to the store. We currently use FurnitureDealer.net for our web presence, and have found Andy Bernstein and his team to be an invaluable asset to helping us foster our future vision for our web presence.

"Social media is included in our marketing efforts including use of Facebook, YouTube, Yelp, Pinterest and others. We are in the early stages of developing a new e-magazine with embedded video as a marketing tool, coming in 2015. We would like to create our own video show for the Internet now tablets and 'phones are used so much for video, something that is more infotainment than just an advertisement.

"We currently advertise on television primarily, then radio, print and ever-growing web advertising."

The GAHS supplier list is long and impressive. A sampling, Bernhardt, Flexsteel, Corinthian, Klaussner, Jaipur, Austin Group, Fusion, Hammary, La-Z-Boy, Magnussen, Pulaski, TempurPedic, Universal, Sealy, Vaughan Bassett, Catnapper and many more quality, up-market names.

Early in GAHS's history, May 2007, and much to Ron's surprise, they gained recognition in the 61-350 employee category of the Memphis Business Journal's Small Business

Awards. In response, "It was nice just to be a finalist, and I thought we were too young for the award. To live up to the honor, I believe we need to continue to be good stewards of our business."

are the driver teams' to pay."

Also in 2007, GAHS was named Mississippi Retailer of the Year. From 2005 to 2010, GAHS was the Best Independent Sealy Retailer in the Mid-South. There were several different awards for participation in two Vesta Home Shows. In 2005, GAHS won "Best of Homes", in 2009, Excellence in Residential Construction, Best Interior Design, Best Master Suite, Best Foyer, People's Choice (first and second place) as well as Best of Show. And the company placed second in the Shelby County Commercial Appeal category for Best Furniture Store to Shop in Memphis in 2010.

And there's a gentle side to GAHS, their reinvestment in the communities that surround their stores. They like to support entities that make a difference locally and have sponsored many events, given money and donated items to schools, research hospitals, homes for children, community foundations, Little Leagues, hurricane victims and many, many more. The company usually favors charitable organizations that have little or no funding. "We, as small businesses, are really nothing more than groups of people living in the community," said Ron. "If the small businesses and citizens of our community don't take it as their own responsibility to provide for them-



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"If the factory refuses to correct the (damage) issue, we will drop that skew from our inventory. In the past, the skew in several cases was our best seller in that category."

selves and others, I don't think it will ever get done. We like to support things where it makes a difference locally. If we give something to the local high school, we know it matters.

"We also give a great deal of attention to the Mid-South Food Bank, The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, the Blood Bank and Coats for Kids."

And the Make-A-Wish Foundation, a non-profit organization that arranges experiences for children between the ages of three and 17 with life-threatening medical conditions, also attracted GAHS's attention, and they are proud supporters. The "wish" of a little boy named Justin who wanted to go to Disney World was fulfilled this past year. GAHS has also furnished many children's rooms.

"We believe it's true, the more we can give and support those less fortunate, the more we are blessed as stewards of our business!"

The future of Great American Home Stores? "Earlier this year we opened our first sleep shop in Memphis with leases signed on two more locations to open next year in Memphis and Southaven. We are currently looking at other markets for both full service and sleep stores.

"We will continue to grow our business out of our profits and not by borrowing money. We are always looking for opportunities to grow our business, especially with the sleep shops. We will look at other markets if we think the conditions and market are correct for

our business model."

Have you ever experienced a magical moment, suspended in space, total unbelief that a miracle has come to pass? Ron told us about the GAHS epiphany. "After two years of intense planning and building the first store, we were all very anxious to get started. The building was completed, all systems were in place, all the staff had been hired.

"Oh, boy, we were ready!

"The first tractor/trailer pulled up to the dock for unloading into our beautiful new facility . . . and everyone just froze! No one moving, everyone just staring at the back end of the truck. Absolute silence! Completely frozen in time.

"Until Richard Rickman, our IT person, came to life. Said Richard, "Well, I guess we should maybe unload this thing.

"And GAHS came to life!"

*Ron Becker writes about some of the outstanding people of GAHS

Jack Wells: "Jack Wells. I have known him for 35 years. He and I have the same value beliefs in life. 'Always do what is right and just even when nobody is watching or even when nobody cares.' Jack started out in the bedding manufacturing industry 40 years ago and eventually moved over into the furniture retail industry with his

family in the mid-1980s. There I think he found his passion for advertising and marketing. Jack loves what he does and is a GREAT mentor for a lot of young people who are coming into our industry. He always finds time to help those who want to learn and grow in the advertising industry. I cannot have a conversation with anyone within the media industry who does not tell me how much they respect Jack and how much they enjoy working with him. Jack has helped grow our business double digits each year, and cut our advertising cost by 50 per cent since coming to work with us. When we started the company I was spending 11.25 per cent in advertising to revenues. This year, we will finish with five per cent advertising cost to revenues!

Matt Klinger: "Matt Klinger I came to know when he started working for me 28 years ago; he had just come out of college. Matt literally started at the bottom of our industry, and worked his way through every department. There is hardly anything in our business he cannot do! If he doesn't know it he will, in a very short time, learn it. He

"All service calls are in an open status and are followed closely by service reps until we receive the words, 'Yes, I am completely satisfied'".



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has that type of intelligence. Matt is very analytical. And he has a great opportunity in this industry. He is a tremendous help in inventory control when it comes to closing out slow moving merchandise, and is great with profit margins on all inventory. At year end of 2014, we will come in with a 49 per cent margin after close outs and clearance items are moved through our system.

Briana Spence: "Briana Spence came to work for me when she was 17 years old. At such a young age there was nothing this young lady wouldn't do, even down to driving a truck. She nat"Jack has helped grow our business double digits each year, and cut our advertising costs by 50 per cent since coming to work with us."

urally knew how to manage people and get production out of everyone she came in contact with. She fell in love with merchandising. It was her vision in merchandising that created the look for The Great American Home Store. It is her never ending determination to make this the GREATEST FURNITURE STORE in the Mid-South that helped us capture such a market share in the Mid-South area. She is always striving for perfection when it comes to merchandise and showroom display."

Allison Ocampo: "Allison Ocampo began to work for us as we opened our second location in late 2007. Allison came to us from the high-end department store industry. She brought with her the experience we needed in visual displays. She has a tremendous talent in color and fashion which helped take us to another level of merchandising and display in our showrooms. With this added touch, shoppers come in frequently just to get ideas for color and fashions. Even our sales people get excited about her displays as she adds her final touches. Allison is now moving into merchandising to help take our showrooms to a new look with some higher end merchandise and looks."

Bill Gill: "Bill Gill came to work for us as we opened for business in September 2004. He brought with him the expertise and knowledge needed to receive, ship and manage the operations as we went from zero to \$14,000,000 in sales the first year of business. He put systems and procedures in place that help us reach the goals we set for ourselves pertaining to customer satisfaction after the delivery. It is his relentless approach to operations that makes us the GREAT-EST logistically furniture stores in this country. I will put our operations up against anyone else in the country."

Diane Harper: "Diane Harper and I have worked together for 35 years. Diane is in charge of our accounting department. No company can operate without a good money manager. Diane is our person for this task. She helps me keep an eye on all our expenses. She is quick to bring it to my attention when we get out of budget for any expenditure. She is very instrumental in controlling our expenses which leads to healthy profits. And, with healthy profits, we are able to help our employees and also help the people in our community."

Mike Carson: "Mike Carson owns the delivery company (Carson Delivery Service) that we use for all our furniture deliveries. Mike and I have a very clear understanding of what our company requirements are when it comes to customer satisfaction. There are no excuses or acceptance of failure when it comes to our deliveries. Mike grew up in furniture warehousing and he understands what it takes to be excellent in customer service. He has never told me he can't or won't make a delivery, no matter what the circumstances. Since we started together in 2004, I can count on one hand the complaints we have received on deliveries, and those were in our early stages of development. The calls we do receive are calls of compliments



(Modestly, Ron asked Jack to pen his bio!) Jack writes:

Ron Becker: "Ron started in the furniture business at the early age of 25, and now has 40 years of experience. He spent 13 years on the floor at Fleming Furniture, moving into management after that. He helped take the local company from five million in sales to 30 million before leaving to pursue other interests. In 2002, Ron met his partner and they decided to open a full service furniture store unlike any in the Mid-South. The first store in Southaven, Mississippi, just outside Memphis, was designed after spending a full year looking for just the right location at a cost of eight million dollars. The first full year after opening, GAHS generated 14 million in sales. The second store was opened

inside Memphis with slight tweeks to the design bringing us to a total of 110,000 square feet of showroom space and 150,000 square feet of warehouse space. Both locations have on site warehousing for customer convenience for pickup. Sales this year will top 28 million and maintain high margins and profitability.

"Ron's passion for the industry and attention to detail as well as his uncanny talent for selecting and building the right team is the cornerstone to our success! He understands and appreciates the value of our sales force being in position for so many years, and has worked hard for this to be a customer and employee focused company. Ron is very loyal to his employees, and our vendors not only respect him but many have become close friends through the years."

(standing left).

"Sometimes we will allow the customer to return the merchandise after several years of use if we cannot make them happy. Excuses are not allowed."

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ARE YOU MARKETING LIKE IT'S 1987?

Most furniture retailers are simply not covering all the bases when it comes to marketing for success in 2015.

by Michael Winicki

emember 1987? That's the year that the stock market crashed almost 23% during the October High Point Market, the drug Prozak made it's debut in the US, "Walk Like An Egyptian" by the Bangles was the top song and we were still using audio casettes, and those huge 1.4 MB floppy disks. Back then, when I was a young "pup" my father opened a retail store. Having recently been laid off and unable to find work in the oil and gas industry (can you believe a barrel of oil was

\$15 back then?), I decided to join him.

Though I'd worked in a couple of retail businesses while going to school, I quickly discovered I didn't have a clue about retail advertising.

A family friend who owned an established home furnishings store gave me this advice: "Mike, don't worry about it The ad reps will be more than happy to help you out."

He was right—once a week the daily newspaper ad rep would poke his head in the door. The reps from the free weekly newspapers would show up next. The three local radio

station reps would stop by every now and then. On top of that, once a year the Yellow Pages rep would visit. And of course ad reps for billboard companies, restaurant placemats and grocery store cash register receipts would be by periodically.

When it came down to it for our

area—like many areas back then—marketing was all about the daily newspaper, the radio stations and the Yellow Pages. That's where most prospects came from.

So the reps were there to help me out—right! I knew they were there to spend our money! Little did I know, however, that they didn't know much more about marketing than I did. But at least they knew something about it from being in the business for a longer period.

And that's how it was back in 1987. At the time I thought it was complicated, but advertising in 1987 wasn't much different from advertising in 1977, 1967 or even 1957. If you had a retail business you pretty much focused on advertising via the same three venues: in the daily newspaper, on the local radio stations and in the Yellow Pages.

CHANGING TIMES

Little did I know how much more

"It has never been easier to take market share from competitors as it is right now in 2015!

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"People don't go on Facebook

or Pinterest to share stories about products that help prevent yeast infections. They don't talk about how product "A" cut down their acne problems."

complicated it would be to market a business in the coming decades, especially after the internet went from an amusing toy to a "must-have-access-to" medium for almost everyone. Since then, of course, the rules for marketing your business have been turned upside down.

And although there are several areas that might appear to be just as they were in 1987, once you wipe the dust off, it becomes clear that even the old and reliable channels have changed.

Back in 1994 I did a study of our store traffic. By then I was fully immersed in this marketing stuff as I tried to find the "golden key" that would unlock the floodgates to more store traffic. Here's how things broke out:

- Daily newspaper-34%
- Weekly newspaper-13%
- Radio-22%
- Yellow Pages-10%
- Unknown-14%

Keep in mind that these percentages reflected new customer traffic only; they did not include customers

who had shopped in our store previously.

Twenty years later in 2014, a store could have similar percentages but end up attracting significantly fewer customers. How is this possible?

It all has to do with the number of potential customers who aren't:

- reading the daily newspaper
- listening to local radio
- pulling the Yellow Pages off the shelf to look up a phone number

Readership of newspapers has plummeted. Listenership of local radio stations has plummeted. The percentage of people using ink-on-paper Yellow Pages directories has plummeted. I don't think these are revelations to anyone. I've had one store owner after another tell me the same thing.

That's not to say it makes sense to give up on using any of these "old school" marketing tools. Yes, fewer people are reading, listening to or using them, but these marketing tools aren't dead yet. The question

becomes how do we continue to use them not just to close the gap between the customers we have and the customers we want, but also to grab gobs of market share from competitors? In this age of online marketing, why bother to continue to use them at all?

NEW FRONTIERS

The fact is it has never been easier to take market share from competitors as it is right now in 2015! And here's why:

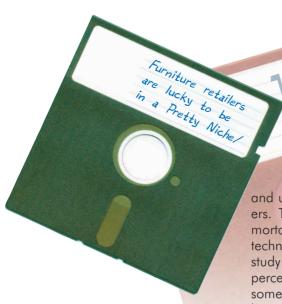
Back in 1987 every store out there competed using the same marketing tools I've already mentioned: newspapers, radio stations and Yellow Pages.

So in order to acquire increased market share back in 1987 you had to:

- Place bigger ads than your competitor
- Place more ads than your competitor

If they were placing a half-page vertical ad every week, you needed to place a three-quarter-page vertical ad every week. If they ran two





ads a week, then you ran three ads a week. That's how you captured market share in 1987.

And while you can still do that today, it isn't the only way of doing it; nor is it necessarily the smartest way of doing it.

I'm sure you're thinking that I'm going to offer the internet as a good way to bypass your competition in 2014. Well, I won't disappoint you. Yes, the internet is a great way to sneak around your competitors and get those prospective customers before they do. Simply look online and you'll find all sorts of tips on how to do this. However, if I left my advice at that I would be doing you a great disservice.

MOBILE COMPONENT

Let me ask you about the last time you went out to a restaurant.

While you sat there waiting for your food, did you look around? What were many people doing around you?

I know what I see guite often when I go out to dinner that I didn't see in 1987: everyone around me looking at the screens of their cell phones, reading or scrolling or texting as though they're possessed. Hardly any face-toface conversations going on. Instead, it's one person after another in his or her own little world with the latest iPhone or smart phone.

Now we can lament that as another sure sign that the world is going to heck in a hand basket (and maybe it is), or we can accept it as life in 2014

and use it to our advantage as retailers. The fact is that most brick-andmortar retailers aren't using mobile technology to their advantage. One study I read recently states that 90 percent of all people who search for something on their phones end up buying that item (or something similar) within the next 24 hours. That's a powerful statistic, no matter how vou view the fact that people are married to their phones nowadays.

When you plan a digital retail campaign, it had better have a mobile component to it or you're going to miss out entirely. Not only do you need a regular website (if there is such a thing as a regular website); you also need a website that is designed for mobile users.

WEBSITE ERRORS

Another point that should be obvious but is too often ignored by furniture retailers: the quality of your website speaks volumes about your business. I still visit too many retailer websites with blank "About Us" pages or other pages that are "Under Construction" or contain cold-as-afrozen-fish verbiage. Such content (or lack of content) can be posted by just about any furniture retailer out there. YOUR website needs to reflect what's special about YOU and your business. Which is why my next point is so important.

A "PRETTY" NICHE

Furniture retailers are lucky to be in a "pretty" niche. Because what we sell is considered "pretty" or "decorative", our past, present and future customers talk to friends and family about the products they've purchased or want to purchase from us. It's a wonderful niche to be in.

"Getting an email address out of a current customer is usually no more complicated than offering a simple enticement... or asking them if they'd like to receive discounts or news delivered directly to their inbox."

Think of how the furniture retail niche is different than, say, the dietary supplement retail niche. People don't go on Facebook or Pinterest to share stories about products that help prevent yeast infections. They don't talk about how product "A" cut down their acne problems. Dietary supplements are in an "ugly" niche. It's extremely difficult to get traction through social marketing if you're stuck in an ugly niche.

But furniture is comfort, and beauty. Someone will go on Twitter and devote 140 characters to the wonderful night's sleep they've had on their new mattress, or they'll go on Pinterest and post a pin on their "wall" showing their new china cabinet. They want to share their good experiences when it comes to furniture, and it's the furniture retailer's job to fan the flames of that conversation.

The internet is also the place where a retailer can talk about its products as desirable additions to a home or lifestyle—products that provide comfort, beauty and elegance. It gives the retailer a chance to break out of the "commodity" rut in which other business owners find themselves trapped

"They may say something like "Joe's Furniture, In Business Since 1978".

Then they give the address, the phone number and the hours the business is open.

That's it, and it's a total waste of money."

when it seems all they can really promote is price.

The internet isn't just about our inventory either. It presents endless opportunities for retailers to talk about themselves in a way that establishes them as an "authority" when it comes to furniture. It also allows you to present yourself as a "real person" to your prospects. When it comes right down to it, people still buy from people. The internet offers up powerful opportunities to connect with potential customers by showing that you're "real". Furniture retailers who take the time to identify what makes them different and then post content online to that effect are way ahead of their competitors already.

EMAIL CONNECTIONS

Beyond allowing us to talk about products in a non-commodity way or to talk about ourselves and our businesses in a unique way, the greatest attribute of the internet and digital marketing may be the ease with which it allows us to communicate with our current and prospective customers.

Email in 2014 is still a powerful marketing tool that far too few retailers use to their full advantage, if at all.

My wife and I are empty nesters and we go out to eat A LOT! We visit franchises, independents, diners, fine dining establishments.... As a matter of fact, we have a list of about 30 local restaurants that we visit on a semiregular basis.

How many of those restaurants do you think have asked for my email address in exchange for something worthwhile? One!

That's it. Just one restaurant out of all that we visit has come out and requested my email address. I hear from that restaurant every three weeks or so through simple newsletter emails that list upcoming specials and events. I don't consider these emails "spam". They can be read quickly and then off to the electronic trash bin they go. But they keep that restaurant near the top of our list.

Getting an email address out of a current customer is usually no more complicated than offering a simple enticement...or simply asking them if they'd like to receive discounts or news delivered directly to their inbox. Yet most furniture retailers hesitate or don't even consider taking this simple step, even though it could help keep their businesses "top of mind" with their customers.

Just recently my wife and I purchased new carpeting for our bedroom and a new chair. These purchases were made from two different retailers. In neither case was I asked to give my email address in exchange for, say, a \$10 gift card or whatever. So I can't pick on the furniture retail niche for being the only ones asleep at the switch when it comes to aggressively putting together an email list of customers and prospects. But most of us are quilty of this.

COMBINING TACTICS

Now let's circle back to "old school" marketing. Even though it's not as effective as it was simply because there are not as many potential customers paying attention to its outlets, that doesn't mean we can't use it more effectively than ever. Better than we did 10 or 20 years ago. Definitely better than we did in 1987. And often with surprising results.

First off, regardless of the platform you choose, do NOT run institutional ads. These ads provide basic info but don't attempt to sell anything. I'm sure you've seen "business card-sized ads" in your local newspaper or on restau-

rant placemats. They usually start out with the name of the business at the top. They may say something like "Joe's Furniture, In Business Since 1978". Then they give the address, the phone number and the hours the business is open—that's it, and it's a total waste of money.

Every ad you place needs a headline that attracts the attention of the reader or listener. And no, putting the name of your business up at the beginning of an ad is not a good headline. Your headline should include a strong offer plus a call to action that directs the reader or listener to do something; call the store, visit the store...something!

The takeaway from all this is to not neglect your offline advertising opportunities and not neglect your online advertising opportunities, but to combine them. To ignore one just because you don't understand it or because you haven't had success with it in the past is not a good plan. If you want to grow your market share or simply avoid stagnating sales, you need to roll up your sleeves and work hard to ensure all your marketing efforts—online and offline—are not only effective but innovative.

As business guru Peter Drucker says, "The best way to predict the future is to create it."

Let's get to creating!

Mike Winicki is president of Big Noise Marketing. His goal is to make the business life of every furniture store owner as easy as PIE: Profitable, Interesting and Enjoyable. To get a free Marketing Opportunity Report for your business simply call his toll free number 1-800-495-8308 anytime, 24 hours a day, and leave your contact information. Or email your request to info@bignoisemarketing.com.

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Employee Stock Ownership Plans Deserve a Close Look for Business Transition.

by Corey Rosen

ne of the most difficult problems for owners of closely held businesses is finding a way to turn their equity in a business into cash for retirement or other purposes. The decision to sell is more than an economic one, however. After putting years into a business, owners develop a strong feeling of identity with their company. At the same time, owners often have a sense of loyalty to the employees and would like to see them have a continuing role in the company. And, many owners don't want to simply sell and move on. They would prefer to maintain some role in the company, ranging from active management to serving on the board or as an advisor.

For some business owners, the answer to these problems will be to turn over the company to an heir or sell to a competitor. But many owners

do not have heirs interested in the business, and outside buyers are not easy to find. Even if they can be found, they may want to buy the company for its customer lists, technology, or facilities, or may just want to put a competitor out of business.

Olum's, a 173-employee, fourstore home furniture retailer in the Binghamton, NY area, found another solution. Back in 1989, the Olum family was looking to move on since none of them had an active role in the business. They could have sold to another company, but wanted a way to preserve the legacy of the company and reward the people who helped build it. An employee stock ownership plan (ESOP) proved the best answer. As a tax-favored employee benefit plan, it was able to borrow money to buy 75% of the company. In the late 1990s it acquired the remaining 25%. The plan was funded not by employees, but by tax-deductible corporate contributions.

This year, Olum's celebrated its 100th year in business, making it one of the longest continually operating furniture retailers in the country. It is also the 25th anniversary of its ESOP. Wendy Howard, Plan Administrator for the ESOP at Olum's, says the plan has made it possible for long-term Olum's employees to accumulate substantial retirement assets. At the same time, Olum's has been able to compete with new big-box discounters such as Sam's Club and Lowe's by offering outstanding customer service by its employee owners. Even during the recession, Olum's was able to maintain its employment in a tough market.

Olum's is not alone in the home furniture retail world. There are a few other companies with ESOPs, such as Hainje's in Alabama and SleepTrain in California. There are also several office furniture retailers. But compared to other industries, ESOPs are not very common in furniture retail. There is no obvious reason for that other than that the idea of ESOPs tends to spread by example in industries in an idiosyncratic way. ESOPs are very common in supermarkets, for instance, and convenience stores. In both of these cases, the growth of ESOPs is likely the result of a few very well-known firms

"Sleep Train

one of the largest mattress retailers in the U.S., borrowed money to fund an ESOP to buy 25% of its stock. Many ESOPs start this way."

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deciding to set the plans up and becoming models for other companies.

Although an ESOP is not a good fit for many companies, for many others it is an ideal solution to business transition. This article will look at how ESOPs work and how to determine if they make sense for you.

How Is an ESOP Used for Business Transition? With strong bipartisan support, Congress has intentionally made ESOPs the most attractive way to do business transition. An ESOP is a kind of employee benefit plan, similar in many ways to qualified retirement plans and governed by the same law (the Employee Retirement Income Security Act). An ESOP allows a company to set up a trust for employees and then use pre-tax future profits to buy out one or more owners on any company schedule the Redemptions of stock are not normally tax-deductible, but with ESOPs they are, making redemptions much cheaper. A \$5 million business, for instance, would need about \$8 million in pre-tax revenue to generate the \$5 million to redeem shares. An ESOP only requires the \$5 million.

Sellers to an ESOP can also defer taxation on the gain from the sale if the company is or converts to C status and the ESOP ends up with 30% or more of the stock and sellers reinvest in stocks and bonds of U.S. operating companies. If the ESOP is or converts to S status, the deferral does not apply, but any profits attributable to an ESOP are not taxable. A 30% ESOP company pays no taxes on 30% of its profits; a 100% ESOP company pays no taxes on any of its profits. Many ESOPs start

off as C companies then convert to S.

There are rules, of course, to get these tax benefits. Stock is held in a trust. All employees with one or more vears of full-time service must be in the plan and allocations must be based on relative pay or a more level formula, then distributed no later than five years after the end of the plan year the employee terminates or one year if the termination is for death, retirement, or disability. Distributions can be in installments of up to five years. Allocations must vest over not more than six years. ESOPs cannot be used to share ownership just with select employees, nor can allocations be made on a discretionary basis. There are only the most minimal required voting rights, ESOPs are governed by a trustee appointed by the board, and the trustee votes the shares for board elections and most other matters unless the company chooses to allow employees to vote.

Financing an ESOP. The simplest way to use an ESOP to transfer ownership

"One of the most difficult problems for owners of closely held businesses is finding a way to turn their equity in a business into cash for retirement or other purposes."

is to have the company make taxdeductible cash contributions to the ESOP trust, which the trust then uses to gradually purchase the owner's shares. Kentwood Office For instance. Furniture in Grand Rapids, a 122employee office furniture reseller, started an ESOP in 2012 by contributing cash to the plan to make an initial purchase in the next year. Alternatively, the owner can have the ESOP borrow the funds needed to buy the shares. In this way, larger amounts of stock can be purchased all at once, up to 100% of the equity, although banks are usually reluctant to loan for a full buyout all at once. For instance, in 2010 Sleep Train, one of the largest mattress retailers in the U.S., borrowed money to fund an ESOP to buy 25% of its stock. Many ESOPs start this way, transferring part of the ownership in an initial transaction, then buying the remaining shares some years later. Sleep Train has done a number of acquisitions of smaller mattress retailers since the ESOP as well, effectively including them in the ESOP too. Sleep Train has seen significant increases in their ESOP value since its inception.

Like Sleep Train, many ESOPs start out buying a minority of the shares. In some cases, they continue that way long term; in most cases, this is a first step towards eventual 100% ownership. Others just continue as minority ESOP owned companies.

Perhaps half of all ESOPs are funded instead by a seller note. The ESOP acquires the shares then pays back the seller at a reasonable rate of interest (not more than what a commercial lender would charge for loans of similar risk.) Sellers often like this idea because not only do they get their



"Olum's celebrated its 100th year in business and it's 25th anniversary of its ESOP. plan has made it possible for long-term Olum's employees to accumulate substantial retirement assets."

shares sold, but they get a reasonably good rate of return on the note. Seller notes also make it possible to sell the entire company all at once.

How Much Will the ESOP Pay? The price the ESOP will pay for the shares, as well as any other purchases by the plan, must be determined at least annually by an outside, independent appraiser. The appraiser's valuation will be based on several factors to determine what a willing financial buyer would pay. Discounted cash flow, expected future earnings, book value, the company's reputation, future market considerations, and

other factors will be considered. A strategic buyer, such as a competitor, might pay an additional premium because when the target company is acquired, there are perceived operational synergies that make the target more profitable to the buyer than it would be as a stand-alone entity. The ESOP cannot match this price because it cannot generate these synergies. Sales to synergistic buyers do trigger capital gains taxes, however, and often come with numerous contingencies.

Who Gets How Much When and Other Key Rules: If you are willing to live with the rules for ESOPs, and an



ESOP makes sense financially, then an ESOP may be the best way forward. But as appealing as an ESOP can be from a tax, legacy, and personal planning perspective, they are not right for every company. Several factors must, at a minimum, be present:

The company is making enough money to buy out an owner. The

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just sell and service our valued customers and leave our reputation in tact.

"It has generated a financial increase that I have not experienced for 8 or more years. Larry

"It has generated a financial increase that I have not experienced for 8 or more years. Larry customized our program and walked us thru every step of the way. He coordinated all our ads with my advertising reps, he was available any time we called with questions and worked with us in a way that we felt totally comfortable. Larry's 'honor system' payment for his services speaks of his integrity. I look forward to working with Larry's Ultra Sales program in the near future for our next big event. I highly recommend his Ultra Sales program to anyone looking to increase profits in a perfectly orchestrated and strategic way!"

Lisa Allard, President/Owner, Allard's Furniture Gallery, West Lebanon, NH

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"The simplest way to use an ESOP to transfer ownership is to have the company make tax-deductible cash contributions to the ESOP trust, which the trust then uses to gradually purchase the owner's shares."

company must be generating enough cash to buy the shares, conduct its normal business, and make necessary reinvestments.

 If the company is borrowing to **L** buy the shares, its existing debt must not prevent it from taking out an adequate loan.

3. If the seller wants to take the tax-deferred rollover, the company must be a regular C corporation or convert from S to C status. S corporations can establish ESOPs, but their owners cannot take advantage of the tax-deferred rollover described above.

The seller(s) must be willing to 4 sell their shares at fair market value, even if the ESOP pays less than an outside buyer would. An ESOP will pay the appraised fair market value based on what a willing financial buyer would pay based on a variety of factors. Sometimes an outside buyer can pay more for a company if it has a particular fit that creates synergies that go beyond what the company is worth on its own. If that price nets the seller more than what would be achieved on an after-tax basis selling to an ESOP (remember, the seller can defer gains on the ESOP sale but not a sale to a third party), then an ESOP only makes sense if the non-financial benefits of the selling this way outweigh the financial difference.

5 Management continuity must be provided. Banks, suppliers, and customers will all want to be persuaded that the company can continue to operate successfully. It is essential that people be trained to take the place of departing owners to assure a smooth transition.

You must be willing to deal with 6. costs and complexity: ESOPs do require more management time to make sure you understand how they work. The costs of setting up a plan will typically run from \$70,000 to \$100,000 for "plain vanilla" plans

and higher for more complex ones or lager companies. That is substantial, although the costs (including brokerage fees) for selling a third party are higher. These costs, however, typically make ESOPs prohibitive for companies with roughly 15 or fewer employees. While ESOPs can be complex, sales to other companies are usually just as complex or more so and often involve unwanted contingencies, such as earnouts or extended escrows.

If you do decide to pursue an ESOP, make sure you get qualified advice. Lots of people will tell you they are ESOP experts, but a much smaller number are. The National Center for Employee Ownership maintains a referral service of people experienced in this field.

About Corey Rosen: Corey Rosen is the founder of the National Center for Employee Ownership, a nonprofit information, membership, research organization. Details on ESOPs can be found at www.nceo.org.

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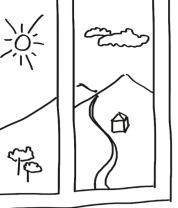
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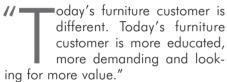




TODAY'S DESIGN FOCUSED CUSTOMERS

Knowing how to serve them requires an understanding of four major influences on their shopping and buying behavior.

by Rene' Johnston-Gingrich



This is a quote I coined to illustrate the importance of customer centric selling and how I begin an introductory discussion in one of our most popular programs, Profitability by Design. The quote is designed to open a discussion about value and profitability.

"Floor some merchandise that reflects current trends and utilize digital media to showcase trendier pieces or concepts that you don't want to risk flooring.

Great display signals that there is an understanding of design in this environment."

It's also meant to create an awareness of how we must understand who today's furniture customer is and what they truly desire, so we in the retail furniture world can meet those needs.

This quote illustrates the importance of three critical elements of sales and profitability. It prompts us to look closely at how we do business. More importantly, it requires a customercentric focus on sales. We must understand the motivation of our customers in order to meet them where they are and move them to the sale. This often means our sales teams must operate differently to effectively understand and serve this customer.

To successfully connect, make the sale, and ultimately serve design focused customers, you have to do several things:

- You have to seek to understand by listening to your customer.
- You have to meet our customer's needs, no matter how complex.
- You have to exceed your customer's expectations.

This understanding of furniture customers was derived through long experience in retail and design consulting at numerous home furnishings retailers. I also draw inspiration from the work of Professor Nicole Ponder of

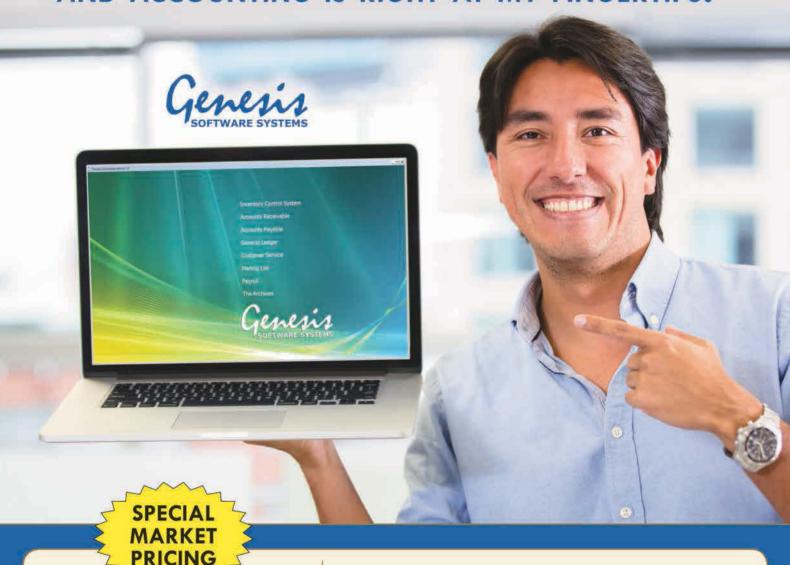
Mississippi State University. In her study, Consumer Attitudes and Buying Behavior for Home Furniture, Ponder studies a cross-section of consumers. Her findings paint a picture of today's design-oriented customer. Chief among these are that many of them regard the aesthetic aspects of the purchase of furniture to be of primary importance. Below are two segments of her research describing consumer perceptions.

FURNITURE AND THE SELF-CONCEPT

Furniture is often seen as an extension of oneself and one's image.

Consumers do treat the furniture purchase decision as important, since furniture can serve as an expression of one's own identity and personality. A large 72.7% of respondents agreed that, "the design of my furniture reflects my personality," 67.0% of respondents agreed with the statement, "A lot can be said about a person from the furniture s/he owns," and 60.7% agreed that they express themselves with the furniture they buy. Regarding furniture as an expression of one's personality, there were no differences across generational groups, but, not surprisingly, females were more likely than males to agree with this statement. (Ponder, Mississippi

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"Our furniture customers

are pulling design concepts from this site and forming expectations based on what they see. They then look to you to meet those expectations"

State University, 2013)

FAVORITE FURNITURE IN THE HOME

There is a direct correlation between the fondness for specific pieces of furniture and the placement of this furniture (i.e. often favorite furnishings are found in the rooms of the home that are used for entertaining and creating emotional memories).

The emotional nature of owning furniture that reflects one's personality is evident when respondents provide information about the favorite room and favorite furniture in their homes. Many people are proud of their furniture and took the time over the course of this study to describe favorite pieces in great detail. Over half of the sample named the living room/den/family room their favorite room. When asked why this room was their favorite, respondents overwhelmingly mentioned the living room as a place where the entire family shares the happenings in each other's lives. (Ponder, Mississippi State University, 2013)

Because design evolves, tastes change, and consumer desires realign, it's important to continue to keep up with buying trends and preferences.

Today's furniture customers are vastly different from those of years past. Their new preferences have been shaped by society, trends and design influences. Because of this, it's important to understand what specific influences have shaped today's furniture customer.

Let's explore four of the

major influences.

HOME & GARDEN TELEVISION EVOLUTION

Years ago Home & Garden • Television, began a trend of misinformation and do-it-yourself design that didn't accurately represent budget, time investment and results. Early design and decorating television programming was not a friend of the home furnishings retailer. It painted a scenario that everyone could have the room of their dreams with a \$1000 budget and a 48-hour time frame; this created unrealistic expectations for redecorating and remodeling. These well-intentioned customers came into our furniture stores and design studios with expectations that we were in no way able to meet, much less exceed. This posed both customer





satisfaction and profitability issues for the furniture and design industries.

The good news is that the quality of programming and the viewership (over 43 million viewers) has improved dramatically. This led to a beautiful thing happening. Design became accessible and furniture manufacturers responded. There was a time when only a small percentage of the population was tuned into style and more sophisticated home fashion. Today there is style and design available at virtually every price point and the furniture-buving public loves it. Furniture customers now have the resources to be design-oriented. Regardless of their budget, they are looking for style, so retailers need to be positioned to respond appropriately. If great merchandise is displayed, the challenge becomes making sure sales teams have the knowledge, skills and the ability to connect.

PINTEREST

Pinterest is a social media platform that is visually based and lends itself well to design. Users create and share collections of photos (on individual virtual boards). This creates an online visual catalog of their likes and can be a useful tool to understanding design trends and customer preferences. Think of it as a virtual vision or bulletin board.

With 70 million users, Pinterest is nothing short of a phenomenon. It has given everyone, creative types and those who are not, a brilliant opportunity to express themselves. It also serves as a resource library so your customers know they can go to Pinterest and find great examples of whatever piece, style, trend, they are

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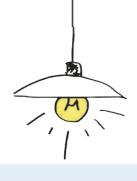
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Who Said It?

Comments From the Study Concerning the Significance of Home Furniture

"Home furniture makes the house feel like a home. It represents a person's style and personality. It makes the rooms more comfortable and relaxing and inviting to family and guests." -40 year old Caucasian male in Wisconsin

"Furniture is a reflection of me and I work hard to ensure that the spaces in my home do so, and are comfortable and usable, both casually and for entertaining, of which I do a lot." -38 year old African-American female in Texas

"Home furniture makes you feel good about spending time in the room and it can put you in a good mood when you are having a rough day. -37 year old Hispanic male in New York

"Furniture is a reflection on my style, taste in decorating, and my success in life." -66 year old Caucasian male in Pennsylvania

"I am very proud of my furniture and also my art work. It reflects who I am and what I believe in. I like who I am!" -69 year old Caucasian female in Ohio

"Furniture is an extension of me. It has to be functional but classically designed and high quality. Color is an important way to express my personality in my furnishings." -51 year old Filipino female in New York

"Furniture is one of the things that make you feel at home. It reflects your personality." -55 year old Caucasian female in Michigan

"Home furniture is simply magical. It pays to invest a lot in home furniture as it has a way of livening up one's mood. If it's good, it could make a good day great, and if it's bad, it could make a bad day worse." -31 year old African- American male in Maryland

"Furniture makes a home a home and it tells your story. When you select it for your home, your family should be in on the selection as a whole. With their thoughts, it will make a difference." -52 year old African-American male in Louisiana

"I like furniture — it makes a home a home and reflects a sense of comfort." -21 year old Caucasian female in Arkansas

Quotes from, "Consumer Attitudes and Buying Behavior for Home Furniture" by Professor Nicole Ponder of Mississippi State University. interested in. This can also be a useful tool for designers and furniture stores when marketing new trends.

HOUZZ

3. Houzz is a web site and online community about architecture, interior design and decorating, landscape design and home improvement. (Courtesy of Wikipedia.)

Houzz is a design junkie's paradise. It is another great resource for building "ideabooks" that serve as a collection of ideas, looks, and concepts. Our furniture customers are pulling design concepts from this site and forming expectations based on what they see. They then look to you to meet those expectations and act as their real-world design resource.

PRINT MAGAZINES

4 Good old-fashioned design and shelter magazines have not yet gone the way of the landline.

Furniture customers still read House Beautiful, comb through Architectural Digest and daydream over copies of Dwell. The beauty of this is these magazines display examples of fully designed rooms that include accessories, area rugs and accents. It's an influence that can only help retailers (management and sales associates) who take time to study what motivates them in order to meet and exceed expectations.

THREE STRATEGIES

Here are three strategies you can use to connect with today's designoriented customer.

Teducation: You must offer formal, training that teaches sales professionals to understand design fundamentals and encourages an awareness of design and style trends. This program must be ongoing and



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TODAY'S DESIGN FOCUSED CUSTOMERS

include a plan to keep your staff up to date on influences such as the four mentioned earlier in this article. This will both enhance their sales skills and boost confidence. Once your sales team understands and feels comfortable with these influences, challenge them to incorporate this knowledge into their own selling process. Their comfort and familiarity with Houzz or Pinterest will lay the groundwork for connecting with today's design-oriented customer.

 $2. {\footnotesize \begin{array}{c} \textbf{Represent With Great Display:} \\ \textbf{1} \\ \textbf{2} \\ \textbf{.} \\ \textbf{To the furniture customer, you,} \\ \end{matrix} }$ the retail furniture store are their reallife link to the design community. In other words, your store needs to look the part. Don't underestimate the impact of your visual merchandising. Get creative and when it comes to your showroom floor, dress to impress and put some edge and creativity into your visual display. Floor some merchandise that reflects current trends and utilize digital media to showcase trendier pieces or concepts that you don't want to risk flooring. Great display can inspire customers to buy and signals to them that there is an understanding of design in this environment. Don't be afraid to bring in experts to assist when incorporating new trends and social media strateaies.

Court Your Customers. Today's design-oriented customers need to feel understood and appreciated. Take a page from the dating playbook (think back, way back, if necessary), acknowledge your customers' great ideas, style choices, and act as their best resource and design advocate. Don't forget to let them know you are excited about helping, and truly appreciate their business. Ask intuitive questions and really listen to the answers. In other words, express inter-

est! Indifference is the kiss of death with a design-oriented customer.

CONCLUSION

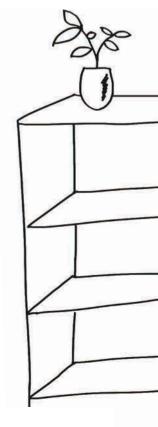
To summarize, the future of sales and profitability lies in the customer experience. Your design-oriented customer is style and tech-savvy. If you want to connect with them and have the opportunity to build a relationship you have to be at the top of your game. The in-store experience has to be so amazing that the lure of online retailers is not nearly as appealing. The supporting context is to create successful customer interactions, requiring that you understand your customer, work to meet his or her needs, present stylish solutions that knock their socks off, and make sure they leave your stores feeling understood and appreciated. Working to build the confidence of sales professionals through formal training can be a major contributor that helps customers feel good about their choices. The key here is confidence and knowledge of new trends, expectations, and overcoming fears while cementing a lasting and highly profitable relationship.

Note: Professor Nicole Ponder 's study can be found online at http://www. ffi.msstate.edu/pdf/consumer_attitudes. pdf. The quotes highlighted in this article are reproduced from that study with permission.

"Ask intuitive questions and really listen to the answers. In other words, express interest! Indifference is the kiss of death with a design-oriented customer."

About Rene' Johnston-Gingrich: Rene' Johnston-Gingrich is Vice President of Training Development for Profitability Consulting Group, specializing in delivering Design Trac: Design Skills for Retail Sales People, and Sales Trac III: In Home Selling. Rene' has owned and operated an interior design firm for 17 years and now works with organizations to ensure they have the best possible team environment.

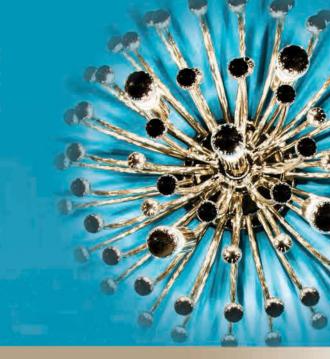
She served as a regular columnist for The Lewiston Tribune Business Profile and is an adjunct faculty member of Lewis-Clark State College's Business Division. Rene' has a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Interior Planning and Design and a Master's Degree in Adult Education and Human Resource Development. Questions about this article or any sales/design topic can be directed to her at reneg@furninfo.com or call her direct at 208-790-3594.



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THE SORRY TRUTH ABOUT

The overall poor state of sales training isn't likely to change for the vast majority of furniture retailers in 2015.

by Joe Capillo

rom my perspective I should say. I'm an old guy now – almost 75. I've been in this business since I was 32 years old, and I've been around. Small companies, big companies – you name it, I've been there. I have a lot of respect for training in general. Some of that came from my time in the U.S. Marine Corps, where they take training very seriously. On the other hand, in the furniture business there is almost no respect for training in the sense that I view it; that it's really not about the furniture, it's about people, their rooms, and homes.

No one cares (sob). In my experience, which is long and broad, the retail side of the industry has been stuck on the 4 Ps; product, price, promotion and place for as long as I've been in it and before. As I look at retail furniture ads on TV, I see the same stuff I saw 40 years ago – 50 years ago – some of it almost exactly the same – as if our entire industry has been in some kind of time warp.

On the other hand, the stuff still sells, so there's little to worry about, if you don't consider your competition including those aggressive online home furnishings retailers.

I haven't been successful, over the nearly 20 years I've been contributing to this magazine, in changing much about any of this – particularly around the crit-

ical importance of training and the more critically important issue of execution. Because all of the training in the world is useless if there is no execution on the selling floor. Oh, some individuals have "gotten it", but they are the self-driven, go getters who did it on their own initiative because the following message resonated with them: Connect to customers and their projects. Better yet, connect to these people through their projects, and you will greatly enhance their experience, retain them as customer and keep them off the internet as buyers, because they value the experience you provide.

Much of what happens between retail salespeople and customers on the selling floor (in the game!) results in consumers being driven to the online shopping experience. Witness the explosive growth of sites like Wayfair.com, where most likely many of those people who visit your store, purchase after leaving your premises. Wayfair has climbed to over \$1 billion in sales (not all furniture).

COACHING IN THE GAME

For the most part, there isn't much coaching going on at furniture retail because it requires:

• A game plan, a strategy that every associate knows and can execute –

because they practice and are coached.

- Plays (customer/salesperson interactions) that are observed.
- Post-engagement meetings held to assess and review – and adjust player performance.

I recently met a furniture store manager who is representative of sales management in many operations. He simply stood his 6'4" frame in the aisle with his hands behind his back, rocking on his feet, while sporting a grin on his face as if attempting to intimidate his sales staff into performing better. He spoke to no one. Well, that doesn't count!

With average closing ratios in the 18% to 22% range, when based on accurately counted customer visits, retailers believe that's as good as it can be and do nothing to make it better. Since there are some salespeople closing in the 30% or higher range and others in the 15% range to make the average around 22%, no one wants to fix it.

FIRST TIME SHOPPERS

Then, there's the even bigger issue around shoppers who are in the store for the first time on a new furniture buying project. Close ratios are generally in the 10% to 15% range for these shop-

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pers. If you can do the "right things", and get that shopper back a second time, the close ratio on that group is 75% or higher, and if you have a class of potential customers like this, isn't it good business practice to do everything possible to get them back a second time? There isn't even consensus around what "the right things" are — and virtually no one tracks this important avenue to higher top line numbers.

ROOM PLANNING

Few retailers truly understand the foundational importance of having a selling strategy (not just a sales system) focused on customers and their rooms. Ask yourself this: Where is it written in any of your company's documentation that states: "This is the way we serve customers. These are the things we do, and these are steps every salesperson should follow." This is one-to-one sell-

"Much of what happens between retail salespeople and customers on the selling floor results in consumers being driven to online shopping." ing for heaven's sake! ALL your revenue comes down this pathway. Isn't it worth the time and effort to provide strategic planning, then provide the necessary training and coaching to make it happen? Most of your customers' primary concerns are centered around the rooms they are furnishing. Not asking about the room is where 70% to 80% of the great disconnect occurs between shoppers and sales associates.

THE METRICS

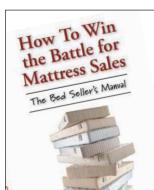
A major reason for the lack of a strategic approach to selling is a lack of vision except to "sell more furniture". Another is there aren't enough well-trained managers who want to, or know how to coach to pull off a strategic approach. Sales managers want to do "management" things, not coaching things. Think of a Baseball team; there's an owner, a manager and numerous coaches who continually observe the game and the players, then practice, practice, practice, and adjust, sharpen skills, etc. We do none of these things.

If you were to carefully measure the two most significant metrics in sales performance, Close Ratio and Average Sale, you will find a range-of-performance among your salespeople. My open question is this: If Salesperson A has an average sale over an extended time period (90 days or more) of

\$2,100, and Salesperson D has an average sale of \$1,500, what would you do? If you had a clearly defined selling strategy, and a training program defining how you expect that strategy to be delivered to customers, and a coach to teach, and oversee the execution, you might pick up \$600 per sale made by Salesperson D over time. Think about it. The same kind of true sales improvement holds for Close Ratio - but the numbers are even bigger! The difference between a 25% close ratio and a 20% close ratio is 25% more sales! Furniture retailers are notoriously poor at managing the metrics.

It's a fact that with regard to training and coaching, nothing much will change for the majority of furniture retailers in 2015. But for those few who do what's necessary to get to the next level, the sky's the limit.

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://www.furninfo.com/Authors/List.



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