

VOLUME 145 NO. 2 MARCH/ APRIL 2015

# furniture WORLD

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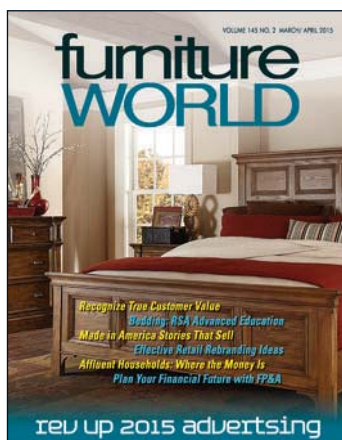
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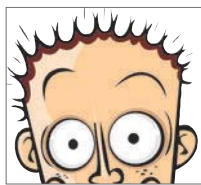
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**Cover:** The New Vintage Collection from Broyhill offers fresh interpretations of timeless classics. With pieces for bedroom, dining, living room, and entertainment, New Vintage offers designer style and quality construction at a surprisingly affordable price. The collection is available in four finishes. For more information visit Heritage Home Group at [www.heritagehome.com](http://www.heritagehome.com).

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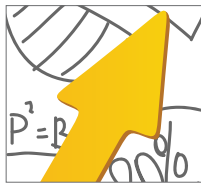
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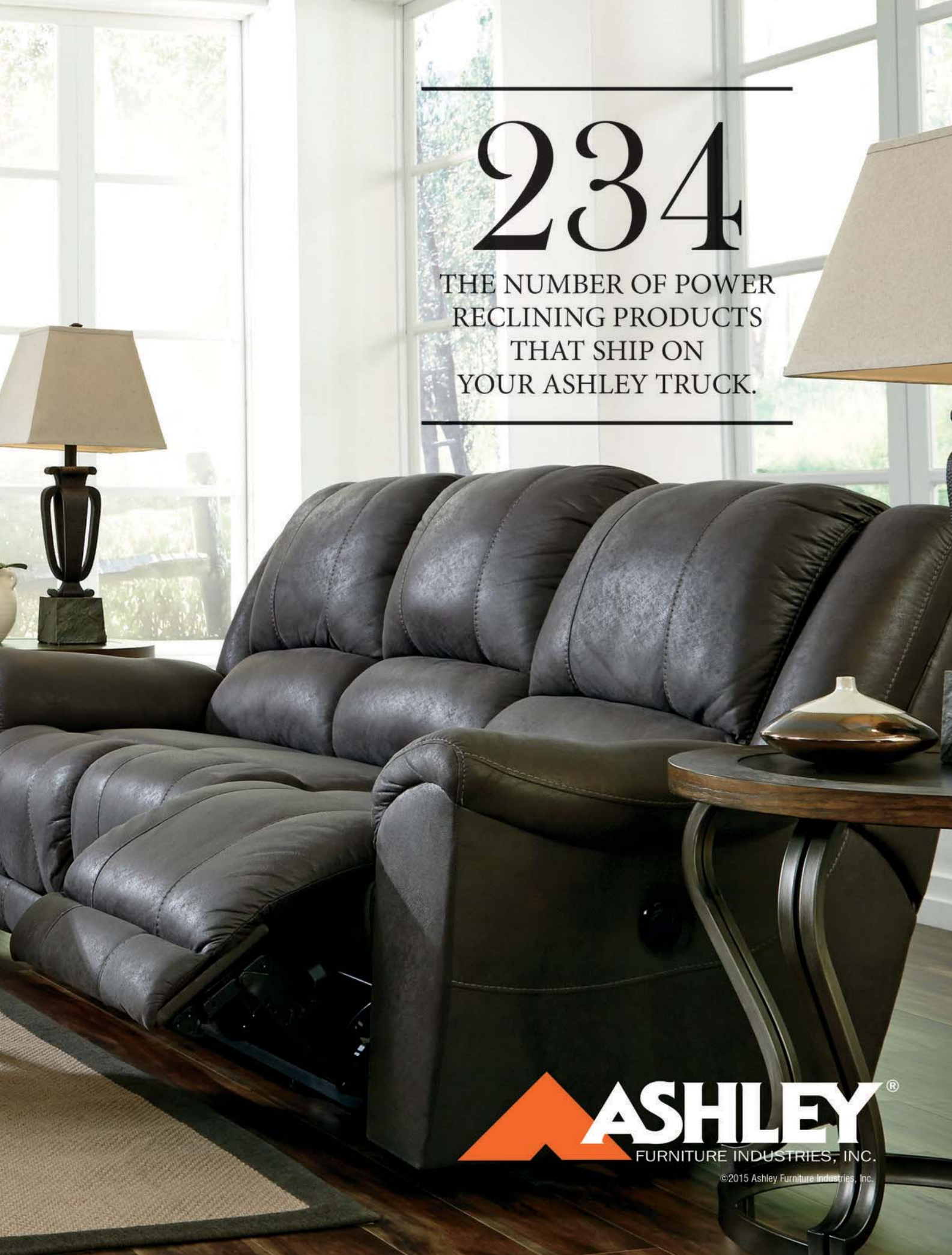


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## EDITOR'S CORNER

A Tale of Two Talents

**L**ight-dark, soft-hard, up-down, yin-yang, right-left. Neither can exist without the other. Likewise, great furniture businesses cannot exist without a vibrant creative side, people who love home furnishings design; as well as those with business talent, reps, buyers and managers whose heads swim with thoughts of GMROI and the next big sale.

In our industry, plenty of resources are invested to bring along the next generation of business talent, but more can be done to nurture great furnishings design. Supporting furniture design schools like Kendall, SCAD and Appalachian State, plus design resources such as the Bienenstock Furniture Library in High Point, are a good place to start.

The Furniture Library is THE PLACE for furniture and interior designers to do research, and develop the next great furnishings ideas. It supports creative talent through its design competition awards and programs.

The Library needs help to continue this work. In 2015, it hopes to raise \$100,000 to expand the collection and fund the preservation of important and rare furniture design books so that they will be available for future generations. You can support this effort by becoming a Friend of the Library at any level. In High Point, please check out it's facilities for research, educational seminars and events at 1009 North Main Street. Visit [furniturelibrary.com](http://furniturelibrary.com) or download a donation form at [www.furninfo.com/library/friends.pdf](http://www.furninfo.com/library/friends.pdf).

Best Regards,

Russell Bienenstock  
Editorial Director

**furniture  
WORLD**

### EXECUTIVE CONTACTS

**Editorial Director, CEO**  
Russell Bienenstock  
[russ@furninfo.com](mailto:russ@furninfo.com)

**Art/ Design Editor**  
Barbara Bienenstock

**Associate Editor**  
S.T. Bienenstock

**Retail Feature Editor**  
Janet Holt-Johnstone

**Comptroller**  
Gifford Dorival  
[gifford@furninfo.com](mailto:gifford@furninfo.com)

**Publisher**  
Barton Bienenstock  
[barton@furninfo.com](mailto:barton@furninfo.com)

**Vice President**  
Thelma Mason Davis  
[thelma@furninfo.com](mailto:thelma@furninfo.com)

**Advertising Sales Director**  
Gary Siegel  
[gary@furninfo.com](mailto:gary@furninfo.com)

**Sales Manager Eastern Region**  
Mark Testa  
[mark@furninfo.com](mailto:mark@furninfo.com)

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# REBRANDING FOR FUN & PROFIT

Edward and Michael Massood rebrand Thomasville of New Jersey as HOME INSPIRATIONS Thomasville, with a little help from their friends.

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

Edward (Eddie) Massood is known as an astute businessman, an expert in operations and logistics. When discussing demographics, he exhibits the talents of a clever strategist. And, when explaining the stunning rebranding of Thomasville of New Jersey, now HOME INSPIRATIONS Thomasville, he reveals his contagious excitement and enthusiasm.

"The transformation begins right at the front door!" he exclaims. "We've created a brick front porch, with double wood doors, added lanterns and informal porch furniture. The ambience is just exactly as it would be when you invite a guest into your own home!" It's a new era to say the least.

The Massood brothers, Eddie and Michael, entered retail as independent dealers at the turn of the millennium. They now operate stores in the New Jersey towns of Paramus,

Princeton, Woodbridge and Rockaway. Over time, as the furniture industry and consumer tastes evolved, the Massoods decided it was time to rebrand, starting with their flagship Paramus location. The new prototype, rebranded, redesigned and remerchandised to fulfill the needs of evolving demographics and consumer tastes, is both timely and far-reaching. "We feel this is the beginning of a new chapter. With the third generation of the Massood family now leading the

Below: Edward Massood and Jena Hall entering the newly re-branded Home Inspirations, Thomasville in Paramus, NJ.



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way, we look forward to continuing to serve consumers throughout New Jersey, and to raising the bar in everything we do.

"Our Paramus location was our largest showroom on two floors, approximately 20,000 square feet. Since we planned to right-size that location, it was the perfect store to create a new retail look and merchandising format. Each of the other stores will be unique but similar."

And what a location! Paramus, New Jersey is one of the largest shopping destinations in the country, generating over \$5 billion in annual retail sales, more than any other zip code in the United States. The store serves such a diverse spectrum of neighborhood lifestyles and reach to surrounding populations, that "Inspirations" is a broad and provocative theme.

Said Massood, "Moving forward, HOME INSPIRATIONS Thomasville's product offering will continue to reflect its namesake, our 'anchor brand', broadened by the Heritage Home family of brands, including Drexel, Lane Venture, Henredon, La

Barge and Maitland Smith. The new concept will also feature a product assortment of private labels, and they will carry the store's new tagline: HOME INSPIRATIONS, Be Inspired. We've developed really new ways to present furniture, we're actually creating fun with lifestyle vignettes.

"So far, the response to the fresh presentation and remodel has been outstanding from both customers and our sales associates. Like many other states, New Jersey has both urban and suburban consumers and they live in spaces varying in size from small condos and apartments to grand and spacious homes. We firmly believe that diverse architecture calls for diverse decorating solutions. Of course, age and ethnic populations are also diverse and these factors play their distinct roles in the product mix we'll present to be truly relevant in today's marketplace."

Another brilliant inspiration, the Massoods called on the dynamic creative strategist and industry icon Jena Hall to mastermind their retail re-creation. "This project is going to set our path for the future," said Eddie. "We

needed someone with tried and true creative flair and instinct, merchandising product knowledge and targeted direction along with retail experience. That's Jena, the right choice! And another benefit, she is also a good friend."

Jena revealed, "We first spoke about getting together a few years earlier, but the timing was not right. Now mutual respect and a good fit for each other's strengths provided a great balance for what we both can do and love to do."

Her first impressions of the task ahead, "Challenging, a major updating of the original customer experience. The real need to thoughtfully develop and present to the consumer a lively new way to shop for furniture. I wanted to make the shopping experience inspirational, a source of ideas, exciting, an element of fun and surprise. The stores have long focused on design services and we've merchandised our offerings with emphasis on personal customization under the banners, 'Have It Your Way' and 'Custom, Just For You'.

"This was a total redo in merchan-



# "We're flirting with the consumer!"

We're showing a Great Bedroom every woman can relate to even if the style is not the one she would normally pick."

dise and approach. It's not about price. It's all about lifestyles, fashion, space solving solutions, decorating and choices. It's about helping the consumer personalize to create a beautiful home. And furniture pieces are selected first for their function, then size and look, not the brand."

Specific features that contribute to the customer experience include: "Inspirational vignettes that 'tell a story', silently, through visual cues as to where each vignette is located such as an urban setting or a suburban McMansion, Small Spaces or Great Places. These settings were created to help the consumer visualize themselves in each room. The goal was to

make definite impressions, knowing that not everyone would like every room. There's nothing wishy-washy about the settings. Each room defines a different type of personality and the goal was to create a lasting impression they could relate to and want to live in."

Fun, whimsy, pervade HOME INSPIRATIONS. "We wanted to put a smile on their faces, have a good time and take the stress out of the experience. We're flirting with the consumer! We're showing a Great Bedroom every woman can relate to even if the style is not the one she would normally pick. What woman would not want a chaise in the bed-

room, a bar and two sofas in a sitting corner to read, knit or simply sip some hot tea or very chilled martinis! Her dream Great Little Closet features the most fabulous custom closet that isn't even custom, just fitted with all neatly hung, color coordinated clothing in a black, white and red closet.

"As you enter HOME INSPIRATIONS there is a section to the left, Small Spaces, designed to appeal to the apartment dweller, not IKEA type furniture, though, but sophisticated, upscale, chic, fashionable and quality. These are smaller-scaled multi-functional pieces that solve space problems. Picture a New Jersey condo, overlooking Manhattan.



*Store vignettes incorporate large wall graphic elements to create dramatic focal points for the newly redesigned store.*

"There's nothing wishy-washy about the settings. Each room defines a different type of personality and the goal was to create a lasting impression they could relate to and want to live in."



*"Great Room Home Inspirations" Area*



*Fun signage and hang tags throughout the store focus customer attention on specific items, rooms, product categories and spaces.*



"The stores have long focused on design services and we've merchandised our offerings with emphasis on personal customization under the banners, 'Have It Your Way' and 'Custom, Just For You'."

We're thinking both sides of the Hudson!

"We added walls, graphic elements, signage, powerful color mixes, some draperies to soften and divide some spaces so that the customer has a place to rest rather than miles of furniture."

Directed to the consumer not yet inside Aladdin's Cave, Jena used store windows to cast the initial spell. She used, "Sheer draperies to achieve several things, to filter the sunlight and give a residential look to the room settings inside. To create a little mystery

from the street that something very special is going on inside... but plenty of tempting furniture can still be seen projecting an inviting look".

A short walk-through Great Places with Jena presents ideas for expansive spaces with "style and a touch of panache for great rooms and larger master suites, walk-in closets typical of the upscale and spacious homes in our suburban areas. Engaging themes like 'Her Great Dream Bedroom', and 'His Great Little Den' with fun, memorable marketing strategies and playful signage are designed to draw consumers in. The 'Chair-ishables' display features high-fashion upholstered dining chairs stacked near the dining presentation so customers can visualize and create an individualized look in the dining room." There's a striking mix of accent pieces, top-spin to the presentations. A mix and match approach.

Eddie added, "Revamped point-of-purchase materials and advertising including more electronic and social media promote the new lifestyle presentations. They were designed to engage customers in new ways. We have also added more technology to our sales floors with iPads for all sales associates, ensuring they never have to leave the floor to access informa-

tion about specific products or special orders."

Jena spoke about changes in advertising. "It was important to maintain the Thomasville affiliation and the halo effect of the brand that is still highly desired by the consumers. But we also needed to signal a change that the store is more than just Thomasville. We added a subtle new name that describes exactly what the store is now, and what the new brand name implies, 'HOME INSPIRATIONS, Thomasville.'"

Spot-on communication, of course, is crucial, and the pivotal decision about a new logo was at the forefront of advertising deliberations. Jena said, "It was a collaborative effort. There was input from key people at the store, and two different types of agencies, each with a specific strength. The name was developed by the Daily Group, Marketing Communications. We knew we wanted a memorable mark, an iconic image that could eventually stand on its own if seen frequently enough.

"The logo is comprised of an H and an I for Home Inspirations, but it also forms a chair, and a fun, whimsical person. We wanted a young, approachable graphic style and that, along with our social media, televi-



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# REBRANDING FOR FUN & PROFIT



*Engaging themes like 'Her Great Dream Bedroom', and 'His Great Little Den' with fun, memorable marketing strategies and playful signs are designed to draw consumers in.*



sion commercials, direct mail and e-blasts are all being produced by Gefen Marketing."

Eddie and his brother and partner Michael are a great mix, Michael controls the financials. He is a CPA with a strong background in commercial real estate and retail. Michael shares with his brother the continuing inspiration of their father and top mentor, also named Mike. Said Eddie, "Coming from the transportation end of the business, I had a unique opportunity to learn about every aspect of furniture retail from my two biggest customers, Thomasville Furniture and Huffman Koos. This opportunity to learn from the best has been a positive influence on our success at retail."

A graduate of Seton Hall University, Eddie's career in the furniture industry has taken him through his years with MGM Transport, Thomasville Home Furnishings of New Jersey and Massood Logistics.

His philosophy and economic foresight now inspire him to, "Believe the

state of our industry will be strong, we will grow and we will prosper. My advice to Furniture World readers would be to always provide consumers with the best buying experience, one that exceeds their expectations. Also, to realize that you can't be all things to all people, just always work be the best given your current mix of offerings and service."

Jena comes from Fort Worth, Texas. She said, "I grew up in my family's retail business and went to my first market with my dad at age 10; I was always working in the store holidays and summers. My red-haired grandmother, 4'11" tall, was a great influence on me. She imparted great knowledge and love for the decorative arts. She had a passion for art and design. Without a passion for what you do, you're doomed! I am blessed with a little talent, a lot of passion and a lot of drive. She was my first mentor – or should I say womanitor?"

"Actually, I've had three fabulous mentors in my career who have been

gracious, supportive, patient and who have helped me reach heights I would have never achieved without them. One of them was my brother, a self-

"Inspirational vignettes tell a story, silently, through visual cues as to where each vignette is located such as an urban setting or a suburban McMansion, Small Spaces or Great Places. These settings were created to help the consumer visualize themselves in each room."



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Spacious design studio (at right). Sales Associates and Designers often team up to go on house calls.



"It was essential to retrain and in some cases hire new sales people to implement the new approach to dealing with customers, handling calls, greeting, closing and delivery, the whole process."

made marvel of a business genius who taught me two great lessons: make sure every deal is a win-win for both sides, and that relationships are far more important than the deal. The deals will come and go but relationships and contacts are your true assets. And he taught me everything I know about merchandising, a major asset when combined with some creativity."

Over the years, Jena has been honored with five Pinnacle Awards, the Withit Founder Award, was inducted as an American Furniture Hall of Fame Fellow in 2012, and the City of Hope's National Spirit of Life.

Both Jena and Eddie are much involved in City of Hope activities "seeking the eradication of bigotry and a cure for cancer". And both support the ADL along with other important areas of outreach.

Jena said, "The Massoods have always supported local charities and when homes are destroyed by floods or fire, they are always there. But in a quiet way, without fanfare."

These two powerhouse people brought HOME INSPIRATIONS Thomasville to the moment of the spectacular grand re-opening on the

evening of January 29, 2015. It followed on the heels of a highly successful soft launch and test of the new retail concept during which several consumers bought entire room settings full of high-ticket furniture! On the 29th, the Massoods and Jena welcomed vendors, VIPs and preferred customers to the celebration. And what they saw and heard from their guests was truly gratifying. Said Eddie, "Their reactions were very positive. And consumer traffic has increased with customers spending more time interacting with our consultants, all very positive signs."

And Jena, "It was fun to see how many smiles were on their faces. I think they enjoyed the humor and the approach. They loved the iconic vignettes like the fooz ball table in the great room, and the space we called 'her great little walk-in dressing room' which has a silk loveseat, French wing chairs, pearl chandeliers and lots of high heel shoes! I think everyone was surprised and had a good time discovering the various little gems. Like the trompe l'oeil murals of a 'Bed of Roses' and the 'House of Cards', 12 feet high and 14 feet wide, behind a bed."

And behind HOME INSPIRATIONS'

spectacular scenes, the necessary nitty-gritty has not been neglected! It was essential to retain and attract new design consultants to complement the new approach from the greeting to delivery, the whole process. Some workshop sessions were personally conducted by Eddie and Jena. "Today our customer expects more from a premium brand," said Massood. "We know most consumers do their research online. If we are fortunate to have them visit our showroom, it's up to us to exceed their expectations, provide inspiration and experienced design consultants. It requires continual training and giving our consultants the necessary tools, it's a must! And we've developed a formal policy

"It requires continual training and giving our consultants the necessary tools, it's a must! And we've developed a formal policy manual."



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# REBRANDING FOR FUN & PROFIT



Edward Massood (left ) and Michael Massood (right). The two partners credit the continuing inspiration of their father and top mentor, also named Mike (center). Photo Credit: Tommy Leflein.

"Eddie and his brother and partner, Mike, are a great mix. A financial guy with a background in retail, Mike shares with his brother the continuing inspiration of their father, their top mentor."

manual."

"Administrative staff had their own training sessions," Jena told us. "When you add new suppliers and different, unfamiliar merchandise, it's important that the back-end understands the subtle but important differences in products."

About 40 per cent of HOME INSPIRATIONS' sales people are designers. "Often sales staff and designers team up on house calls."

Delivery procedures and staffing have been enhanced, although they were already "white glove and top notch", and there are no changes to the back-end and warehousing. "We already are state of the art in those

areas."

The website," said Massood, " with its unlimited space will be a virtual showroom. An e-commerce platform will be operational within the next 12 months."

There'll be more excitement this spring and summer when HOME INSPIRATIONS brings its rebranded, remerchandised and totally re-energized image to Woodbridge, Princeton and Rockaway. Jena said, "On the surface all the stores will 'feel' similar, but there will be changes in the specific merchandise styles based on the demographics of the specific areas. And all the whimsy and fun will travel!"

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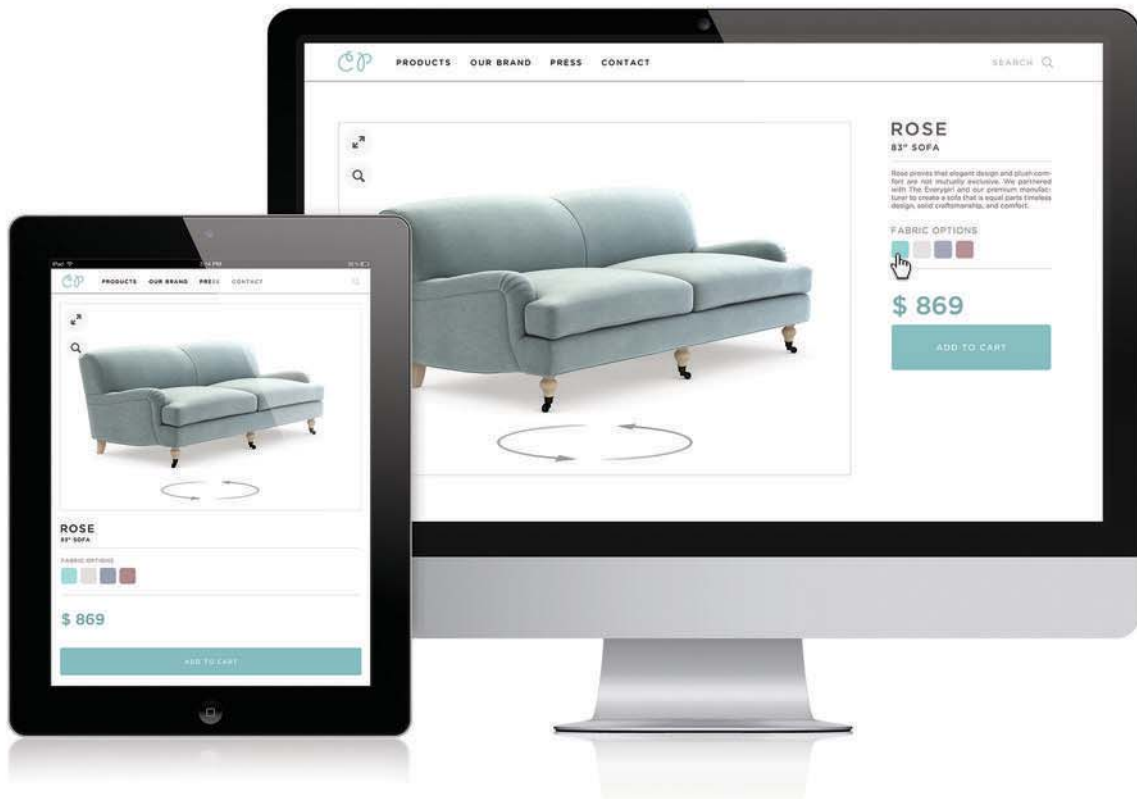




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# 6 RULES FOR PLANNING YOUR BIG EVENT



Planning a BIG EVENT is a lot like planning a wedding.

by Gordon Hecht

Earlier this year some good friends announced that their daughter Kelsey is getting married. She graduated college a few years back and is ready to settle down. The date is set for mid-October and a fairly large wedding is being planned right now.

I decided to call Kelsey and ask her why she needs to start planning now for a wedding more than six months away! She took a few moments and told me there is a lot to do, and not much time to do it. Some of the tasks ahead include: Selecting a place to have the reception, arranging for a photographer, a caterer, a band, the cake, and the invitations. She also told me that her and her fiancé Drew need to purchase a wedding license, a wedding dress, a tuxedo, accessories like a garter and veil, have premarital counseling, and make sure the minister and church are available.

They also have to select the best man and ushers, along with the maid of honor and bridesmaids - and their attire! And when it's all over, they need to note who gave what gift so they can send thank you cards.

Then there is the guest list that started with too many names. It needs to be narrowed down, then narrowed down once more, until it becomes a manageable crowd! And of course they need to be sure that the friends and family members most important to them are available for that date.

A wedding is a BIG EVENT, and costly too. In 2014 the average cost of a wedding was \$25,200. Couples reporting their total outlay said they spent between \$10,000 and \$31,500. A wedding is a once in a lifetime event if you are lucky! But that is still a big investment.

## BIG RETAIL EVENTS

The next BIG EVENT your store promotes will likely also be expensive. Even medium sized stores in medium sized markets can spend \$10,000 to \$31,500 per week promoting a sale! When you start to think about it, planning a BIG EVENT is a lot like planning a wedding. It takes time, thought, and budgeting. I once heard that "Retail is Detail" and the more time

you spend on the details of your event, the greater chance you have of reaping the rewards of your investment. Here are some tips to consider in maximizing the return on your next big event:

### 1. Plan Six Months In Advance:

It seems like a long time, but unless you are planning right now for Labor Day, Columbus Day and Black Friday, chances are that your event will fail. In fact, six months is NOT enough time. World Class Furniture Retailers sketch out their advertising event calendar a year in advance, then revise and update as needed. If you have not planned your calendar for the balance of the year, it may be time to call for extra help. Resources like your product suppliers and media reps can often help you set a basic plan that will include product, promotion, and advertising venues.

### 2. The Guest List:

Back in the day, meaning before 2010, advertising often meant getting your message out to as many people as possible with the hope that some would show up. The number of "impressions" was the buzzword of that time. Some sources claimed that they could get you 800 million impressions in the US, with our 300

"Does your store put on a SALE or an EVENT?

One way to tell is how the store and the staff look."



"It seems like a long time, but unless you plan right now for Labor Day, Columbus Day and Black Friday, chances are that your event will fail."

million population! But today, the way to make advertising pay is to direct your message to the people most likely to buy your products, sometimes called target marketing. Think about hosting a wedding in December in Alaska. It's a beautiful state, but

unlikely to attract many guests from Florida in the winter. In our business, your target area may be as small as 3 miles around your store with very few people under 18 or over 65 considering a furniture purchase. You can then narrow it down to homeowners or renters, male or female, family, singles, or couples. Just like Kelsey and Drew will narrow their list down and narrow it once more, to select the people most important to them.

**3. Attire, Accessories and The Caterer:** Does your store put on a SALE or an EVENT? One way to tell is how the store and the staff look. What's a wedding without a wedding dress, some tuxedos, and hideous bridesmaids' dresses? (Note:

Kelsey assured me that the bridesmaid dresses she chose are very tasteful) Typically, the reception hall is decorated with white and silver accents and flowers at every table. The caterer's wait staff is properly dressed, and fresh tablecloths are on every table. Anyone can peek into the hall and know that a wedding is scheduled for that day.

**4** When you have a promotion, decorate in the theme of the event: It's not corny to have flags or bunting out on national holidays. On Presidents' Day have a few Abe Lincoln look-alikes around for photo opportunities for the kids. On Black Friday Morning, have your staff wear night caps. And, if you are



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THE  
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"For Retailers, the gifts are each sale you ring up!  
The day after your event is time to see who gave what gift."

having a mattress sale, how about having the staff wear non-revealing pajamas. Also you can add badges, store POP, and change the music and videos you show in the store. Your customers will stay longer in your store when you give them a snack or bite to eat. Just ask the people at Bob's Discount Furniture who are growing like crazy and have great snacks and drinks in the store for FREE!

**5. The Best Man & Bridesmaids:** along with the Minister, attendants, and parents of the couple make up the wedding party. Your EVENT will be more successful when you have the right people at your party. Major events have to be "All Hands on Deck" days. That means everyone from the back office or Corporate HQ are at the store. Get as much office help as needed to process buyers' tickets and credit applications. HR people are great

Front Door greeters. Your Operations staff should be willing to pack and wrap purchases, or move tables and lamps as the sales staff works to build tickets. The Store Owners are like parents of the bride. They can pay for lunch and coffee!

**6. Gifts & Thank You Cards:** It's your event and you get the gifts. For Retailers, the gifts are each sale you ring up! The day after your event is time to see who gave what gift. Analyze your results. Key performance measures start with Total Sales, Total Traffic, Total Tickets Written, and Advertising Spend. Take those numbers and calculate Average Sale, Close Rate, Sales Per Guest (total \$\$\$ sold divided by total traffic), Advertising Cost per Guest, and Advertising Cost per Sale. Track every event period and non-event period to see what is working and what improvement is needed. Thank-you cards sent by snail mail may seem old-fashioned, costly and time consuming, however, remember that average sale metrics for most stores in our industry are around \$1000. You better believe that a ponying up for a postcard and a stamp is a small courtesy that will not go unappreciated. You wouldn't expect a new bride and

groom to e-mail a thank you card for that toaster or coffee maker you gave them. Your customers deserve more than an e-mail from you!

Kelsey, Drew and their families have a lot of work ahead of them. Kelsey also has a sister, so her parents Mike and Renee will get to repeat this in a few years. You have to plan for 12-15 events this year and another 12-15 next year. Plan for them, exercise that plan, review and improve it and you will maximize every advertising dollar you spend. And I'll just count the blessings of having just one child, my son!

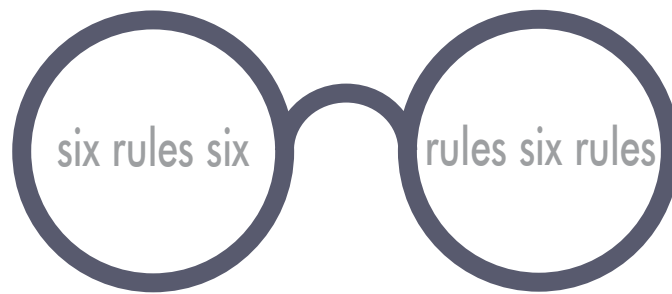
**About Gordon Hecht:** Gordon Hecht is a Growth and Development Manager for National Bedding Company's America's Mattress stores, nearly 400 mostly locally owned and operated bedding stores across the country selling Serta-branded and America's Mattress-branded mattresses. He started his 30+ years experience 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 organiza-

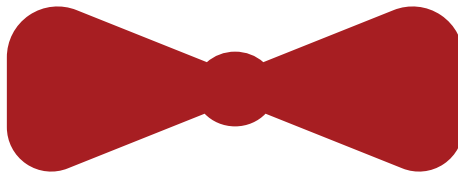


"HR People are great  
front door greeters. Your operations staff should be willing to pack and wrap purchases, or move tables and lamps as the sales staff works to build tickets."





# BIG EVENT PLANNING



tions 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 is a frequent contributing writer for industry magazines. Gordon is based in Columbus, OH and is married with one adult son. Questions and comments can be directed to him at [ghecht@serta.com](mailto:ghecht@serta.com).



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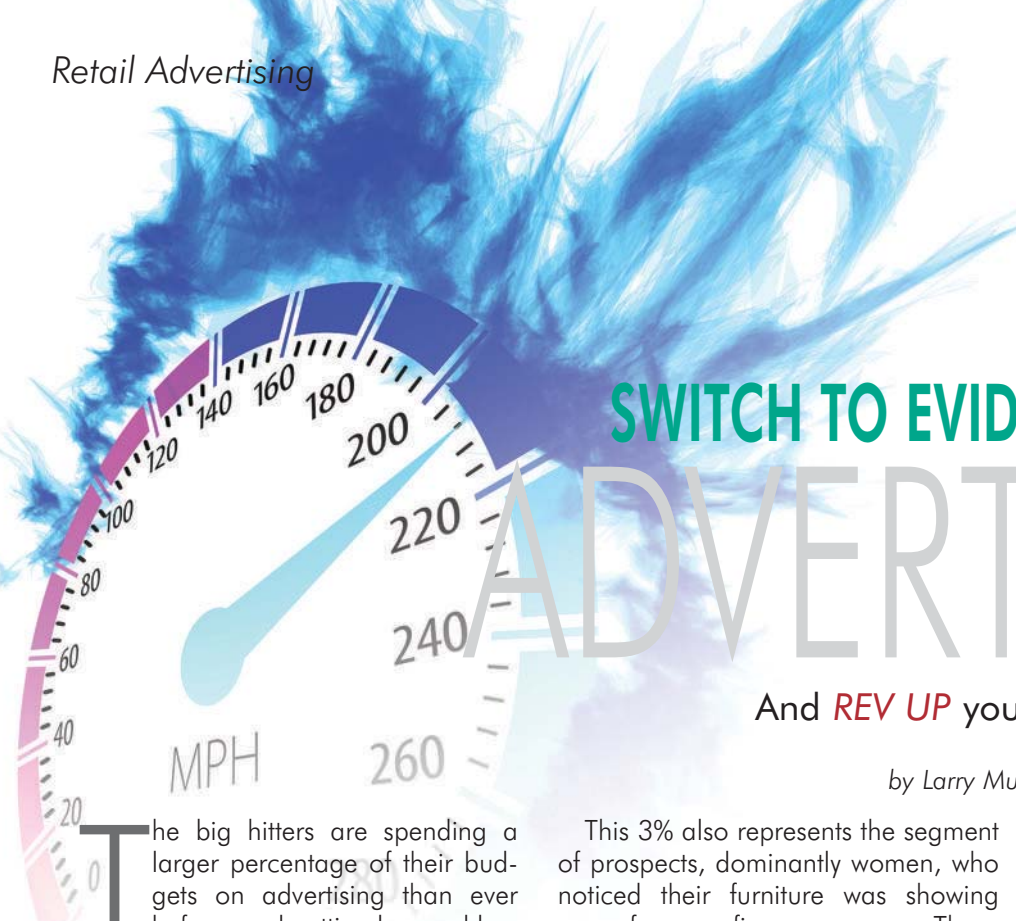
High Point  
Market  
IHFC  
G270  
April 18-23

## SWITCH TO EVIDENCE-BASED

# ADVERTISING

And **REV UP** your business!

by Larry Mullins



The big hitters are spending a larger percentage of their budgets on advertising than ever before, and getting less and less return. Why? Because these home furnishings experts are in a ferocious fight for the 3% of the market that is ready to buy. That market is composed of people who are actively shopping for furniture and mattress sets. Most ad people know this as the “red ocean” of prospects. A very small niche of the market is responsive to advertising, ready to buy and an easy sell, so it’s under constant siege by furniture and mattress retailers, especially the Big Boxes.

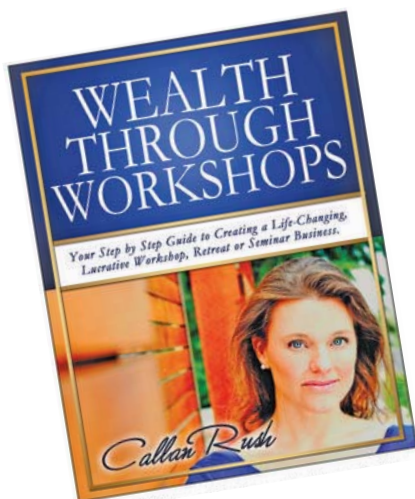
*Callan Rush has achieved super star status on the internet. Smart home furnishings advertisers could learn a great deal from her.*

This 3% also represents the segment of prospects, dominantly women, who noticed their furniture was showing wear four or five years ago. These ladies are not waiting any longer to get a fresh look going in their living rooms. This segment is also composed of people who know they need a new mattress, and they are sick and tired of dealing every morning with chronic back pain. The stories go on and on, they vary, but the bottom line is these folks mean business; they are ready to buy.

The downside of this statistic is inescapable: “97% of your ideal potential customers are NOT looking for your product.” Can this be true? Yes, the vast majority of the people who need your help to solve their

home furnishings necessities are not looking for you or for your competitors.) This is true even though you have a good selection and a service-minded staff that could help them with the perfect solutions to their problems. These prospective customers are a tougher sell, yet they represent a huge blue ocean of potential sales and profit. Let’s briefly examine the 97% segment, and break it down to see how you can reach them.

Just beyond the 3% actively shopping, there are folks representing about 7% of the market, who are not quite ready to buy. Even so, they may like your store and they are at least open to a persuasive, “buy now” message. These 7% prospects have a problem to solve, and they know it. If



“Positioning the purchase refers to strategically organizing the content of an ad so that it leads the customer to identify with it and come to the logical conclusion that you are the trusted adviser who understands her problem and that she needs what you are offering and she needs it now.”





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## High Point Furniture Market

138 South Main St. - Showroom dates: April 17-21

# Rev up your mattress advertising



we drill down further, there is a much larger, third category of potential customers. These are the 30% of buyers who are aware that they have a problem to solve, yet they have consciously decided to put off the purchase. Possibly when that promotion at work comes through they will be ready to buy. Or perhaps they will become active shoppers when their cash flow improves. Or maybe they want to wait until after they get the car paid off. They want a solution, but they believe the timing isn't right.

The next 30% of your ideal clients are simply unaware. They just are not mindful that you could help them resolve their problems. Other issues have priority and dominate their concerns anyway. They are not actively shopping for furniture or mattress sets. And finally, there is a 30% segment of the general public who are just not interested. They are not persuadable.

At least, they are not persuadable at this time.

## WHERE DID THESE STATISTICS COME FROM?

Good question. A woman who became a multi-millionaire as a result of her work on the internet provided these numbers. Her name is Callan Rush. I find it fascinating that it is the internet marketing experts who are more tuned into attracting clients by focusing on solving their problems.

Rush recently wrote a book titled: "Wealth Through Workshops" in which she explained her marketing theories. Retailers who are price-item focused could learn a great deal from Rush. She is one of several female entrepreneurs who have capitalized on their nurturing, service-oriented natures and have made personal fortunes on the internet.

High end, middle-of-the-road, lower end. It really doesn't matter. Virtually all mattress ads offer guaranteed lowest prices, generous "free" interest, free removal of all bedding, etc., etc. Ads including the ones pictured above feature a large number of offers for plush, memory foam and hybrids. These offers are confusing and meaningless to most prospects. These stores propose all kinds of goodies for prospects, but they omit one essential thing. they fail to offer the single most important thing that their potential clients are looking for. Can you guess what that is?

There are also fortunes to be made in retail home furnishings by the entrepreneurs who understand how to leverage their offers to dramatically increase market share. The purpose of this article is twofold.

1. To clearly demonstrate to you why most furniture and mattress advertising is not working today and what you can do to fix yours.







Contempo Collection Bedroom in Solid Alder

**WIN AN  
Apple i-Pad Air 2**  
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One retail winner each  
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Solid Wood  
casual dining  
from GS Furniture



- Mastercraft SOLID WOOD BEDROOM collections; with and without bed storage....VALUE PRICED.
- GS Furniture dining collections include designs in CLASSIC OAK, ARTS & CRAFTS, CONTEMPORARY, TRADITIONAL, and TRANSITIONAL styles.
- Three dining collections available in MULTIPLE FINISHES for SPECIAL ORDER OPTIONS.
- DURABLE LAMINATE TOP TABLES available in two collections.
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- Fast shipping from WAREHOUSE STOCK...CONTAINER program available.
- SOLID WOOD IS OUR SPECIALTY.



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**See GS Furniture & Mastercraft at High Point, IHFC Green Wing G-572**

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www.gsfurniture.com & www.mastercraftcollections.com



# REV UP YOUR ADVERTISING

2. How, for the same amount of money you are spending now (or less,) you can begin to turbo-charge your offers and stand out above the crowd in the price-item circus.

## THE PRICE-ITEM CIRCUS

There are no secrets in advertising. There is, however, a huge, neglected reservoir of long-standing principles that have been tested and retested and consistently proven to be effective.

These principles are as valid today as they ever were. Good ads stand out in the wasteland of glitzy, but hastily produced, content-starved home furnishings ads. The Big Boxes copy each other and the independents follow suit. Rather than copying other stores, wise furniture and mattress entrepreneurs would be better off to heed that advice of Mark Cuban, of "Shark Tank" fame:

"Wherever I see people doing something the way it's always been done,

the way it's 'supposed' to be done, following the same old trends, well, that's just a big red flag to me to go look somewhere else."

Callan Rush states in her book that the #1 reason most businesses fail is that they are trying to fight it out in a bloody ocean battle for 3% of active shoppers. Very few furniture and mattress retailers know the secrets of how to access the neglected 67% of their ideal clients who have a home furnishings problem to solve. And yet, all that these prospects need is just a little education to become aware that your organization is essential to improving their lives. Follow me through this article and I will show you a simple "secret sauce" formula to help.

## HOW TO MAKE AN IRRESISTIBLE BEDDING OFFER

Let's begin with bedding. In my judgment, mattress advertising has never been so inadequate and weak. The only reason mattress specialty stores spring up everywhere is because full line home furnishings stores do such a poor job of promoting the

"Rather than copying other stores, wise furniture and mattress entrepreneurs would be better off to heed that advice of Mark Cuban, of "Shark Tank" fame..."



Forget leather, microfiber or chenille. Give your customers what they really want – plastic. With the re•novate card from TD Retail Card Services, your customers get exactly what they want today – and gives them the power to come back for more tomorrow. It also gives your business a boost, with more approvals, higher limits and bigger sales.

**The easiest way to lift profits for your business.**

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# *See What's New*

## **Chromecraft, Peters-Revington & Douglas**

*Styled Right. Priced Right.*

**Chromecraft: The Leader in Caster Dining Is Back!**



### **CHROMECRAFT**

*Custom swivel-tilt caster dining with 50 fabrics and choice of two finishes.*



### **Peters-Revington**

*Set shown is from the Briarwood Collection Collection... one of 14 occasional table collections offered by Peters-Revington.*

*Centralized warehouse distribution center in Senatobia, MS*

### **DOUGLAS** *Casual Living*

*Over 10 styles of chairs, many in a choice of two finishes and matching family friendly high pressure laminate table tops.*



**See Chromecraft, Peters-Revington & Douglas at High Point**  
**IHFC Hamilton Wing H1147**

**Chromecraft Revington Douglas Industries, Inc.**

2009 S. Parco Ave. Ontario, CA 91761 Tel: 909.930.9891

# 4 Steps to a compelling offer

product. When you examine all the bedding offers, there is little to distinguish them. Virtually all mattress ads offer guaranteed lowest prices, generous “free” interest, free removal of old bedding, etc., etc. The ads of leading stores feature a large number of offers for plush, memory foam, and hybrid mattress sets that are confusing and meaningless to most prospects. These stores propose everything to prospects but one essential thing: They fail to offer what their potential clients are looking for.

Surprise. A mattress is a “sack of sand.” Prospects are not looking for the largest discount on an item they have no knowledge about and no way to evaluate. These potential clients are looking for someone they can trust. They are baffled by a huge selection of mattresses. What they need is a trusted advisor who will guide them to the perfect bed for their needs and budget. Collect all the mattress ads you can for a week or so... all the ROP ads, all the flyers. Watch all the TV spots on mattresses carefully. It is highly unlikely you will see a mattress ad that is properly positioned and also addresses the prospect’s most important concern.

No matter how great your offer is, it must be properly positioned. And, it must address the concerns of the targeted prospect (see exhibit above). This is the trickiest part of creating a compelling offer. Positioning is an art. Callan Rush describes it this way: “Positioning the purchase refers to strategically organizing the content of an ad so that it leads the customer to identify with it and come to the logical conclusion that you are the trusted adviser who understands her problem and that she needs what you are offering and she needs it now.” Once you master this very difficult art, everything else becomes easy.

**Slumberland offers the most complete selection of famous brand mattresses in Minnesota**

**2 Want the Health Benefits of a New Premium Mattress, But Don't Know Where to Start? A Factory-Trained Slumberland Sales Consultant Can Lead**

**3 You to the Perfect Bed AND Save You Money. GUARANTEED.**

At Slumberland one of our expert sales consultants can help you test the comfort of traditional pocketed innerspring ... or try out the remarkable, new cool memory foam technologies. You may prefer the revolutionary concept of a combination of traditional innerspring and cool memory foam. Whatever you need, you will find it here at Slumberland. *Every size, every style, every firmness is on sale right now!*

*There is no substitute for strong competitive merchandising and a trained sales force. However, when you add a compelling, targeted headline, appropriate graphics, and benefit-loaded informative copy, response will soar.*

**Entire Stock! All Beautyrest, BeautySleep and Posturepedic Mattresses at Jaw-Dropping Doorbuster Blowout Discounts!**

<b>POSTUREPEDIC FIRM QUEEN SET</b> 62% OFF <b>BLOWOUT: \$499</b> All Sizes on Sale!	<b>PILLOW TOP QUEEN SET</b> 56% OFF <b>BLOWOUT: \$699</b> All Sizes on Sale!	<b>LUXURY QUEEN SET</b> 49% OFF <b>BLOWOUT: \$1099</b> All Sizes on Sale!	<b>POSTUREPEDIC CUSHION QUEEN SET</b> 53% OFF <b>BLOWOUT: \$1499</b> All Sizes on Sale!
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**WHY BUY YOUR TEMPUR-PEDIC MATTRESS ANYWHERE ELSE?**

**0% APR for 5 YEARS\*** for Tempur-Pedic set purchases.

**FREE Local Delivery and Setup.** With any Tempur-Pedic set purchase. See store for details.

**Buy any Tempur-Pedic mattress set at Slumberland and get \$300 IN FREE FURNITURE!\***

\*Bonus Bucks voucher for \$300 worth of Slumberland furniture will be issued at time of purchase. Please see store for details.

**FINAL WEEK!** Sealy Nokomis Euro Top Truckload Selloff!

**Features found in mattresses at over twice this doorbuster price!**

- Supremely comfortable stretch breathable cover with super soft foam cushioning.
- Solid edge High Density foam edge encased support for long lasting sleeping comfort.
- Unique individually wrapped coils eliminate motion transfer and assure that togetherness is optional!

**FINAL WEEK! Save \$600 on a List \$999 Sealy Euro Top Queen Set Blowout: \$399 ALL SIZES ON SALE!**

## FOUR STEPS TO A COMPELLING OFFER

**1 First define your target audience.** Consider the illustrations you are using. Who is most likely to be interested in a new mattress? Most bedding ads are made by creators who seem to assume the store’s prospective customers are always gorgeous, vibrant young women. This is half true at best. Consider the older lady or gentleman who wakes up every morning with a backache because their mattress is worn out. See the exhibit for a few creative solutions to targeting your ad more effectively.

**2 Consider and articulate the deepest concerns of your prospects.** They may not be able to put their concerns into words. But if you can define their needs, you will have gone a long way towards winning them over. Check the exhibit above to see an effective appeal that will resonate with almost any bedding prospect: “Want all the health benefits of a new

mattress but don’t know where to start?”

**3 Offer a solution to address their concerns.** “One of our factory-trained experts will guide you to the perfect bed for your body, GUARANTEED.” Obviously you must deliver on your promise when they visit the store. Assuming you are able to do so, you will have attained the precious role of

“There is a much larger, third category of potential customers, the 30% of buyers who are aware that they have a problem, yet have decided to put off the purchase.”





## WHO LOVES OUTDOOR?

85%

MILLENNIALS

83%

GEN X

73%

BABY BOOMERS

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If you haven't added Agio to your showroom floor, something's just not adding up. As more and more consumers, of all ages, add outdoor rooms to their home improvement project lists, you have an unprecedented opportunity. Give your sales a boost and watch your margins soar with the very latest in designs from Agio.

To discover the benefits, and the profits, of becoming an Agio retailer, visit [agio-usa.com/retailer](http://agio-usa.com/retailer) today.

Agio is the registered trademark of Agio International Company, Ltd.  

*agio*<sup>®</sup>  
Life Begins Outdoors.<sup>™</sup>



trusted advisor, and you will have acquired a valuable lifetime client.

**4. Instruct your sales consultants in how to sell the ultimate dream.** Most sales people are trained to understand the key principle of a sales presentation: "Never point out a product feature without explaining the benefit it provides." For example: "This premium mattress features 550 pocketed coil springs to cradle you in perfect comfort." Master sales consultants go further. They know the added value of benefits can accumulate to support the ultimate dream of better, more effervescent health: "When you sleep better the health benefits can be a game-changer for improving your life."

During a time when home furnishings have never been a greater value, furniture and mattress advertising has never been so ineffective and wasteful. And herein lies the opportunity for the

independent furniture entrepreneur to recapture market share by adopting Evidence-Based Advertising.

The original theory was: Just run more advertising than anyone else, and overwhelm the market with a geyser of print and TV. Expensive, but it did work for a while, especially when the use of slick color flyers was a relatively new idea. But, newspapers are now cluttered with look-alike flyers and the playing field has leveled. Moreover, the recession-burned customer is tougher and more suspicious. So the big box tsunami of TV and print is now draining more and more cash while producing less and less result.

It is time for independent home furnishings entrepreneurs to review the proven, Evidence-Based principles about advertising and put them to work. Resolve to start creating messages that are content-rich, and communicate empathy for a prospect's concerns. While your competitors are

still frozen like a deer in the headlights, get ahead of the curve with Evidence-Based furniture advertising. Tested advertising principles will put you well ahead of all your competitors.

More information on Evidence-Based advertising principles and "Blue Ocean" philosophy, can be found by clicking on "View all articles by Larry Mullins" on the furninfo.com website at: <http://www.furninfo.com/Authors/List>

**"Resolve to start creating messages that are content-rich, and that communicate empathy for a prospect's concerns."**

Larry Mullins is a contributing editor for Furniture World. He has acquired 30+ years of experience on the front lines of furniture marketing. Larry's mainstream executive experience, his creative work with promotion specialists, and mastery of timeless advertising principles have established him as one of the foremost experts in furniture marketing. Larry's turnkey Mega-Impact programs produce legendary results for everything from cash raising events to profitable exit strategies. His newest, innovative Internet Leverage Strategies have produced record-breaking increases in sales and profits in recent months. Larry is founder and CEO of UltraSales, Inc. and can be reached directly at 904.794.9212.

See more articles by Larry at <http://furninfo.com/Authors/List> or [www.ultrasales.com](http://www.ultrasales.com).



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Skip the walk  
across High Point.

Make Feizy your  
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Baxter 8370F Midnight Blue

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AN OPPORTUNITY TO

# KEEP YOUR WORD

When can a customer service call be a good thing?

by Peter Schlosser

Several years ago I had the pleasure of visiting with Ron and Tim Deets at Deets Furniture in Norfolk, Nebraska. I remember three things most clearly about that trip. First, their fanatic love of Traeger smokers. Second, my decision to refuel my rental car somewhere on the way back to Omaha, not realizing that within the vast expanses of corn and cattle in our nation's grain belt, that might not be a possibility.

But, most striking was a comment the brothers made to me regarding service. They said that they view service calls as a good thing. I was dumbstruck by that opinion, and of course I disagreed, replying that service, in my opinion, was a failure. After all, if the delivery didn't go right, how is that a good thing? They insisted it was, that it gave them the opportunity to prove to their customers that they stand behind their reputation and resolve each concern at a high level. Poppycock, I thought.

It wasn't until years later—recently, in fact—that the gravity of their statement finally made sense to me.

Having been brought up in our industry in North Carolina in the 1990s, where forty-eight-state delivery was the norm, there was no margin for error. The delivery either stuck, or the costs associated with backpedaling and satisfying the customer in far-flung places like Fresno and Fargo seriously deteriorated any profit we had made on the sale. So to say service was a good thing, made absolutely no sense to me.

Joni Mitchell sang, "I look at life from both sides now," and I understand how that applies as I get older. After I left life on the road I settled into a quality management position in the mid-South in a heavily military community. Soldiers and their families come and go quite frequently, and it's the norm to have service people in fatigues pick up their furniture in our will call area. We make service calls on post, with Chinook and Blackhawk helicopters flying right overhead. And it became clear when I got here that service means exactly what Ron and Tim told me it did: An opportunity to keep our word.

## FINDING THE RIGHT SERVICE PEOPLE

If you want to have a chance of keeping your word to every customer, you must have a truly successful service department. That necessarily begins with hiring the right service people. What does that mean, anyway, the right people? Let me ask you to consider service as not so much a function of the warehouse, as it is a function of sales.

**Excellent Service Managers:** An

"Essentially, the bottom line is, We have your money and we are not giving it back, but I personally guarantee you will be pleased with the results."



The **#1 in-demand** retail management software  
Built on **5 SMART Steps™** that maximize your profitability

- Elite Customer Support
- Largest Customer Base
- Integration Partners
- Cloud Solutions
- Professional Services
- Hands-on Training

“Since implementing PROFIT *systems*, we have grown our volume, increased GMROI, and doubled our profit.”  
– Michael Alan Furniture



**Visit Us At High Point Market**  
**April 18 - 23**  
**Plaza Suites - Retailer Resource Center**  
**1st Floor, 1-527, #22 and 23**



“If you feel that your consumers are not as discerning when it comes to low-end goods as they are with high-end goods, I can absolutely assure you that you are dead wrong.”

excellent service department manager must be a skilled negotiator. He or she is:

- *Charged with calling someone who is not happy with what they bought, who has an issue, a complaint, a concern.*
- *Is responsible for maintaining a sale. Refunds are not even on the table.*
- *Has to convince a customer who is already upset, that he will have to bring the piece back to the shop for repairs. Repairs? Parts??*
- *Has to be able to convince the customer that the work will solve the issues, without mentioning that a discount or allowance isn't a possibility.*
- *Must be firm and yet empathetic, kind but unyielding, savvy but compassionate, calculating but seemingly liberal.*

Essentially, the bottom line is, We have your money and we are not giving it back, but I personally guarantee you will be pleased with the results.

When owners recruit people for sales, they scrutinize their credentials, looking for those who can get people to buy. This requires talents, many of which were mentioned at the end of

the last paragraph. So why is service never given the same consideration? A service manager or representative has to have a personality that makes people feel comfortable and safe. Here are a few ways to make that possible.

- *Don't address customers by their last name, as Mr. Smith or Mrs. Jones. Call them Michael and Jennifer.*
- *Talk colloquially, as if you've known each other before, in a friendly tone, to disarm the otherwise confrontational stance they're expecting.*
- *Always listen to their concerns first, and always have a solution to their problem ready before the conversation starts.*

Of course customers have their own agenda, so here are some truisms to consider before making each and every call:

1. Customers know you're out to save the sale.
2. They are not interested in multiple trips to their homes.
3. They know that refunds are a long shot but, given the opportunity to request them, they will give it a

try anyway.

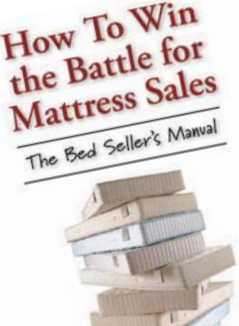
4. They are aware that social media is like a loaded gun pointed right at the retailer, and that the service manager or service technician has the capacity to pull the trigger on themselves.

5. Most customers simply want someone to listen to their concerns, and solve their problems.

**Preparation is a Must:** Service managers who are the best at solving customer's problems, gather as much information as they can about each case before calling about a service issue, including:

- *Are parts available?*
- *According to information on hand, what is the real problem likely to be?*
- *How long have they had this issue?*
- *What is the likelihood of success if Option A, B or C is presented?*

There's nothing worse than asking a customer to take time off from work to wait for service to arrive, only to find out that the problem could have been solved with a new part. A skilled and



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"Social media is like a loaded gun pointed right at the retailer, and the service manager or technician has the capacity to pull the trigger on themselves."

knowledgeable service manager makes decisions that minimize inconvenience for the customer, retains the customer's loyalty, and minimizes expense for the company.

### TROUBLE WITH TECHS

A troubling truth that makes it difficult for retailers to keep their service promises, is that most find it difficult to recruit, or even find, service technicians. In the old days (pre-2000), domestic producers issued authorizations for repair allowances, expecting retailers to solve the problems themselves. They would also issue return authorizations (RA's), for items that exceeded the talents of most repair techs to fix. No more! These days, parts can be ordered with relative ease, and chucking furniture in the trash in exchange for full credit is common. The problem is that this made people like me—dyed in the wool, classically trained repair professionals—virtually obsolete. Those with other talents migrated to management positions, or opened their own shops, or gave up altogether. Why pay a tech \$20 an hour to work on furniture whose value is less than the time it takes to fix it? A vicious cycle ensues, and retailers find themselves conscripting people into repair positions who are wholly unqualified, or who are capable, but must learn without guidance or training. Figure it out, I've heard many, many techs tell me of their training experiences. That, to me, is a travesty and sets individuals up for failure.

I used to recruit people who showed

unusual characteristics: Artistic, sarcastic, quirky, inked, peripheral, highly intelligent, underachievers. Exhibit any of these personality traits around me and I start asking questions. Are you interested in repair? Has anyone ever told you that you have artistic talent? The funny thing is, the people I usually end up working with are those with one foot out the door because "they're not working out." Of course not! They have a need to express themselves, and furniture repair is as much an art form as oil painting or pencils: Each involves color, a medium to apply the color, and a canvas, be it a piece of watercolor paper or a drawer with a rub-through. And furniture repair isn't something you learn in a week or a month or a year, it is a skill, a genuine skill like jewelry-making or dance or husbandry or boat-making. To assume otherwise puts undue pressure on the student and dramatically increases the chances of failure.

Repair, in my opinion, is a respected but underappreciated aspect of our business, one that requires highly-paid people to staff it, and fairly expensive materials and tools. But it's a necessary evil that any furniture retailer must have, much like an auto dealer has a garage to service the cars he sells. Like cars, furniture does not come out of the box in pristine condition. To pre-

vent exchanges and dissatisfied customers, deluxers and service techs routinely have to:

1. Touch up glue and gesso smears under the finish, which are light spots that stand out;
2. Relacquer tops due to packing marks (this is difficult when it's a no-rub dining table finished with catalyzed lacquer and all you have with which to fix it with are spray cans).
3. Repair finishes that are expressly irreparable, particularly printed finishes that incorporate a slip component that prevents lacquer from sticking.
4. Re-attach peeling veneer, particularly on drawer edges, which can be sharp.
5. Correctly stuff back pillows that show up with one sagging corner and one stuffed one.

...and so on ad infinitum. Not having these trained individuals puts limits on a furniture retailer's ability to satisfy customers and causes clearance centers to literally burst at the seams.

Sadly, there are few avenues for retailers to choose from when it comes to training technicians. Some forward-thinking manufacturers have repair



# SERVICE





THE KINGSLEY COLLECTION

# TRULY ORIGINAL

RUGS AND PILLOWS

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# AN OPPORTUNITY TO KEEP YOUR WORD

programs, and there are touch-up suppliers that offer two and three-day cram sessions on repair. One excellent resource available to anyone is, "Understanding Wood Finishing" by Bob Flexner; the most recent edition has been expanded to provide twice the material of the earlier editions.

## WHAT COULD OUR INDUSTRY DO?

I long ago felt that large retail chains would be wise to establish repair "universities" at their corporate offices to not only establish norms and benchmark techniques and tools, but to provide a universal methodology for repairing product specific to their showrooms. Traveling repair professionals could visit stores regionally for continuing education, so to speak, or to address difficulties that technicians were facing. This would also allow for valuable feedback to buyers so they can better address repeat problems such as failing fabrics or cracking joints. They could also offer real-time help through a web portal.

Further, I firmly believe that furniture manufacturers, domestic and international, would benefit immensely from feedback from the stores to whom they sell their furniture. Now, let me qualify this by saying, I do not believe that every retailer should be allowed to do this. There are those in my trade who like to complain about every little thing that causes them work, and there are those who are gifted at what they do, who can see patterns, analyze problems, and offer solutions. Large manufacturers with involved, attentive representatives actively encourage feed-


back from dealers, and analyze metrics from their parts request department to identify trouble areas. One step further would be to input these trends electronically, directly to plant executives who can decide for themselves which issues are valid concerns from a manufacturing standpoint. If information is power, then this data would be immensely useful in correcting production issues in their infancy before they become full-blown crises.

## CONCLUSION

Service must be taken as seriously as sales if we are to succeed long-term as an industry. It is imprudent to assume that people will always need furniture and as an industry, we can dumb down standards and continue to dispose of defective product as a way to deal with manufacturing issues. We're forgetting one critical component of all this: The customer. If you feel that consumers are not as discerning when it comes to low-end goods as they are with high-end goods, I can absolutely assure you that you are dead wrong! And, if you assign more importance to large tickets than small tickets, or expensive products than more affordable products, you are making a

colossal mistake. I have a saying when it comes to meeting people, wherever that is, whoever they are: You never know who you're talking to. The guy in the suit might be a bum, and the woman in flipflops and a sun visor might own her own firm. Look at customers the same way. Each one should be treated as a friend, someone who you want to help, to make comfortable with your good intentions. You can make them feel as though your entire day was begun simply to talk to them and resolve their worries. It's not hard. You just have to hire the best service managers and repair techs so that all your service calls will be an opportunity to keep your word.

**About Peter Schlosser:** Peter Schlosser is a quality control manager living in middle Tennessee. He is a contributing editor to *Furniture World* where he writes about service, repair and backend operations. Questions on any aspect of this article, or on service or furniture repair, can be directed to Peter Schlosser at [pschlosser@furninfo.com](mailto:pschlosser@furninfo.com).



"If you assign more importance to large tickets than small tickets, you are making a colossal mistake."

# SERVICE





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BEST SELLING

# DESIGNS



## Capel Rugs

Pasadena is machine-made in Belgium of 100% olefin in four fashionable colorways, black, cream flower, cream stripe and terra cotta. The collection is available in 3'11"x5'6", 5'3"x7'6" and 7'10"x11'. A 5'3"x7'6" could retail for \$249.

Contact information on page 112.



## Arthur W. Brown

From entryway to mud room to foyer to game room to basement, the functional "Sit and Store" is as stylish as it is versatile. Available in Maple and Oak, 6 decorative molding styles and 12 standard finishes. Made in America.

Contact information on page 112.



## Broyhill

The Chevron dining group is part of the New Vintage Collection. Features include antique-inspired pulls and knobs which complement the four fashion finishes: Vintage Brown, Timeworn Ebony, Vintage White and Vanity Red.

Contact information on page 112.







## Kas Rugs

Grey Wheels in Motion, in polyester with hand hooked construction. Available in seven sizes from scatter to room size.

Contact information on page 112.



## Horizon Home

New Rio Occasional tables are made of exotic solid hardwood 2" tops. Each top has unique grain and a beveled edge for a natural look. The stylized base is solid metal with a gold tone lacquer finish for a high-end look and feel.

Contact information on page 112.



## Philips Collection

Hand crafted by an Indonesian artist, this unique wood cabinet is finished with the artist's signature. The Gray Stone finish shows the grain of the wood in the look of stone. Available in other interesting shapes.

Contact information on page 112.



## Omnia

The "Tratto" sofa features motorized headrests and chaise cushion recliners for ultimate personalized comfort. Subtle contrast stitching and chrome legs add to its refined silhouette. Made in America.

Contact information on page 112.





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BEST SELLING

# DESIGNS



## Loloi

Hand stitched in India of 100% authentic cowhide, Promenade is a contemporary version of the cowhide rug. This modern collection offers patterns in a variety of graphic designs with strong contrast of light and dark hides.

Contact information on page 112.



## Klaussner

The Willow Dining group is shown in Harbor (whitewash, multi-shade) finish. Fabrics are Sunbrella or Outdura fabrics-solution dyed acrylics. The Willow collection includes deep-seating, occasional and dining.

Contact information on page 112.



## Borkholder

The Sunset Hills Table is pictured in solid cherry wood with Sealy finish. Also available in ebony finish.

Contact information on page 112.



## Four Hands

The Sherbrooke Flip Sofa is from the Kensington Collection. This sofa includes chaise lounge that flips from left to right. Seating is feather wrapped for comfort.

Contact information on page 112.





## Maxwood Furniture

The "Sumo" twin over full bunk bed, shown in chestnut. Ample bottom bunk space allows plenty of room for story-time or sleepovers. Upstairs is easily accessed with the extra-safe staircase.

Contact information on page 112.

## Elran

The Charlie collection features a contemporary design with clean lines, sculpted track arms, a contoured foam back and inside pull handles. Other features include optional power recliners and matching loveseat.

Contact information on page 112.



## Jaipur

From the National Geographic Collection, this striking rug is made of 100% wool with flat weave premium construction.

Contact information on page 112.

## Furniture of America

The Petersburg II counter-height table set is ideal for grand dining spaces. With a beautifully-crafted table top and curved claw feet, its fine details perfectly complement any traditional setting.

Contact information on page 112.



# BEST SELLING DESIGNS



## Nourison

Soft and serene, the Twilight Collection reflects the special beauty of early evening in its treatment of light. These scintillating wool-blend rugs are a perfect complement to today's leading trends in contemporary furnishings. Power loomed from 70% wool, 30% viscose.

Contact information on page 112.



## Surya

The Sulak lamp has a textured resin base featuring a distressed sandstone finish. It is paired with a retro-inspired drum shade.

Contact information on page 112.



## Craft + Main

The Pershing Hall accent chair is made of solid Ash wood with a multi-step classic finish. Available in top quality linen blends with a large selection of fabric combinations.

Contact information on page 112.



## Standard Furniture

The Montana bedroom is casual and rugged with rustic pine board laminates enhanced by sawmarks and knotty graining. Aged metal corner brackets add bold detailing.

Contact information on page 112.





## Manhattan Comfort

The Morning Side Entertainment Center has built-in brackets for TV mounting. It has a High definition, ultra-resistant finish with natural wood texture and stylish wood patterns. The unique paint is protected with Micro-ban Antibacterial Protection.

Contact information page 112.



## Tayse Rugs

Purposefully distressed finish and hemmed short edges complete the handmade look of this area rug. Soft 100% polypropylene fibers are naturally stain-resistant. Shown in neutral colors of teal blue and ecru.

Contact information on page 112.



## Screen Gems

The Spiral Metal Table has popular and upscale body brandishing metal rings in a spiraling cross formed configuration. It is 24" D x 24" H.

Contact information on page 112.

## Thomasville

Sedwick is from Impressions, a new upholstery program. Features include sturdy foundation, high density foam seat cushions, virgin fiber filled back cushions and luxurious down blend toss pillows.

Contact information on page 112.



# BEST SELLING DESIGNS



## Oriental Weavers

The Sedona collection features heavily saturated shades of deep midnight teal, saffron gold and carnelian red in globally influenced designs. Constructed from a polypropylene/nylon blend. Made in the USA. Suggested retail \$299 for 5'x8'.

Contact information on page 112.



## Gabby

The Henkel Desk with wood framed black iron quatrefoils is a stunning writing desk with drawers.

Contact information page 112.



## Donco

T/F denim bunkbed, in a washed denim finish, with solid pine, and distressed hardwood caps. Mattress-ready with slatrolls/center supports. Suggested retail \$629.

Contact information on page 112.



## Ashley

The "Barinteen-Granite" upholstery collection with the stylish look and feel of textured gray, offers comfort without sacrificing looks. Nail head accents add a finishing touch to dress up any home.

Contact information on page 112.



## GS Furniture

This casual dining set is from the Riverside collection. It is made from select hardwood solids under a walnut and black two-tone finish. The table measures 42" x 42" x 60" (with 1-18" leaf) and features a solid wood top and cable driven table slides for easy opening and closing.

Contact information page 112.



## AC Pacific

Quietly tailored in rich chocolate toned fabric, the William recliner has a transitional feel which allows it to adapt to all home decors.

Contact information on page 112.



## Country View Woodworking

Expanded Casual Dining Collection™ features 24 styles of chairs including bar chairs and swivel bar stools. Also, 19 cases, plus multiple leg and pedestal options. The collection offers a choice of table top edge profiles and heights. The dining group shown features a heavily distressed two-tone finish. The Ruby Red Dutch Pantry accentuates the transitional appeal. Made in America.

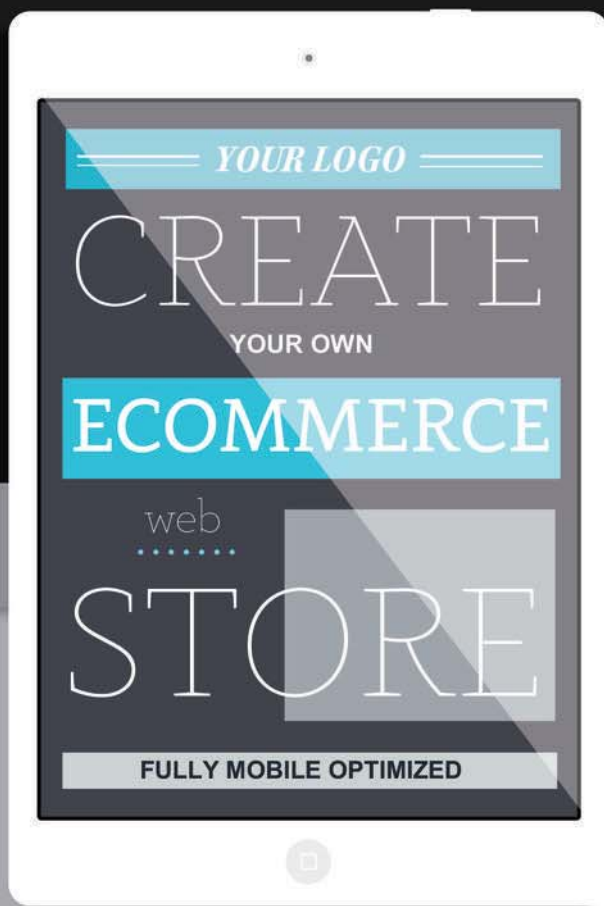
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# CHOOSE THE RIGHT MADE IN AMERICA STORIES

Customer cohort research helps sell domestically sourced furniture, be it made in the US or Canada.

by Russell Bienenstock

According to a recent article in Consumer Reports, "Given a choice between a product made in the U.S. and an identical one made abroad, 78 percent of Americans would rather buy the American Product." Consumers surveyed also noted that they would pay as much as 10 to 20 percent more for domestically sourced items.

The relationship between what people say motivates them, and how they act, is often tenuous. It can, therefore, be argued that some consumers who say they would pay 10% more for an "identical" piece, would be hard pressed to choose a \$1200 table made domestically, over an identical \$1,000 imported item. It's easier for consumers to say they would pay 20% extra, than actually hand over \$200 in grocery money.

Retailers interviewed for this article were, however, in general agreement that a high proportion of their shoppers are interested in domestically sourced furniture, and many pay a premium for the privilege of buying it. So, who are these customers? What are the best ways to reach them and sell to them?

To try to answer these questions, Furniture World interviewed Jaynie L.

Smith, President of Smart Advantage, a management consultancy that helps businesses make their messages relevant by identifying targeted value propositions, to comment on what furniture retailers should consider when buying, marketing and selling domestically sourced, or for that matter, any home furnishings items.

The most important thing furniture retailers should do, she told us, "is to make sure that the products they stock are well received, not something they project customers will like. That's a mistake that a lot of retailers make. They decide for themselves, without watching what the trends are. You have to be careful when you're a specialist that you're not projecting your taste or your views as a retailer on your customers instead of what they really desire," she advises.

"Customers are not monolithic, and target markets buy for different reasons. "My second book, *Relevant Selling*, is about being relevant to the specific target you're selling to."

## DO THE RESEARCH

"Focus groups are good for idea generation. This qualitative research works well for testing out an idea or a

brand name," Smith continues. "I am more interested in quantitative research, primarily telephone surveys that result in data that is projectable, yielding a 90 percent confidence level with a margin of error of plus or minus 10 percent.

"This data can show how a customer chooses where to buy furniture, what kind of furniture they buy, why they buy it, and what they look for in addition to the product itself, whether it's a knowledgeable sales person, or design help."

"I am more interested in quantitative research, primarily telephone surveys that result in data that is projectable, yielding a 90 percent confidence level with a plus or minus 10 percent error rate."



# American dream

*noun*

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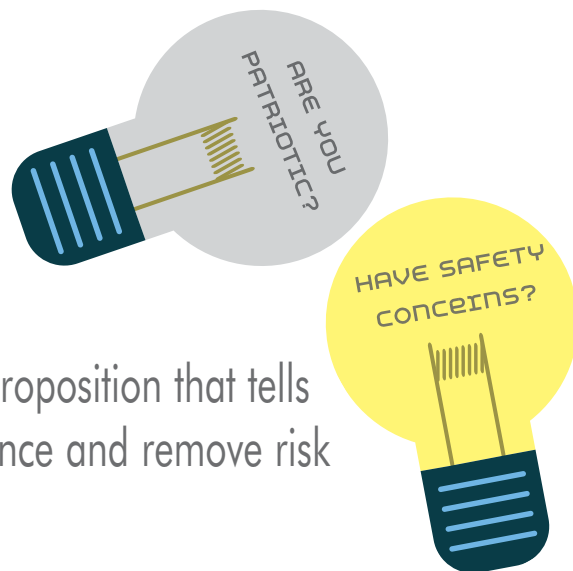
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# "Saying that furniture is

Made in America is not a reason to buy. A value proposition that tells a story can become a reason to buy, build confidence and remove risk from the buying decision."



In double blind research studies, Smith asks company executives, what they think their customers want the most. "Ninety percent guess wrong," she relates. "Their sales and marketing are focused on attributes 'A,B, and C' when customers really want to hear about 'D,E, and F'." Smith says the best way for retail executives to avoid getting it wrong, is to propose and test number of possible value propositions. "If your store serves predominantly one demographic it's easy, but there's typically a combination of potential customers that should be surveyed by cohort," she advises. "Cohorts are groups having well defined, ages, occupations or income levels.

"Just saying that furniture is Made in America may not be a reason to buy. A value proposition that includes information about using the finest hardwoods and joinery that will withstand 50 years of abuse, or telling a story about how a store delivers high rates of customer satisfaction can become a reason to buy, build confidence and remove risk from the buying decision."

## KNOW YOUR COHORTS

Smart Advantage does research to discover what specific cohorts value most. "This research," Smith explains, "might tell us that people under 30 value quick decisions so they can get in and out of a store. Baby boomers on the other hand might want to know that the furniture is going to last, so they can hand it down to their grandkids." Once cohort information is gathered, the question becomes how to language messages to each group a retailer serves to get maximum results. Smith

says part of the answer is to develop specific messages and then train salespeople to deliver them.

This segmented information lets sales and marketing people identify the approach that's most likely to resonate with a target demographic such as a millennial or baby boomer. "We develop cheat sheets so salespeople know what to say to each target market based on statistically valid, projectable research. Not every retailer can do this, and some won't take the time," she advises, "but the more laser focused your message and the more clearly defined the value proposition is to the person making the buying decision, the more you will sell and the further away from price as an objection you will get."

Sales trainers often suggest sales associates rely on qualifying questions at the point of sale with open and close probes. That is clearly necessary, but the competitive advantage often comes from pre-qualifying. Furniture World asked Smith why using research to pre-qualify prospects can be so effective.

"Two reasons," she replied. "One is people always tell you they want a good price because they're negotiating. The double blind research we use, presents about 20 attributes individuals rank on a one to 10 scale, so we can gauge how important each of these are to them. It forces them to think about things that would not be top of mind. For example, we recently did some research for a window installation company, and found that getting the window measurement right was the top buying criteria. Not the window, the actual product, but getting the mea-

surement right! So if the company could say that, '98.9 percent of the windows we've measured arrive perfectly measured, no re-dos.' That might be a very good value proposition their customers would be willing to pay more for."

The same might be true for a furniture retailer that specializes in domestically sourced home furnishings. If research shows that a subset of a retailer's customers are primarily interested in design services to help create coordinated, beautiful homes. It might be a mistake for this retailer to focus sales presentations exclusively on delivering messages about lower ranked cohort interests such as construction features, custom options, fast delivery, safe manufacturing processes, fair wages, environmental issues, or job creation at home.

"Similarly," Smith proposes, "if a cohort's primary concern is to have a comfortable buying experience and be assured that a store will keep it's promises, it might be wise to talk about customer satisfaction percentages backed up by thoughtful testimonials.

"Using research is vital to balancing the message. For example," notes Smith, "There are stores that are very smart about putting whole rooms together so a group of people feel like the process is idiot proof. On the other hand, a group might feel like they're getting cookie cutter solutions, so it's helpful to know which customer will appreciate a pre-designed approach to furnishing a room and which are likely to want to personalize the design themselves." The latter group may be more likely to value domestically sourced





# OMNIA<sup>®</sup>

*Personalizing Comfort<sup>™</sup>*

## Company Profile: A Truly American Made Furniture Icon

Omnia's Leather Furniture and American Elegance lines include a full and varied selection of stationary and motion sofas, sectionals, chairs, and sleepers, all hand-crafted and proudly made in America.

"The core elements of Omnia's designs are style, quality, comfort, flexibility and American craftsmanship."

"The core elements of Omnia's designs are style, comfort, quality flexibility and American craftsmanship," says Omnia's President Peter Zolferino. "These elements are built into the DNA of our company. Our beautifully crafted lines appeal to a wide cross section of consumers. We give them the freedom to create looks and levels of comfort that speak to their individual tastes and lifestyles. Omnia retailers have the advantage of showing designs that are not the same as every other store.

They have the flexibility to customize leather, color, configurations, motion and comfort. All Omnia furniture is made in the USA with quality, safe materials and the obvious value consumers are looking for today. At Omnia, Personalized Comfort & Design have never been easier."

Omnia is a family run business with showrooms for retail furniture buyers in Chino, California, High Point and Las Vegas. Omnia's Leather furniture is constructed with 100% top-grain leather - no splits, bicast or vinyl. Only the finest quality hides are selected, each with beautiful details. With more than 400 leather selections to choose from, retailers can find every texture, color, and type of leather available to present to consumers.

The company's American Elegance, custom upholstery division offers traditional, transitional and contemporary upholstery incorporating the finest quality components with beautiful tailoring. A wide array of luxurious fabrics and custom finishes give consumers all they need to create their own personalized designs.

Omnia's furniture lines are hand-crafted in a 180,000 square foot Southern California factory using the finest materials, the newest technologies and most importantly, integrity. Careful attention is paid to each element of the production process. Quality wood framing with solid, hand-milled construction, luxurious leather and fabrics from around the world, premium foam or down cushions, impeccable tailoring and state of the art motion and sleeper mechanisms are standard in each and every piece. Quality control and expert packaging ensure your customers will be thoroughly satisfied.

As a founding member in the Sustainable Furniture Council, Omnia's recycling program has saved hundreds of trees and the company is proud to manufacture products with a focus on preserving the environment.

"Personalized comfort & design has never been easier."



*Omnia Leather  
Motion & Stationary*



*American Elegance*

# SELLING

# MADE IN AMERICA

items that have more flexibility to design in custom options.

## HOW TO AVOID COMMODITY STATUS

Although promoting domestically sourced furniture can help to differentiate stores from a sea of sameness based on price and financing, many specialists who sell Made in America can improve how they language their offerings.

"A big mistake retail CEO's make is to language the competitive advantages of their companies in clichéd and vague terms that just do not sell anymore," advises Smith. "You cannot build a value proposition by saying 'We have good customer service and good quality.' So what? Everybody says that. It's not going to get you anything! She says the most common examples of vague competitive advantages are: Good customer service, quality, reputation, good results, our employees, knowledgeable staff, consistent management, responsiveness, innovativeness and trust.

"Most retailers don't know what to say about their own products, and that's where they get into trouble with price. That's why they need to make explicit information such as:

- *What materials make the product a better value?*
- *What's better about the product?*
- *What's better about your delivery?*

- *What's better about how you stand behind it?*
- *What's better about how you make them feel good about buying it?*
- *Why should they buy from you and not the competition?*

These are key points that very few businesses answer well, she concludes."

## RETAILER PERSPECTIVES

One of the retailers interviewed for this article was Ed Smith, Founder, and President of Chariho furniture based in Richmond, RI.

Ed says his company has not done in-depth research of the type described by Jayne Smith, but does listen carefully to customers. For example, he's noticed an uptick in consumer concern about the environment. "We do hear from more customers who are concerned about the lack of environmental controls in other countries, and these controls make products safer in the end.

"Our customers tend to be older, from their mid-forties to mid seventies. They can consider investing 10 or 12 thousand dollars on a bedroom set. We also serve a lot of veterans who want to buy something that's made in America versus China or Vietnam. They certainly want the dollars to go to America.

"We carry the upper end of the American made tier,

so the price can be out of range of younger customers. If furniture isn't English dovetailed, if it doesn't have choices, upon choices, upon choices, we don't put it in our store.

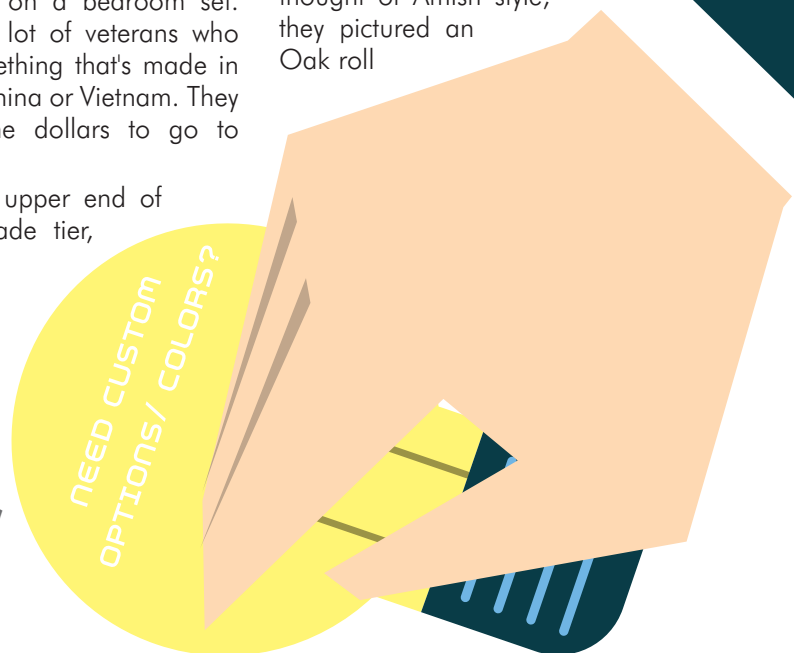
"Our single largest vendor is Harden Furniture and we do tons with Gat Creek, American Leather, DR Dimes, Copeland and Henkel Harris. We have over thirty Amish lines, the most meaningful ones being Simply Amish, Canal Dover, Country View Woodworking, Barkman, Millcraft and some smaller specialty Amish builders like Y&T Woodcraft and Wonderwood."

Ed says that offering 100% American made furniture frees his salespeople from having to explain to customers, "which bedroom is made in Vietnam, which is China and which is made in America. If it's here, it's American made. It's all we do."

Chariho has always had success with a Made in America message, but a big boost to the category has come with the recent expansion of available styles. "We carry about thirty Amish lines. Twenty years ago when people thought of Amish style, they pictured an Oak roll

"A big mistake retail CEO's make is to language the competitive advantages of their companies in, clichéd and vague terms that just don't sell anymore."

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# SELLING MADE IN AMERICA

top desk. Today these companies create awesome contemporary pieces in solid Walnut and natural Tiger Maple. There are great transitional and casual lifestyles as well. A lot of the American made manufacturers have stepped up to the plate.

Henry Yoder, the NIWA's (Northern Indiana Woodcrafters Association) Representative and principal at RH Yoder Woodworking agrees. "We are seeing steady growth that's due to more people warming up to the idea that Amish furniture is not just traditionally styled blonde Oak. Furniture retail-

ers want domestically made products that really sell, so they are asking Amish builders to create the kinds of furniture styles they are looking for. But, there's still some education that needs to be done to fully change perceptions.

"A big advantage of Made in America," he notes, is that it can provide retailers with much shorter lead times from concept to execution of the actual piece. With domestic goods, and especially for Amish companies, it can be typically less than eight weeks from concept to finished product. There's also the added advantage of having flexibility with specifying options

and colors."

Yoder mentioned, "most of our customers are excited about quality, and it makes for a much easier sell. There's a comfort level for furniture store owners and also retail salespeople who know they are working with a product that will result in high levels of customer satisfaction and fewer service issues."

On the topic of promotional events and Amish furniture, Chariho Furniture's Ed Smith adds that his, "single most successful event of the year, is an Amish themed event. For some reason, it gets people through the door and buying at a high average ticket. The difference between us and everybody else in our trading area is that carrying thirty lines gives us the ability to sell every single category in Amish furniture, be it a dining room set, youth furniture, bedroom, or a cedar chest and jewelry armoire.

"When customers pull up to our store," he concludes, "they see a ten foot flag flying. Every piece of furniture has a Made in America hang tag. Our delivery drivers have jackets with a big embroidered American flag on the back. It's the story that we talk about."

Mark Fedde, President of California based Fedde Furniture has a different philosophy of how to promote his domestically sourced lines. There aren't any red, white and blue flags flying. "We've been located in Pasadena, for 78 years, and have always tried to sell based on the quality of our furniture, he explains."

Like Ed Smith at Chariho Furniture, Mark Fedde's customers buy furniture that will last. "It's an investment in a quality piece of furniture their grandkids will thank them for," he explains.

"Our domestically sourced furniture includes some really nice import companies like Theodore Alexander and FFDM as well as domestic factories like



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"Throughout the whole recession all of my competitors, were scrambling to bring in more imports at lower price points and thinking that was the answer. I just stayed the course."

"This research might tell us that people under 30 value quick decisions so they can get in and out of a store. Baby boomers might want to know that the furniture is going to last, so they can hand it down to their grandkids."

Stickley Furniture and Simply Amish. Over the five to seven years, we've tried to swing a little bit towards the domestic side.

"Made in America is important and we do use it in our presentations," he told Furniture World. His signage, however, doesn't shout Made in America. That's because Fedde doesn't feel that there is a benefit to identifying a country of origin for each piece of furniture in his store.

"The question then becomes," he observes, "Where is this piece made, and where is that one made?" It's a fact that many of the imported furniture lines we carry probably can't be built domestically at the same values we offer. We are proud of our domestic offerings, but at the same time, just because a particular item is built in any one location doesn't immediately make it a good or bad product."

Fedde says that careful buying ensures that both his domestically and internationally sourced products have a high degree of quality, and he tries to work with factories that emphasize creating a partnership with their retailers, have good people, and focus on creating good communications with their factory people.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

Asked about how telling a focused and consistent story has benefited Chairho Furniture, Ed Smith explains, "Throughout the whole recession all of my competitors were scrambling to bring in more imports at lower price points and thinking that was the answer. And, I just stayed the course.

Did we feel the recession? Yeah, I actually had a year that we were down about three and a half percent. That was my worst year ever. Last year the business grew nine percent. I feel like we rebounded quicker because we never sent mixed messages."

Ed says his people explain to customers the environmental and safety benefits of his domestically sourced furniture. "So they know that there are not going to be finishes or foams that are questionable. But what really drives it home, is that there are 310 million people living in the United States, and that if each would move 20 dollars a month spending from foreign made products to American made products, it would create five million jobs. We really talk up the economic benefits of buying American. They might pay 10 percent more or 20 percent more, but will be assured that it's quality. We also articulate the message that if they buy a bedroom or dining set from Chairho, it will be the last one they ever need to buy."

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

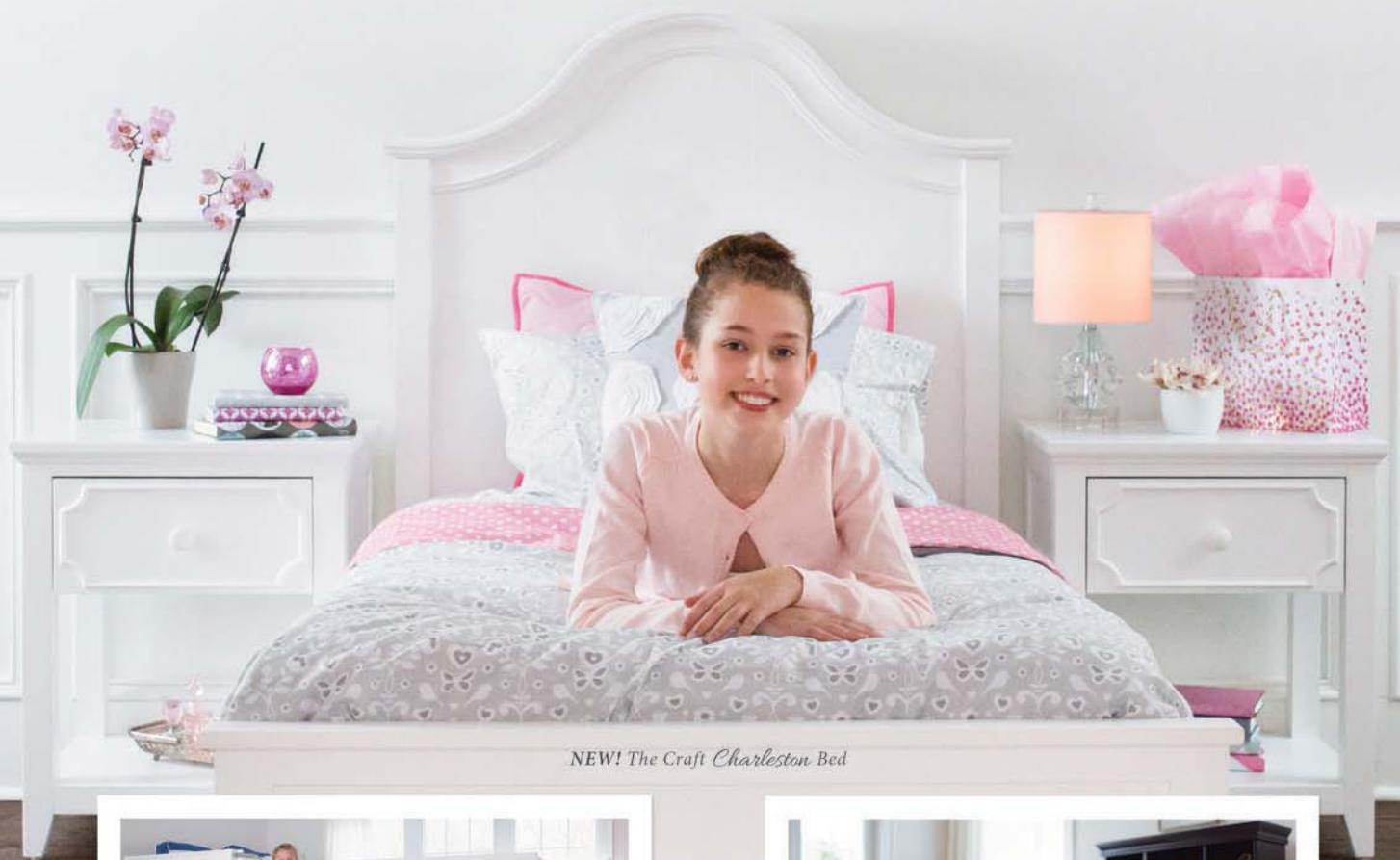
More tips and tools to help you to successfully focus on domestically sourced products can be found in Furniture World's March/April 2012 issue, "Plug In To Domestic: Sell More Made In America Furniture. It's posted to the [furninfo.com](http://furninfo.com/Furniture%20World%20Articles/260) website at <http://furninfo.com/Furniture%20World%20Articles/260>. That article gives specific ways to tell your story via website, social media, holiday promotion ideas, in store signage and sales presentations.



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# RSA

## BEDDING ADVANCED TRAINING

Training Part 2: A checklist for retail sales associates.

by David Benbow

This article is the second in a series that discusses training for Retail Sales Associates. It is specifically directed to R.S.A.s who specialize in mattresses and bedding; but the general concepts will be useful for furniture and accessory sales as well.

Advanced sales training should address the details, nuances and refinements of the sales process (steps of the sale), but before we launch into

"All the advanced sales training in the world will be just another waste of time unless you master the background information that this article talks about."

that virtually endless subject in future articles, I want to address, once more, what R.S.A.'s need to know, inside and out, about the background knowledge that supports and sustains the sales process. This background knowledge consists of what has been described in other articles as "The Five Groups of Knowledge," which were originally so labeled and identified by the late John F. Lawhon in his book *Selling Retail*.

Some may ask "Why do I need to know all this stuff? Everybody knows that mattress shoppers buy bedding on comfort. Furniture buyers wait for some item to 'call their name.' Learning all these specification details is just a waste of time, and besides, I'll just forget it as soon as training is over, anyway."

The fact that so many showroom floors are populated by employees who carry the above attitude points to an opportunity for those few who will actually study hard, exercise self-discipline and prepare themselves. Only

by learning product information and techniques, will they transform into true sales professionals. The real sales professional stands out from the crowd like a Rolls Royce in a destruction derby.

To be brief and to the point, all the advanced sales training in the world will be just another waste of time unless you master the background information that this article talks about.

So, that being said, let's illustrate a check list of the background information that every professional Retail Sales Associate should know.

Each category will have its own checklist and descriptive narrative. For much more detail in each category, consult my book *How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales*, the *Bed Seller's Manual*.

Airline pilots have them, doctors have them, concert promoters have them. In fact, everybody that does anything successfully usually has some



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sort of check list so that they don't overlook something important. Retail Sales Associates should have them, too. Here is a brief list.

## PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE

**1. Name of the mattress:** You should know the EXACT name of

every mattress on the floor.

**2. Manufacturer and product line:** Memorize which manufacturer makes each mattress. Is it a premium line or promotional line?

**3. Feel or comfort level:** Is it hard, soft or in between?

**4. Price point in queen and king:** Know both the regular price (keystone) and sale price.

**5. Warranty:** What is the length of warranty and how much is prorated? You should also understand what mattress warranties cover and what they don't.

**6. Location of the bed on the floor:** Can you go straight to the right bed if the sales manager suddenly shouts across the room, "Show them the Crown Royal Pillowtop?"

**7. SKU number:** Every store item has a unique SKU. Make sure the number is on every sales ticket.

**8. Law label:** This is the unsightly white cloth flag that is sewn into the tape edge. Learn how to read and interpret all the meaningful information written on the law label.

"Airline pilots have them, doctors have them, concert promoters have them. In fact, everybody that does anything successfully usually has some sort of check list."



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# RSA **BEDDING ADVANCED TRAINING**

**9 Specifications of each inner-spring mattress:** The following list gives a variety of specs that may be found in innerspring mattresses.

- *Coil count* – if a mattress on your floor contains coils, learn the queen size coil count.
- *Wire gauge of the coil* – this is the thickness of the coil wire
- *Coil construction type* – Is it a Bonnell, Continuous, Marshall (wrapped), or Offset?
- *Coil turns or spirals* – How many turns in a single coil?
- *Height of an individual coil* – Standing alone, is it taller or shorter than other coils?
- *Shape or profile of the coil* – Is it hourglass shaped or barrel shaped?
- *Tempering* – Is the coil tempered or not tempered? Ask your rep for his take on this.
- *Coil arrangement within the innerspring unit* – Are they “posturized?”
- *Border wire* – Is there a border wire or is it foam encased?

- *Helical lacing* – Is it side to side or head to toe?
- *Upholstery* – Do you know the configuration of all the different kinds of padding and comfort layers within each mattress, why they are there and what difference they make?
- *Cover and quilting* – Do you know pros and cons of cover and quilting types?

**10 Specifications for specialty mattresses** – This includes air and all foam mattresses.

- *Base foam* – Know which type of foam, its density and firmness.
- *Comfort layers* – Which type of foam is used, its density and firmness – for each layer.

**11 Foundations types.** These consist of two basic categories. Non-mechanical foundations, which are either wood, or steel span, and adjustable bases. When it comes to adjustable bases, RSA's must be conversant in all their features. Some of these are:

- *Know your control device* –

*whether it is wired or remote, learn thoroughly all functions of every adjustable base on the showroom floor. Make sure all control devices work properly and have live batteries.*

- *Learn all the features of each adjustable bed including timers, wall saver, massage, etc. Learn how to demonstrate each of these features.*
- *Warranty* – Knowing the warranty provisions of your adjustable bases is important.

Adjustable bases are mechanical products that can break down. Your customers must be assured that your product can be fixed if a malfunction occurs. This concern is one of the biggest objections when customers are considering an adjustable base purchase.

- *Other furniture* – Whether you are selling case goods, upholstered items, accessories or outdoor furniture, RSA's with a similar command of features and specifications of each category will be in a much stronger position versus his competition.

Customers buy durable goods, including furniture, by comparing one deal to another. Buyers want to know why one item costs more or less than another. They want to know which item is the best value. They rely primarily on Retail Sales Associates for that information. If you cannot supply that information to your prospective customer, you can hardly blame her for finding another RSA who can willingly supply that information. That is why RSA's must know features (attrib-

“Why do I need to know all this stuff? Everybody knows that mattress shoppers buy bedding on comfort. Learning all these specification details is just a waste of time, and besides, I'll just forget it...”





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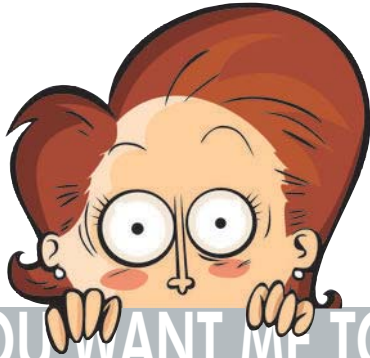


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## YOU WANT ME TO KNOW WHAT???

utes and specifications) of every product.

Although knowing features is important, the higher skill is to translate those features into tangible benefits that customers understand. If you don't know the features, how can you translate those features into benefits?

We have just scratched the surface with this list. The professional R.S.A. will seek out new features on all new, incoming products. Ask your reps for information.

Never forget, little things sell! Small, seemingly insignificant features can translate into big benefits in the customer's mind when properly demonstrated by a professional.

### KNOWLEDGE OF ADVERTISING

I wonder how many readers of this article know exactly, and in detail, everything your store is advertising and in what media? Anybody? Outside of the store owner who

"Never forget, little things sell! Small, seemingly insignificant features can translate into big benefits in the customer's mind when properly demonstrated by a professional."

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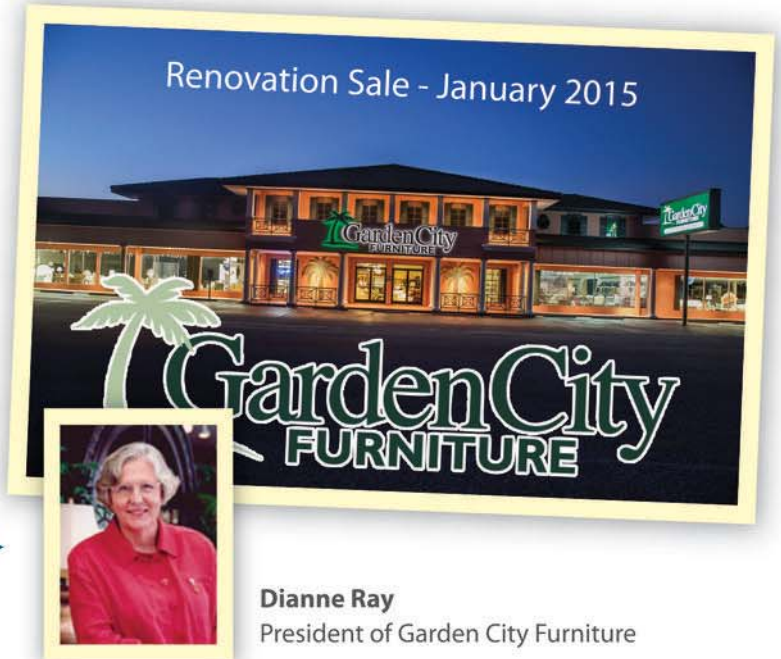
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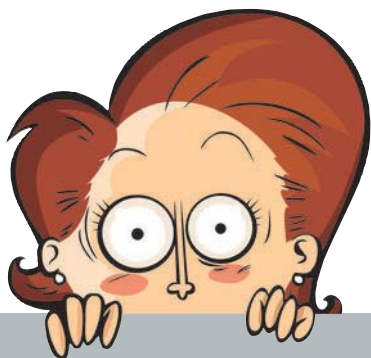


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# RSA

## BEDDING TRAINING CHECKLIST

placed (and is paying for) the ads?

Advertising and promotion is the food and drink which nourishes all retail businesses. And, typical of food, drink and advertising, you never know for sure which stuff is good for you and which is not. There is a wise old saying that some smart retailer once said, "I know that half my advertising money is wasted, I just don't know which half."

But, good or bad, useful or wasted, each R.S.A. must know every ad the store runs. In a large market area, keeping up with a store's advertising placements can be challenging. It is, therefore, important for the sales management team to keep salespeople informed. It's unrealistic to expect RSA's to know, on their own, about every ad. That is why frequent sales meetings are important. Keep your salespeople up to date on what the store is promoting, and what the competition is promoting as well. More on the competition later. How embarrassing is it for an R.S.A. to not know what a customer is talking about, when asked about an advertised special?

### KNOWLEDGE OF FINANCING

From low end to high end, the range of financing and rent-to-own options is almost endless. Why is this important for the R.S.A. to know? It should be self-evident.

Many customers are concerned about how to pay for large purchases. Part of the qualifying process should, therefore, include asking about the overall size of customer's budget, and how much per month they can afford.

It makes sense that every RSA should be fully fluent in all the different ways their store can help customers pay for merchandise.

If you, as an RSA do not know what financing plans your store has available, you will miss out on a lot of sales.

Again, the sales management team and financing department must keep every R.S.A. informed regarding the current status of any and all finance options.

Other small but important details that every RSA's financing check list

should include are:

1. Where are the finance application forms, and how do you fill them out?
2. Where are all the details, such as interest rate and length of term available?
3. Do you know how to calculate the monthly payments in every situation?
4. Do you know what "Same As Cash" means? Can you explain it to the customer?
5. What do you do with Turn-Downs? Can you explain why this happened, and what other options are available so that the customer can still buy today?
6. Do you know how to protect the customer's financial disclosures (that are on every form).

### KNOWLEDGE OF INVENTORY

Simply stated, knowledge of inven-

"Good or bad, useful or wasted, each R.S.A. must know every ad that his store is running; in all media. In a large market area, keeping up with your store's advertising placements is a hard job."





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# RSA

## STORE POLICIES

tory? means knowing what merchandise your store has in stock currently, what it has coming in on order, and when it will get here. Why is this important? On special orders, especially higher end upholstered goods, it probably isn't that important. But for cash and carry items, such as mattresses and less expensive furniture, it can often mean the difference between making or not making a sale.

A lot of stores have good inventory reporting systems. RSA's who know how to use such a system can easily find out what is in stock. But, what if your on-line inventory system is not updated with each sales and delivery transaction? Or, what if the reply on the computer screen is somewhat ambiguous? Meaning, the item you are looking up is a fast moving item, and the computer says you only have one available? Do you trust the answer? Will you write up the ticket without double checking the physical inventory?

All R.S.A.s should know how to use the inventory reporting system and probably most do. Here, however, is where true professionals stand out. The R.S.A. who shows initiative and

aggressively pursues the sale, may be able go to the warehouse and find discontinued items, old floor models, warranty rejects, etc. All stores have them. They are usually hiding in dark corners and otherwise ignored by the warehouse operation. These items, can represent a real find for the bargain-hunting customer. And, I've met a lot of customers that love bargains!

Knowing your inventory, all of it, not just the current backup of the showroom floor, will make sales when you might otherwise have a willing but walking buyer.

### KNOWLEDGE OF POLICIES

In the context of our discussion, policies are defined as follows: A planned course of action that an organization or individual takes in response to a particular event or situation. Ideally, these policies are well considered before implementation and written out in clearly understood language.

Various store policies usually include answers to the following questions:

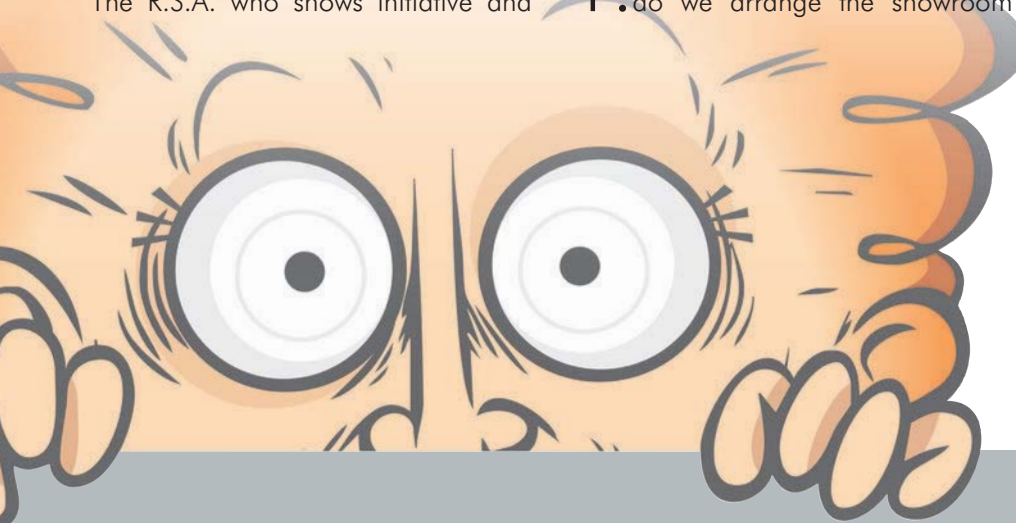
1. **Merchandising policies:** How do we arrange the showroom

floor? Does our store carry name brands? Do we display prices? Do we show low-end, popular priced merchandise or only upper end? Are our floor models always neat, clean and dust and smudge free?

2. **Pricing policies:** How competitive are our tagged prices compared to other stores? Will our store discount to make a sale? Does our store "guarantee the best price"? What incentives can be offered to purchasers, such as free delivery?

3. **Delivery policies:** How quickly can our store deliver? How far away will we deliver, and on what days? Do we offer white glove service? Does our store have strict policies on the appearance and

"Customers make buying decisions by comparing store to store, merchandise to merchandise, sales associate to sales associate. The only way to know how you compare is to know what the competition is doing."





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"How do we handle sensitive customer financial information? Where is this information stored, and how secure is the storage?"

demeanor of delivery personnel?

**4. Customer pick up and will call policies:** Is our warehouse convenient for customer pick up? What days and hours are available for customer pick up? Who will secure the customer's merchandise to the vehicle? Is the customer asked to inspect and sign off on all merchandise before it leaves the warehouse?

**5. Return policies:** Does our store have a return/refund policy? Do our people know how to interpret it and enforce it? Does our store do cash refunds or in-store credits?

**6. Layaway policies:** Does our company have a layaway plan? If so, do our employees understand its terms and conditions. Are they comfortable explaining them to customers?

**7. Special Order policies:** Does our store do special orders? What kind of deposit do we require before ordering merchandise? Does our store have a consistent follow up policy regarding special orders? Under what conditions can special

orders be cancelled or refunded?

**8. Personnel policies:** Is our store always understaffed, or over-staffed? Are R.S.A.s adequately trained before lurching out to take their first up? Do they understand our company's pay plan?

**9. Guarantees and Warranties:** Does our store do mattress comfort exchanges, and if so, what are the terms and conditions? How does our company handle warranty complaints?

**10. Customer security policies:** How do we handle sensitive customer financial information? This information can be found on finance applications, personal checks, and credit card transactions. Where is this information stored, and how secure is the storage?

## THE COMPETITION

As much as is possible, the list above should also include the same knowledge of your competition's products, advertising, financing and policies. It may sound impossible to get your arms around all this information for all your competitors, but never forget this. Customers make buying decisions by comparing. They compare store to store. They compare merchandise to merchandise. They compare sales associate to sales associate. The only way to know how you compare is to know what the competition is doing.

The store and sales associates that compare the most favorably in the customer's mind Will Get The Sale.

**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 professional alike. The book can be purchased on-line at <http://www.bedsellersmanual.com> or [www.mattressretailtraining.com](http://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](mailto:dave@bedsellersmanual.com) or in person at 361-648-3775.

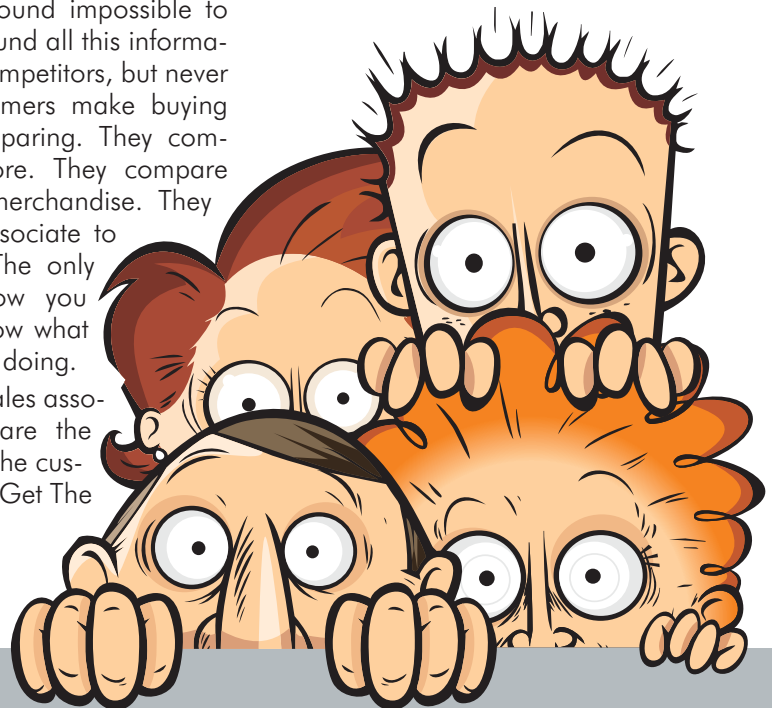
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## TOP 5 REASONS to come to the Canadian Furniture Show

The Canadian Furniture Show has new dates — June 4 to 7, 2015 — and dozens of new features to make it a great new Show! The only national furniture show in Canada was formerly known as The Canadian Home Furnishings Market or TCHFM, and in 2015 we're introducing a series of great new changes. You don't want to miss it!

1. Take advantage of the exchange rate: **your dollar goes 20% further.**
2. **82 % of our exhibitors** don't show in High Point or Las Vegas, so you'll discover tons of new products!
3. More than **200 of the top names** in furniture manufacturing, design, and imports over **400,000 sq. ft.** of showrooms.
4. Find great **hotel deals** on our website... **Visit Toronto** in June and mix business with pleasure.
5. An exclusive presentation from acclaimed design experts **Steven & Chris.**

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**TCHFM**  The Canadian Home Furnishings Market

## WHAT'S NEW at the Canadian Furniture Show?

**One word describes the 2015 Canadian Furniture Show: change. Change to attract new exhibitors and more visitors, making the Show bigger and better!**

### NEW DATES

Holding the Canadian Furniture Show in June instead of January makes it easier and much more fun. Forget the ice and snow, and combine business with pleasure, under the sun!

### NEW NAME

*Canadian Furniture Show* is a straightforward name that reflects what the Show is all about!

### NEW FLOOR PLAN

A refreshed layout combined with at least 30 new exhibitors; plus, **82 % of all our exhibitors don't show in High Point or Las Vegas!**

### NEW SHOW

A major sign of renewal: we're holding a **Consumer Day** on Sunday, June 7. As with the major European shows, Consumer Day will help raise the profile of the event and **attract new exhibitors!**

### NEW STAR SPEAKERS

A rare opportunity to attend talks by acclaimed design experts **Steven and Chris**, and multi award-winning designer **Karen Sealy**, the Show's spokesperson.

### MORE TO SEE

More business opportunities with the inclusion of some of the permanent showrooms near The International Centre.

### EVENING ACTIVITIES

Great evening events are also on the menu.

- **June 4** – Day 1 ends with an outdoor industry bash: big top, BBQ, LIVE band, and plenty of networking opportunities.
- **June 5** – Canadian Home Furnishings Awards Gala, celebrating the achievements of our industry.
- **June 6** – Business spills over till 8 p.m.: drinks will be served on the floor starting at 4 p.m.

Canadian Furniture Show: More business opportunities, great new products, and **your money goes 20 % further!**



CANADIAN  
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DUTAILIER

## DESIGN TALKS AND DESIGN TRENDS

On Sunday, June 7, the Canadian Furniture Show will present two inspiring talks on home décor that are bound to bring out the crowds. These design TV stars will cover the latest décor trends and some smart ideas and savvy tips... Free of charge!



TRICA



STYLUS MADE TO ORDER SOFAS

## STEVEN AND CHRIS are coming to the Show

The highly anticipated presentation by acclaimed design experts Steven Sabados and Chris Hyndman will be presented, on **Sunday, June 7, at 1 p.m.** Their TV success is due not only to their irresistible personalities but also to their refreshingly creative approach. With several hit TV shows, including the current show *Steven and Chris*, they now have programs airing in more than 80 countries. In 2007, they launched their own line of furniture, area rugs, decorative accessories, and textiles, to rave reviews in Canada and the U.S.

[www.stevenandchris.com](http://www.stevenandchris.com)



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## DESIGNER KAREN SEALY: an undeniable passion for design

Multi award-winning designer and 2015 spokesperson, Karen Sealy will share her passion for design and her contagious enthusiasm, on **Sunday June 7, at 10:30 a.m.** Karen is a regular design expert on the national Canadian TV show *Cityline*, and host and designer of *Summer Home* (season 1) on HGTV. Her work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Elle Décor*, *Style at Home* and others. Her company, Sealy Design Inc. won the Best of Houzz Awards for 2013, 2014 and 2015 in the Design and Customer Satisfaction categories.

[www.sealydesigninc.com](http://www.sealydesigninc.com)



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# COME TO CANADA!

With the exchange rate, your dollar goes **20%** further!

## GREAT NEW ACTIVITIES FOR A BRAND-NEW SHOW!

### INDUSTRY BASH

Thursday, June 4, 6 p.m.

To wrap up the opening day of the Show and make the most of the summer weather, all Show participants are invited to party under the big top, and do a little networking! On the menu: summer specialties, a BBQ, even a LIVE band...



### CONSUMER DAY

Sunday, June 7, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Like the major European shows, the Canadian Furniture Show will welcome consumers on June 7. This unique day will raise the profile of the industry. It's a terrific opportunity for exhibitors to get direct consumer feedback on their new collections.

### CANADIAN HOME FURNISHINGS AWARDS GALA

Friday, June 5.

The Canadian Home Furnishings Alliance celebrates the Canadian industry, with namely two coveted honours, Retailer of the Year and the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Tickets at: [ssl.marcomweb.com/chfaevents](http://ssl.marcomweb.com/chfaevents)

### KAREN SEALY DESIGN TALK

Sunday, June 7, 10:30 a.m.

Multi award-winning designer and 2015 Show spokesperson Karen Sealy shares her passion for design, with her trademark enthusiasm, and gives tips for creating functional and fabulous spaces.

### BUSINESS ON SATURDAY EVENING

Saturday, June 6, from 4 to 8 p.m.

New this year: the Show will stay open in the evening to give visitors a chance to tour the floor till 8 p.m.; the Show will offer drinks starting at 4 p.m. Enjoy the extra hours to do business!

### STEVEN AND CHRIS DESIGN TALK

Sunday, June 7, 1 p.m.

The Show is delighted to welcome dynamic design duo Steven Sabados and Chris Hyndman, hosts of the popular weekday TV show *Steven and Chris*, for a fresh, fun and fabulous presentation.

### TOWN HALL MEETING

Sunday, June 7, 8:30 a.m.

Reprising last year's first-ever Town Hall, we will again be bringing industry participants together to discuss various issues. Join us on Sunday morning, and share your opinion with industry professionals. Coffee and muffins will be served!

### GOLF TOURNAMENT

Monday, June 8, 11 a.m.

Industry professionals are invited to tee off at the Caledon Woods Golf Club for the CHFA Classic Golf Tournament. The day on the greens will be followed by cocktails and dinner. Reserve online at: [ssl.marcomweb.com/chfaevents/](http://ssl.marcomweb.com/chfaevents/).





# EXPERIENCE TORONTO IN THE SUMMER!



Come to the Canadian Furniture Show and mix business with pleasure by discovering Toronto in the summer. This great city has a lot to offer: Major League Baseball, the CN Tower, Niagara Falls not far away, restaurants, golf, shopping, great entertainment, family activities, and much more!

To help you plan your visit to Canada's largest city, here are a few interesting suggestions:

**MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL WITH THE BLUE JAYS:**  
[toronto.bluejays.mlb.com](http://toronto.bluejays.mlb.com)

**VISIT THE TALLEST BUILDING IN TORONTO, THE CN TOWER:**  
[cntower.ca](http://cntower.ca)

**SEE THE BREATHTAKING NIAGARA FALLS:**  
[niagarafallstourism.com](http://niagarafallstourism.com)

## GREAT PLACES TO EAT:

- **Best restaurants:**  
[menupalace.com](http://menupalace.com)
- **Restaurants with a view:**  
[seetorontonow.com/cuisine/5-toronto-restaurants-with-a-view](http://seetorontonow.com/cuisine/5-toronto-restaurants-with-a-view)
- **Best brunches:**  
[seetorontonow.com/cuisine/wake-up-to-torontos-best-brunch-spots](http://seetorontonow.com/cuisine/wake-up-to-torontos-best-brunch-spots)
- **Budget-friendly restaurants:**  
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**PLAY A LITTLE GOLF:**  
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**SHOPPING CENTRES AND OUTLET MALLS:**  
[seetorontonow.com/shopping/8-toronto-malls-to-make-a-day-of](http://seetorontonow.com/shopping/8-toronto-malls-to-make-a-day-of)

## TO PLAN YOUR FAMILY OUTINGS:

- **Toronto Zoo:** [torontozoo.com](http://torontozoo.com)
- **Ripley's Aquarium of Canada:** [ripleyaquariums.com/canada](http://ripleyaquariums.com/canada)
- **Fallsview Waterpark:** [fallsviewwaterpark.com](http://fallsviewwaterpark.com)
- **Royal Ontario Museum:** [rom.on.ca](http://rom.on.ca)
- **Ontario Science Centre:** [ontariosciencecentre.ca](http://ontariosciencecentre.ca)
- **Canada's largest amusement park:**  
Canada's Wonderland: [canadaswonderland.com](http://canadaswonderland.com)
- **Theme park in Niagara:**  
Marineland: [marinelandcanada.com](http://marinelandcanada.com)

**Need more ideas? Visit [seetorontonow.com](http://seetorontonow.com)**



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# IMPROVE PERFORMANCE WITH FINANCIAL PLANNING

by David McMahon, CMA, EA

I hope that you achieved all your goals in 2014 and produced a healthy cash flow from your operations. Congratulations if you have! Congratulations if you are truly satisfied with your results! However, if you want to do better in 2015 please read on.

I am writing this because I want to share with you a necessary practice that top performers do every year and maintain throughout the year: they conduct formal and professional financial planning and analysis (FP&A).

Top performing businesses analyze and plan because:

- *It forces them to think strategically.*

- *It allows them to develop key tactics to achieve strategic goals.*
- *It helps them focus on the performance indicators that matter.*
- *It shows them the path that their entire organization must follow.*
- *It gives them a much higher chance of success than if they did not have a formal financial plan.*

Financial planning and analysis has both quantitative and qualitative aspects.

FP&A is quantitative because it allows us to project the raw numbers (metrics) that need to be achieved to arrive at desired profit and cash flow levels. These metrics act as performance indicators during the course of everyday business. For example, to achieve a 10% net income, a certain combination of customer visits, average sale, close rate, cost of goods, gross margin, advertising spend, commission rates, and other operating outputs must be generated. Then, to produce a determined cash flow increase, an additional combination of product mix, return on investment, and asset and liability levels need to be maintained.

FP&A is qualitative because there are specific actions that need to be

put on paper and then executed by managers and employees for the numbers to become reality. It is easy to “just say it”, but “just doing it” is what separates leaders and laggards.

For example, if a gross margin return on inventory (GMROI) overall of \$2.50 is a target metric, tactics such as running a fast merchandise distribution system, a markdown that starts under 60 days, 95% best seller in stock days, and periodic category and vendor analysis may be required.

Everyone in your organization needs to be clear on what they are required to achieve. Every member of your organization needs to be clear on how to achieve it. That is what Financial Planning and Analysis puts in motion for you.

It is important that you understand that FP&A is forward-looking. It is nothing like your typical CPA financial tax accounting. Tax accountants are retrospective.

**Creative Accounting is for the future not for the past:** With financial planning, the past is only used to understand where you came from and how you are performing. FP&A paints a financial picture of where you could be if you properly execute the right tactics. It is a Pro forma. It allows you to start with the end in mind and con-

“FP&A is quantitative because it allows us to project the raw numbers (metrics) that need to be achieved to arrive at your desired profit and cash flow levels.”





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# "FP&A is forward looking.

It is nothing like your typical CPA financial tax accounting.  
Tax accountants are retrospective."

consider various possible scenarios. Tax accounting is the necessary legal reporting when the end has already arrived.

## HOW A TOP-DOWN FP&A SYSTEM WORKS

**1** Find out where your business is now from a financial and operational perspective. Review current systems procedures and outcomes.

**2** Determine BIG PICTURE strategy with the ownership team. Define the FORWARD end-goal for profitability and cash flow.

**3** Create a forward-looking financial statement model to arrive at your end-goal. Review past monthly sales data to understand seasonality. Determine if the end goal can be accomplished. Adjust the model until it is

agreed upon.

**4** Document key metrics that need to be achieved by organization team members.

**5** Document specific actions and tactics that need to be executed.

**6** Review and present performance standards to your department managers.

"FP&A is qualitative because there are specific actions that need to be put on paper and then executed for the numbers to become reality."

**7** Organize any operational training that may be required.

**8** Create a performance budgeted financial statement so your ownership team can see if they are on target at the end of each month.

**9** Periodically review your plan and make adjustments to the tactics when and where necessary.

## SHOULD YOUR ACCOUNTANT DO IT?

It is very important that who you choose to assist you with Financial Planning and Analysis be qualified. This must be both top and bottom lined focus. This is big picture thinking with results that must be achieved at the ground level and the front lines of your operations.

Actually arriving at your destination, and the time it takes to get there, depends on your internal team and external partners working together.

### Who does not qualify to conduct FP&A?

- An Accountant that specializes in tax reporting only. A good tax CPA is important to the operation but the skills and body of knowledge of tax and FP&A differ. Any organization requires both.
- An operational employee with no future financial modeling experience.
- Anyone who does not understand every aspect of your business and how they are integrated.

### Who does qualify to perform FP&A?

- A certified financial professional with forecasting and budgeting experience. For example, Certified Management Accountants (CMA's) often specialize in FP&A in businesses.
- Someone who communicates well





with the various organizational players – Owners, Managers, Employees, and external vendors and service providers.

- Someone who understands the industry segment you are in and how best practice operations perform.
- A person that has the qualities of being strategic, tactical, and also creative.

Plan right in 2015. The stakes are too high for your business to not plan at all. No plan is a perfect crystal ball but it is MUCH better than shooting in the dark. The FP&A process will prepare you and your team for the occurrences that will happen. You will get back on course faster than if you were without focus or measurement. Your odds of success will increase 100%, producing better profits and cash flow than if you ignored FP&A.

**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](mailto:david.mcmahon@accellos.com). See all of David's articles at [www.furninfo.com/Authors/List](http://www.furninfo.com/Authors/List).

## How a Slumberland Furniture Franchise Achieved Record Volume with a Larry Mullins Sales Event

In December and January of 2014-15 Slumberland Furniture of Willmar, MN, executed a Larry Mullins renovation event. The sales results were electrifying. Here is the report from the store's Sales Manager, Gerard Ninow:



"Hello Larry: I appreciate the opportunity to offer some feedback on our recent December-January renovation event. The traffic was off the charts. Typically we would experience a drop off in traffic shortly after the holidays...but we didn't, it was the exact opposite! At certain times during the event it felt similar to a BLACK FRIDAY event. A buying frenzy sort of atmosphere prevailed. The credibility of the renovation event was enhanced because major modifications were being performed during store hours. Furthermore, the event was sales driven...the staff had a

great story to tell. Giving the customer a background as to what was going on at our store, and how that translated into savings for them, was a key to success. The custom preprints you prepared helped dramatically with advertising messages that were consistent with what the customer experienced once they arrived at the store."

**Regards ... Gerard Ninow**

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(See Larry's timely article on how to increase your advertising effectiveness in this issue of Furniture World)



# GOING WHERE THE MONEY IS

Study shows the 20% of affluent households, that account for more than 40% of home furnishings sales, are increasingly shopping at specialty retailers.

by Pam Danziger

Outside Philadelphia, the home furnishings warehouse called "The Dump." sells everything for the home; furniture, mattresses, electronics, outdoor, rugs, and accents. It's tag line sets the stage for its customer appeal, "Tired of Stores that Cost too Much? Dump 'em." With limited hours, open only Friday, Saturday and Sunday, you never know what you will find there, but whatever it is, it will be cheap.

At first blush, The Dump's name might seem like an odd choice, but from a marketing and branding perspective it is brilliant. The Dump's branding is the K.I.S.S. principle at its

finest -- Keep It Simple Stupid. The name is simplicity itself, one word, one syllable. It's ironic, what does it mean?, so it engages people's minds and makes them think, imprinting it in people's memory, and inviting a visit. Because it's a store where manufacturers 'dump' their overstock and excess inventory, it's a place a shopper may find a diamond in the rough. It stands for one simple thing -- Cheap stuff for the home.

Does your store or your brand tell potential customers what, indeed, you stand for? Many times home marketers confuse rather than clarify their meaning for shoppers, not explicitly standing for anything, but too many things. Your store becomes just another place for home stuff, not The place to go for \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank).

Unity Marketing recently completed a seven-year retrospective study of the home furnishings market. It focused on the mindset of the affluent, the top 20% of U.S. households based upon income. Those households account for more than 40% of all home furnishings sales in America. Since coming out of the recession, the affluents are the most important target customer for anyone selling home furnishings. They are about the only segment in the market that actually has discretionary income, as the middle-class has lost about

\$5,000 per household of spending power in the economic crisis. The affluent are a primary target, whether you compete at the low-end, like The Dump, mid-market, like Raymour & Flanigan or La-Z-Boy, or premium/high-end, such as Ethan Allen, Design Within Reach, Restoration Hardware or anywhere along the pricing continuum.

What Unity Marketing's seven-year retrospective look at the home furnishings market revealed is painful, but these three facts are important for all to know:

- First, not until 2013 did the home furnishings market recover from the losses of the recession. For the durable goods segment (furniture, major appliances, tableware & other hard goods) it still lags pre-recession highs. The Bureau of Economic Analysis put total personal consumption of nondurable furnishings (linens and soft goods) and durable furnishings and home equipment at \$315.9 billion in 2013 (2014 data is not yet available), after hitting a \$273.5 billion bottom in 2009. In 2013 this personal consumption measure remained at levels about equal with those from 2007 (See Chart 1).
- Second, the number of home furnishings retailers as tracked by the

"The affluents are the most important target customer for anyone selling home furnishings, since they are about the only segment in the market that actually have discretionary income."





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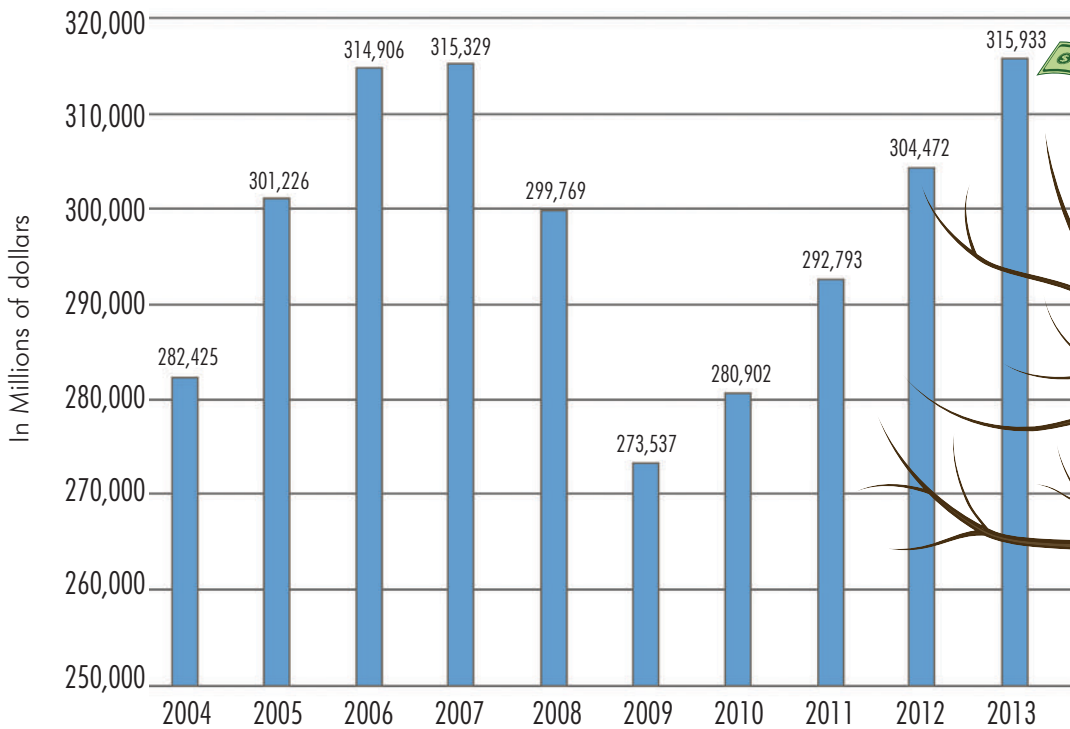
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Chart 1: U.S. Home Furnishings Market



Source: BEA NIPA 2.4.5U & Unity Marketing

Not until 2013 did the total home furnishings market surpass pre-recession levels.

five-year Economic Census declined by 21% from 2007 through 2012, dropping from 65,144 stores to 51,998 through the recession. That means there are 13,000 fewer places for people to shop for their home, which may be a blessing, less competition, or curse, your store may be hanging on by a thread.

- Third, in 2012 the home furnishings retailers that survived the recession accounted for only 29% of total industry sales (i.e. \$89.1 billion), as compared with 34% in 2007 (\$108.2 billion). That means other types of retailers, think department stores, discounters, online/internet and more, have taken a huge chunk of business away from specialty furniture and home furnishings stores.

Given the realities that every home furnishings marketer faces -- i.e. there is a smaller durable home furnishings market today than before the recession, and people who want and need

home furnishings have fewer specialty stores in which to shop -- how can home marketers grow their businesses and prosper? I think the answer is to keep focused on the best customer prospects -- the affluent with discretion -- and deliver the home furnishings experiences they crave.

### ATTRACT THE AFFLUENT

Drastic times call for drastic actions and 2015 is your call to action. Unity Marketing's research into the needs and desires of the affluent home furnishings customers from 2008 to 2013 reveals that when it comes to affluents buying things for their homes, they are turning more often to specialists, such as interior designers and stores that specialize. They are turning away from stores that don't specialize in any particular class of home goods. Chart 2 on page 92 tells you what's important to know about trends in the sale of home furnishings to affluent consumers from 2008 to 2013.

This chart shows that affluents more than doubled their purchases of rugs

and carpets through interior designers and increased spending by 50% in specialty rug and flooring-type retailers. At the same time they spent 10% less in home improvement-type stores, like Home Depot and Lowe's, and 26% less in discount stores and warehouse outlets.

In other words, channels that position themselves as 'experts' or 'specialists' in rugs and carpets captured a larger share of the affluent market from 2008 to 2013. Retailers that were

"They are turning more often to specialists, such as interior designers and stores that specialize in one aspect of the home, than to stores that don't specialize."





# "Specialty is in and mass is out!"

This is a trend Unity Marketing found across all 10 different home-goods product categories included in our study."

more mass or discount-oriented lost market share in the time period.

This is a trend Unity Marketing found across all 10 different home-goods product categories included in our study. Specialty is in and mass is out! Affluent shoppers are more likely to turn to specialty stores that are the 'experts' in specific types of home furnishings. For example, affluent shoppers are increasingly looking for these specialists:

- **Furniture:** *Interior designers and decorators for new furniture choices*
- **Lighting:** *Interior designers and specialty lighting stores*

- **Window Coverings:** *Interior designers and specialty window dealers*

- **Major Appliances:** *Interior designers, contractors and specialty major appliances stores, as well as electronics and high-tech specialty stores*

- **Cookware & Small Appliances:** *Specialty gourmet cooking stores*

Similar trends are noted across the other home categories studied. Affluents in the current market for home furnishings value the expertise and experience of specialists for their home purchases.

## STAND OUT

The call to action is to make your store, your destination, your service offering stand out. You must be clear regarding what you do, why you are better at that one special thing, and communicate it clearly and simply, like The Dump. The Dump doesn't claim to be all things for all people for home. But The Dump is a stripped-down shopping experience that offers the potential to find that one special thing for one's home at a deeply discounted price for the customer willing to search it out. One of The Dump's great appeals is its treasure-hunt atmosphere.



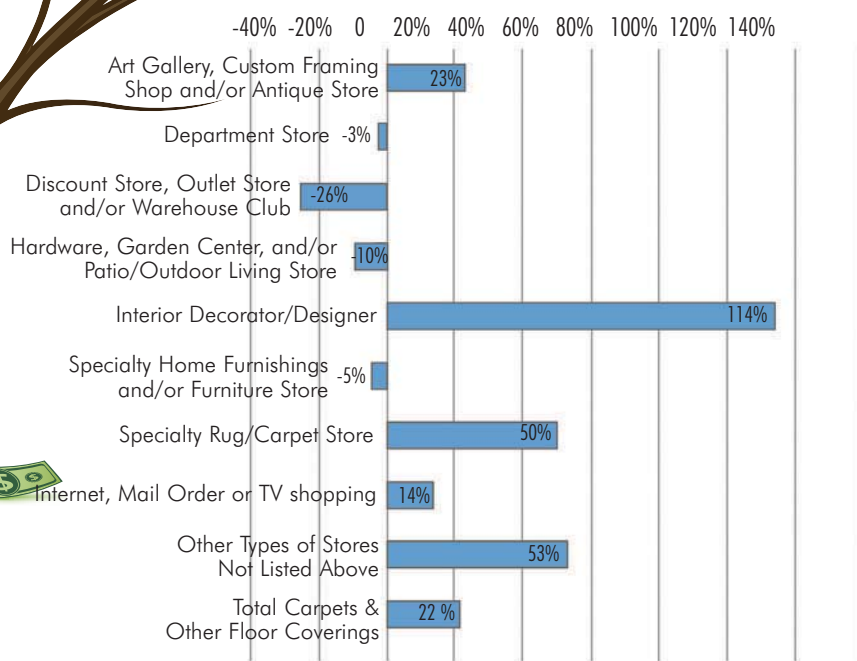
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**Chart 2: Affluent Carpets & Floor Covering Customers' Channels of Distribution. % Change In Spending 2008-2013**



How do you compete, especially when so many other home furnishings retailers focus on price and discounting, like The Dump? It's risky to go down the discount path, where there are plenty of opportunities for consumers to buy good, cheap home furnishings. Instead, consider focusing on developing a specialty. Unity Marketing's research reveals that the affluent shoppers in particular are looking not just for 'stuff,' but for special expertise along with products for their home. Affluent shoppers want to learn more about the home furnishings they are considering and how to use them effectively to make a design statement. More often than not, they have an idea of the way they want their homes to look and feel. They are turning to experts like interior designers who can help bring those ideas alive in their homes.

Specialty retailers selling across different categories should aim to develop category or product specialists within their stores to bring the kind of user information and design-specific expertise that affluent customers seek. No doubt, these customers made plenty of do-it-yourself design mistakes before they reached affluence. Now that they have reached higher levels of income, they are likely to want to avoid additional mistakes, and will value the services of an expert in a consultative retailing environment. Retailers need to lead with their expertise in specific categories to attract these high-potential customers.

And finally, specialty retailers need to develop a marketing communication plan that clearly and effectively communicates what that specialty is.

Developing this communications

program can be more of a challenge for specialty retailers than finding and developing their actual home-related specialty. After all, you are an expert at home furnishings retailing, but not necessarily at effective branding and marketing communications. To communicate effectively with affluent target customers today, you should consider finding an expert in marketing, branding, public relations, advertising, and internet and social media marketing, to help you to reach this important target customer.

**About Pamela Danziger:** Pamela N. Danziger is an internationally recognized expert specializing in consumer insights for marketers targeting the affluent consumer. She is president of Unity Marketing, a marketing consulting firm she founded in 1992. Pam received the Global Luxury Award for top luxury industry achievers presented at the Global Luxury Forum in 2007 by Harper's Bazaar. *Luxury Daily* named Pam to its list of "Women to Watch in 2013." She is a member of Jim Blasingame: The Small Business Advocate's Brain Trust and a contributing columnist to *The Robin Report*, a newsletter for senior executives in the retail, fashion, beauty, consumer products and related industries.

Pam uses qualitative and quantitative market research to learn about luxury marketers' brand preferences, shopping habits, and attitudes about their luxury lifestyles, then turns these insights into actionable strategies for marketers to use to reach these high spending consumers.

Pam has authored four books with her latest book *Putting the Luxe Back in Luxury: How new consumer values are redefining the way we market luxury* (Paramount Market Publishing, 2011). Visit [www.unitymarketingonline.com](http://www.unitymarketingonline.com) or email [Pam188@ptd.net](mailto:Pam188@ptd.net).



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## HELPING

# BEFORE SELLING

Part 1: Free yourself from a “churn and burn” attitude that ignores the true value of your customers.

by Jeff Giagnocavo and Ben McClure

Once in a while a business innovation appears that is a true game-changer for Main Street small business owners including furniture and bedding retailers.

Our store, Gardner’s Mattress & More in Lancaster, PA has developed and implemented such a system called Infotail that has changed the way we look at and comport our business.

Infotail is the brainchild of mine, along with my business partners Ben McClure and Mike Capuzzi. If you’ve been following this series of articles you’ve already been exposed to small parts of this system. In the next four issues, we will take a deeper dive into this marketing and sales strategy we’ve implemented in our own stores

and consulting client businesses.

The system is grounded in the power of putting educational information in the hands of people who need what we sell. Helping before selling is a key point of differentiation in the way we think about our business.

Another key differentiator is the way we think about our customers. We call this the Infotail Customer Lifecycle which is delivered to customers through the use of properly designed marketing and sales tools, systems and automation.

At its core the system’s power is that it creates informed prospects, profitable life-long customers and raving fans. It combines information-based selling with automated direct response retail marketing systems.

## PARTS OF THE SYSTEM

**Tools** - A collection of information-centric tools that first seek to inform and educate prospects with quality information before an actual sale is made. These are marketing pieces, customer relationship building devices, and process/procedures used in our business to assist in customer acquisition or fulfillment.

**Systems** - These are a combination of tools strategically put together to create a WOW experience for leads and prospects. These systems are organized, reliable and consistent, therefore they deliver consistently predictable results. They also have had the added benefit of creating wealth and freedom for us as store owners.

**Automation** – Marketing and sales management automation is at the core of the system and is what holds our marketing and staff to account. It permits our tools and systems to run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year.



Shown at left are the eight strategic goals of the Infotail Customer Lifecycle used at Gardner’s Mattress & More.



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## HELPING

# BEFORE SELLING



Shown at left are the eight strategic goals of the Infotail Universe that support tools, systems and automation used at Gardner's Mattress & More.

## THE CUSTOMER LIFECYCLE

It's a sad matter of fact that typical home furnishings retailers look at their customers completely wrong.

Average business owners think that they get a customer to *make a sale*. At Gardner's Mattress and More, we know that the point of making a sale is to *get a customer*! This is a BIG DIFFERENCE. Once we understood this idea, and set it as a goal, it completely changed the way we approached marketing and sales.

Most business owners think in terms of transactions in these ways:

- "I need to up my close rate

to 35%."

- "I need to serve 20 customers today."
- "I need to sell six bedrooms this week."

This churn and burn attitude ignores the potential lifetime value of a customer and what this value truly means to a business.

An ideal customer is a vital and valuable business asset. To maximize this asset, our job is to:

- Identify our target customer.
- Offer them educational information to get them interested in our products and services.
- Offer this information and capture the lead.
- Get them to visit us for the first time.
- Convert them to a customer.
- Deliver and delight them with our offerings.
- Nurture and get them to become lifetime customers.
- Make them raving fans of our business.

Essentially, we make a sale to get a customer, and do everything in our power to create value and keep that customer for life. When done correct-

ly, the lifetime value of a customer is expandable, not only by future purchases, but also by the referral power that customer represents.

There is no reason a customer who started with us this year, cannot still be a customer a decade from now, resulting in substantial incremental value to our business. In order to accomplish this, we keep in mind eight strategic goals that are also presented in the diagram on the first page of this article.

"It's a sad matter of fact, but the typical small business owner looks at their customers completely wrong."

## EIGHT STRATEGIC GOALS

**1. Target Recipient:** It all started with getting a clear picture of who our ideal customers are. Once we found out "who our who" is, our marketing became more focused and relevant. This enabled Gardner's Mattress & More to attract more of the customers we want, and repel those we are not meant to do business with.

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# "20x more referrals

are mailed back to us than we get with our online referral program. Of those names, we sell through to 20%."

**2. Inform & Get Interest:** We developed information-centric marketing tools that attract, inform and educate our ideal customer and get them interested in doing business with us. By helping our target recipient with educational and valuable information regarding the products, services and solutions, we immediately differentiate our business from the masses.

**3. Lead Capture:** Using information-centric tools such as a call-to-action, we capture both online and offline leads in order to follow up and offer compelling and valuable reasons to visit our business.

**4. Prospect Visit:** We have one single goal with our lead follow-up marketing. It's to get them to visit our location and become a first time cus-

tomers. We use specific strategies to accomplish this.

**5. First Time Customer:** We know that every first time customer has the ability to become a repeat, lifetime customer, NO MATTER WHAT IS SOLD!

**6. Deliver & Delight:** Making the first sale is by no means the end-goal. It's just the start of a mutually-beneficial relationship with our customers. Our goal is to deliver on our promise and delight them with unexpected surprises and personal touch-points, immediately after the first sale, and on a regular basis.

**7. Lifetime Customer:** Using the tools and systems, we nurture and keep customers coming back. The future sales and referral potential with our properly nurtured customers is huge.

**8. Get Referrals, Testimonials & Reviews:** In today's business environment getting happy customer referrals, testimonials and online reviews is mandatory! We use automation tools to get happy customers to leave positive testimonials and reviews, and tell their friends and family about the business.

## EIGHT THINGS YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

Whether you are ready to change your approach or are looking to score incremental business, here are eight suggestions that have worked for us at Gardner's Mattress & More.

**1. Advertising:** We often recommend a laser focused approach

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1. Target Recipient → 2. Inform & Get Interest → 3. Lead Capture → 4. Prospect Visit → 5. First Time Customer → 6. Deliver & Delight! → 7. Lifetime Customer → 8. Get Referrals, Testimonials & Reviews

---

to advertising. Consider including copy and messages within your advertising that call out to your potential customers. Instead of 50% off language, use language such as, "wake up happy & pain free, download our mattress buying guide to find out how".

**2. Buying Guide:** We make people into prospects by getting them to request our mattress buying guide. Now we are in a conversation with them, and all of our subsequent communications are focused on continuing a conversation, at their pace, so we can get them to visit our store.

**3. Lead Capture:** We use lead capture not just for our mattress buying guide, but for offers, financing, and even the coupons we call savings passes. Upon capturing a name and email, our email marketing system delivers the savings pass they requested. Then the marketing works to get them to visit the store.

**4. Conversation:** Steps 1-3 work to collect unique information for each potential customer that enables us to encourage relevant, timely, and personal conversations. If a lead claims a savings pass, we let them know when that savings pass expires and that a store visit is required to use it. If they ask for a mattress buying guide to be mailed, we ask them if they in fact received it and if so what feedback do they have for us? Keep in mind that all of these efforts, while powerful in and of themselves, act synergistically to create a higher return on investment.

**5. Information Capture:** We collect all kinds of information.

Even if someone just buys a pillow, we ask for, collect, and record when they expect to buy a mattress next, and of course subsequent communications begin.

**6. Make An Experience:** We seek to make every point of contact an experience. Each customer receives a unique gift bag on delivery that contains candy, note pads, and pens along with referral and testimonial forms. These forms are digitally captured and then printed with each customer purchase. They contain relevant data for every customer making them unique. But for us the experience doesn't stop there. Our delivery staff rolls out a floor mat for use inside the home, and wears foot protection so as not to dirty or scuff floors. We even offer to vacuum under and around the bed with the use of a battery powered vacuum.

"Instead of 50% off language, consider including copy and messages within your advertising that call out to your potential customers."

**7. Stay Connected:** We add prospects to our printed and mailed newsletter list. This has proven to be an inexpensive way to stay connected to our best customers. It keeps them aware of what is going on here at Gardner's and communicates new

and exciting offers and products available for purchase.

**8. Don't Trash Your Pen and Ink:** The biggest success story we have to share here is that although we have an online referral system, 20 times more referrals are mailed back to us than are generated by our online referral program! While the online aspect is very unique from a technology standpoint, the old school paper, ink, and stamp method of mailing back the form we provide offers a far better return on investment. Weekly we average 18 names given to us as referrals and of those names we sell through to 20%. That's almost three sales weekly from just referrals.

**About Jeff Giagnocavo and Ben McClure:** 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".

Jeff Giagnocavo also helps retailers that sell face to face, harness the power of information based selling and drive more ready to buy now customers through the front door of their businesses.

To learn more about Infotail, the Infotail Team, and how they can help you accomplish 100% of the things you should be doing in your store, 100% of the time, email [Jeff@Infotail.com](mailto:Jeff@Infotail.com), visit [www.Infotail.com](http://www.Infotail.com), or call 888-688-1974

Questions about this article or any aspect of bedding promotion can be directed to Jeff and Ben care of editor@furninfo.com.



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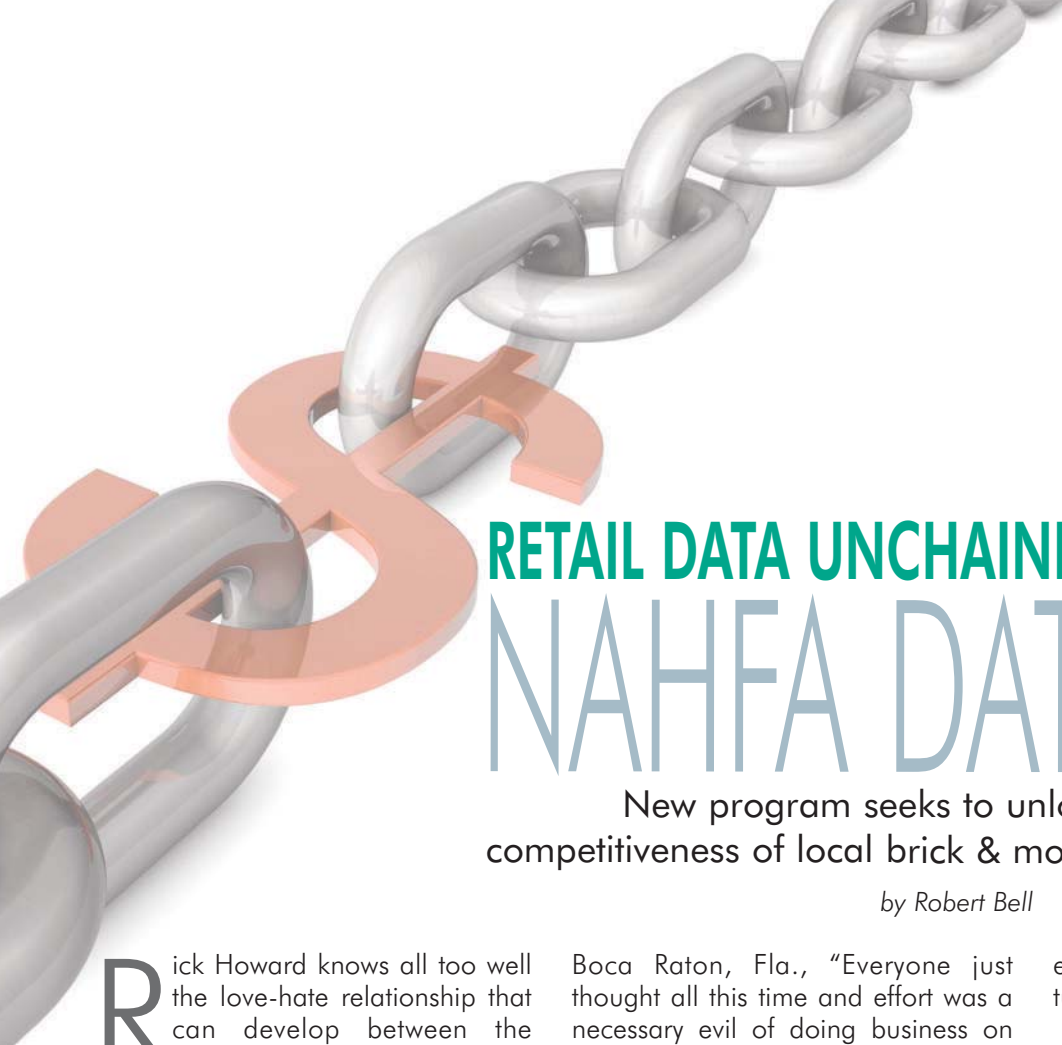
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## RETAIL DATA UNCHAINED

# NAHFA DATA LINK

New program seeks to unlock the online competitiveness of local brick & mortar furniture retailers.

by Robert Bell

**R**ick Howard knows all too well the love-hate relationship that can develop between the home furnishings retailer and his website. Howard loves the added sales and visibility that come with his furniture store's online presence. He also hates the time and labor that goes into populating the website with product data provided by manufacturers in a variety of different formats.

"It's always been a hassle", said Howard, owner of Sklar Furnishings in

Boca Raton, Fla., "Everyone just thought all this time and effort was a necessary evil of doing business on the Internet. That you had to dedicate all this time and expense to your web site."

A new service promises to change that. The North American Home Furnishings Association has partnered with RM Innovations to convert and standardize manufacturers' product data, then deliver it to home furnishings retailers to use on their websites, point-of-sale systems, e-catalogs, digital signage and more.

"The new service, NAHFA DataLink, will reduce the amount of time and labor retailers like Howard currently invest in building their web presence and product libraries," says Sharron Bradley, CEO of NAHFA, which represents more than 1,800 home furnishings retailers throughout North America.

"We really believe this will be a game-changer for home furnishings retailers," adds Bradley. "NAHFA DataLink is going to help level the playing field between brick-and-mortar retailers and e-commerce giants."

The service was announced at the winter Las Vegas Market and has been

embraced by retailers and manufacturers alike.

Delivering standardized product data to merchants is commonplace in retail categories such as appliances and electronics, but furniture has been slow to adapt in large part because of expense and time. "It's a service that has been very segmented over the years and who's time has finally come for furniture," says Patrick Bain, chief operating officer at RM Innovation, the Kentucky-based marketing company that partnered with NAHFA to introduce NAHFA DataLink.

Bain said DataLink already has data on more than 220,000 SKUs from 55 rug manufacturers and expects home furnishings to be even more successful.

Retailers have forever been frustrated trying to access manufacturers' data including photos, pricing, measurements and styles in a standardized format. Indeed, web-service providers often hire many workers whose full-time job is to download and format the different types of product data from manufacturers.

The labor is expensive, but much needed. Without that data, online shoppers who can't find what they are

"The new service, NAHFA DataLink, will reduce the amount of time and labor retailers invest in building their web presence and product libraries, says Sharron Bradley, CEO of NAHFA."



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# "Delivering standardized product data to merchants is commonplace in retail categories such as appliances and electronics, but furniture has been slow to adapt in large part because of expense and time."

looking for locally, turn to e-commerce giants to do their research and shopping instead.

And make no mistake: Consumers are buying home furnishings online. Overstock.com's highest-performing product category from Nov. 27 to Dec. 1—traditionally retailers' biggest selling period of the year—was furniture. Yet even as online shopping grows, Forbes magazine reports that 90 percent of shoppers would rather buy from a brick-and-mortar store.

Bain takes that one step further, pointing out that online shoppers will buy locally, provided the merchant offers three pieces of data online: a product's image, its availability and a price.

"Armed with that information," says Bain, "studies show 47 percent of consumers will shop at a store close to them that provides them with those three things.

"Consumers want to visualize what they are in the market for," Bain adds. "That's where NAHFA DataLink

comes into play for retailers. The more likely a consumer is able to make an informed decision from your website, the more likely she is going to walk through your front door. But they can't visualize and make that decision without the product information."

Bradley says retailers using NAHFA DataLink can provide that information—the same photos, pricing, availability and other information as Overstock, Amazon, One Kings Lane and similar online giants—giving customers the chance to buy locally.

NAHFA DataLink isn't about retailers replacing their brick-and-mortar store, says Bradley. "It's about your online store enhancing your brick-and-mortar store," she says.

John Wells is president of Wells Home Furnishings, a two-store chain in West Virginia, and a believer in NAHFA DataLink.

Wells says his store is a lot like most home furnishings stores. His business comes primarily from local customers who come in to look, feel and ultimately buy. But increasingly he's seen those customers come in having done their homework online.

"They've already started their shopping before they come through my doors so I see the importance of being online," says Wells. "It's becoming very clear to me and a lot of other retailers that to stay in business 10 years from now, we'll need a store and web presence. NAHFA DataLink will help us build to that future."

Wells uses a third party to populate his website, but even with outside help, he still doesn't have the entire product data set available for his 100-plus vendors.

Bradley and other NAHFA officials have been meeting with manufacturers since January to get them on board. She said most are eager to participate, and that NAHFA hopes to have more than 300 manufacturers' catalogs available to retailers later this year. DataLink will be free to manufacturers, and retailers will pay a monthly subscription fee.

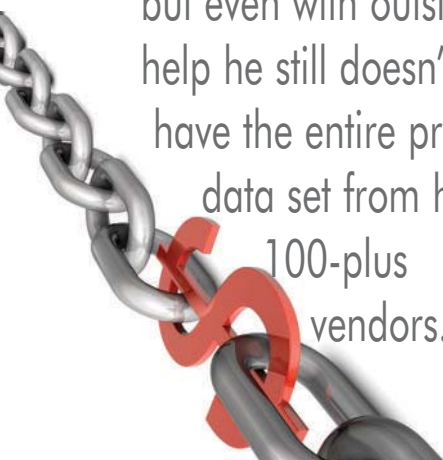
That fee will be determined by the number of SKUs a retailer has. She said the Association expects to have firm pricing in place in April. The service will be available to all retailers, but NAHFA members will receive a steep discount.

Howard believes this program is needed among small and large retailers alike. "(NAHFA DataLink) isn't about an end to a retailer's brick and mortar. Nobody's ready to give that up yet," he said. "But technology is such that the business is changing for all retailers. Why not get ahead of the game now?"

**For More Information:** NAHFA DataLink is available to all home furnishings retailers, though members of the North American Home Furnishings Association receive a significant discount. For information about subscribing to NAHFA DataLink, contact Mary Frye at [mfrye@nahfa.org](mailto:mfrye@nahfa.org). For information about joining the NAHFA (North American Home Furnishings Association) contact Kaprice Crawford at [kcrawford@nahfa.org](mailto:kcrawford@nahfa.org).

About Robert Bell: Robert Bell is editor the North American Home Furnishings Association's magazine for members, *RetailerNOW*. He can be reached at [rbell@retailernowmag.org](mailto:rbell@retailernowmag.org).

"Wells uses a third party to populate his website, but even with outside help he still doesn't have the entire product data set from his 100-plus vendors."





# MARKET SQUARE & SUITES



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Hint: It's not furniture!

by Joe Capillo

"Give the lady what she wants" is a famous quote by Marshall Field, the pioneer Chicago retail legend. He had it displayed on a sign above his desk in his office in the store he built in 1887. 128 years later, this wisdom still rings true. However, it begs the question: "What does the lady want?"

My view is that the lady wants a beautiful, comfortable, functional home that is the best she can afford. Furniture is just one of the stepping stones to that goal, that dream, that place.

So, if you believe that the lady who tells your salesperson at the door;

"So, if you believe that the lady who tells your salesperson at the door; "I'm just looking" is simply trying to avoid engagement, you're right, and wrong."

"I'm just looking" is simply trying to avoid engagement, you're right, and wrong. And if you've had a salesperson tell you the reason her customer didn't buy was because: "She didn't know what she wanted" – she's right too.

### YOU ARE NOT IN THE FURNITURE BUSINESS

You're not in the "furniture business", you're in the business of helping people fulfill dreams. When Tom Peters, the author of the great business book "In Search of Excellence" studied our industry 20 years ago, he said two things that have resonated with me since: "Your industry underperforms because you set your sights too low" and then, most significantly, he said "You sell too much furniture, and not enough dreams." Peter's tried to wake us up two decades ago.

In my continuing list of relevant quotes, Stephen Covey in "Principle Centered Leadership" said my favorite sage thing of all time: "Sometimes, the way you see the problem, is the problem."

I've studied this industry from the sales metrics, performance management, and selling strategy points-of-view for 43 years, and still do to this

day. When you carefully, photographically, accurately count your customer traffic and account for all potential buyers, closing ratios (conversion rates) are right around 20% with some great salespeople at around 30% and the poorest people as low as 15%. And, this is made more powerful by the fact that if as few as 20% of your monthly traffic consists of customers returning an additional time on the same project (dream), your close ratio on new, first-time-on-a-project shoppers is around 10% OR LESS, meaning that returning shoppers, those infamous Be-Backs, close at a far higher rate – measurably in the 70% to 90% range.

### BRING BACK BE-BACKS

How, then, can you bring back more of the people you don't sell the first time? The Be-Backs.

Now, remember that an old customer coming in on a new project for the first time, is the same as any other first-time customer. When they don't buy, they become a potential "Be-Back". This fact is a critical strategic point to consider if you want to increase your sales. And, it can only be accomplished by having a well thought out strategy and coaching to



# SHOWPLACE



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Furniture Classics



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MARKET CENTERS

# "Simply knowing and showing

technical things about construction, materials, fabrics, color, pricing, delivery... won't get you connected to the one thing you know nothing about: the room!"

ensure that the strategy is applied to every customer, every time.

The simple, "top line" statement



"A strategy statement is not some high-minded thing. This is a statement of what you will actually do every day when dealing with customers."

made by understanding these critical metrics is this: If your store's overall close ratio is 20%, that means 80% of the shopping visits to your store do not result in a sale being closed. If you can reduce the number of non-buyers to only 70% of all opportunities, your sales go up by 50% with the same level of customer visits. You get a 50% sales increase by doing some things differently. Worth considering? You

still have more non-buyers than buyers, but your sales go up 50%, and you do NOT have to spend an additional penny on advertising to bring in more shoppers.

Giving the Lady what she wants means first understanding what she wants. It means that you understand that for this sofa, this dining room set, this bed, this accessory, rug, – one thing or ten things – it's all a "project" to her. You need to have a strategic approach to understanding everything about this project – like the room – and what's in it, what's changing, what's staying, what she is struggling with. You need to connect to the project and to the people through their projects. You need to become her professional partner in completing this project.

Simply knowing and showing all the "technical" things about construction, materials, fabrics, color, pricing, delivery... won't get you connected to the one thing you know nothing about: the room. And, it won't connect you to the project or the person either. And it is in this disconnection where you lose people. You miss the point of "Give the Lady What She Wants."

A strategic plan lays out how you want to deal with all of your customers. A strategy statement might say:

"We will provide services to our customers to help them achieve their goals for beautiful, functional, affordable rooms and homes. We'll make every effort to fully understand their rooms and homes, and their desired outcomes, and provide room planning services to assist them at any level they require."

Notice, I haven't mentioned furniture in here once. Or "quality" or used the word "best".

This is not a "mission statement" in the old sense. Not some high-minded thing. This is a statement of what you will actually do every day when dealing with customers. Remember that 70% to 80% of what you're doing now doesn't work.

## ARSENAL OF SELLING TOOLS

Now that you've made this strategic statement, you have to back it up with the training for those people who will be dealing with your customers. And, with the on-the-floor coaching to help the players make it happen.

Unless you run a powerhouse promotional store where price is your prime driver and you're cranking out carloads of furniture every day, here is my short list of things you need to have in your arsenal of selling tools:

- A defined, scripted selling approach that people can learn and use when dealing with customers. The simplest of these has been around for as long as I can remember, and it's simply to ask one thing: "Tell me about your room." And then you need a process to follow with what to do next, which is to sketch the room and then...
- A 2D room planning tool on several computers around the store. Everyone needs to be able to use this tool efficiently. Plus, know when and why to use it, depending on each customer's needs. This is a powerful way to connect to customers and their projects.





GIVE

THE LADY

WHAT SHE WANTS

- Simple, old-school paper forms to document each customer opportunity with an area to make a hand sketch of a room. These will later be used by the sales coach to review the salesperson/ customer engagement. This also captures customer contact information for follow up to generate those important Be-Backs (70%+ close rate).

#### COACHING IN THE GAME

Coaching-in-the-game means the coach watches the game – right there on the field with the players and

makes adjustments and responds in real-time as things happen. Customer engagements are replayed between the salesperson and the coach, and this is all reflected against the person's goals for sales and income – their goals first, not yours.

Selling Strategies based on solid understanding of, and the sincere desire to "give the lady what she wants" are a great way to build a common rallying point for diverse people to find common ground – when they fully understand what is it the lady wants.

**About Joe Capillo:** Joe Capillo is an experienced retail furniture industry sales and management consultant. He currently provides furniture retailers with affordable strategic planning management and sales coaching services via screen-sharing software, telephone calls for meetings and email for off-time communications.

Questions on any sales management topic can be directed to Joe Capillo at [joefcap@gmail.com](mailto:joefcap@gmail.com) or call him at 267-374-9127. See all of Joe's articles on Furniture World's website at [www.furninfo.com/Authors/ List](http://www.furninfo.com/Authors/List).

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