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Marketing To Millennials

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focus on accessories

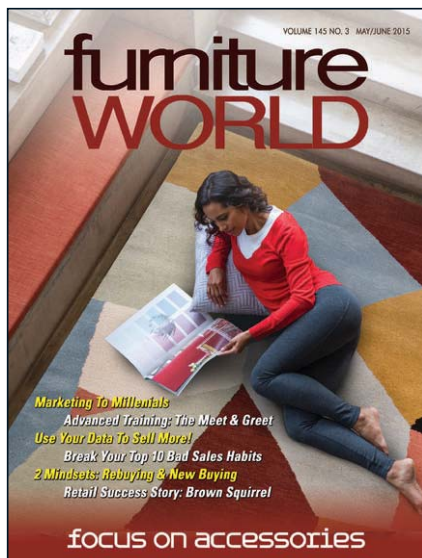


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IN THIS ISSUE

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- 08** Millennials: Congratulations Mom & Dad, It's a Customer!
Millennials think and shop differently than Baby Boomers and Generation X. Here's what you need to know.
- 14** Trending Accessories
Best practices for buying, merchandising and profiting from the category - Part 1.
- 24** Killer Casualness at Retail
Casualness can creep in anywhere. It's your job to cut it out and replace it with intention.
- 28** Best Selling Design
Editors' picks of best selling furniture and accessory designs.
- 36** Brown Squirrel Furniture - "King of The Wild Frontier"
Knoxville Tennessee retailer with a storied history creates a showplace with the help of store designer Connie Post.
- 52** Rebuying and New Buying: Two Different Mindsets
Executing these activities properly and coordinating them improves sales and profitability.
- 58** Use Your Data To Sell More Furniture
Case Study: How a regional furniture chain pulled its data together to sell more furniture.
- 64** Top Ten Bad Sales Habits & How To Break Them
Bad habits are easy to form but hard to break. They equal lower sales and declining revenue.
- 68** The Meet & Greet: Advanced RSA Training
Part 3 of our Steps-Of-The-Sale series. The 'Meet and Greet,' is where the R.S.A. makes a first impression.



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**EXPRESS
DELIVERY**



BY **ASHLEY**
FURNITURE INDUSTRIES, INC.



EDITOR'S CORNER

Hall of Fame

For those of you who haven't given much thought to the American Furniture Hall of Fame lately, it's time to take another look. First of all, the recent name change to American Home Furnishings Hall of Fame, is significant. It's part of an effort, underway for some time, to collect a wider range of historical information and to honor individuals who've made substantial and historically significant contributions to our industry from sectors such as bedding, outdoor/casual, accessories and design. Changes have been made as well to the induction process. Chief among these is that inductees' names will be made public well before he banquet.

Each year a six-member nominating committee spends countless hours collecting candidate names, then amassing information on each, with a focus on identifying four main selection attributes; Excellence, Superior Accomplishments, Innovation & Creativity, plus Philanthropic Generosity. The process takes months of meetings that culminate in quantitative voting.

Check out the announcement in this issue of a new fabulous AHFHF induction banquet to be held on October 15th at the Grandover during the High Point show. Undeniably, the industry's most prestigious gathering, it will be bigger, better and not to be missed. See you there!

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MOM & DAD CONGRATULATIONS IT'S A...CUSTOMER!

by Gordon Hecht

Boomers are being replaced by Millennials as your target demographic. Are you ready for the blessed event?

This year marks a monumental birthday for me. It is more impactful than when I turned 40 or 50. This month my only child turns 30-which, by any measure means that he is no longer a child. This realization hit me hard in April when I visited him in Albuquerque, NM.

I was in the Land of Enchantment for a store opening. Time was short, so I arranged to meet my son at his work location for lunch. Upon arrival I was greeted by the receptionist and told her "I am here to see Dylan". She said she would have to see if Mr. Hecht was available. He was. She offered to lead me to his office and announced "Mr. Hecht, your guest is here." At the moment I arrived as a "guest", in my eyes, he had arrived as an adult.

2015 marks a moment for all of us who fight the daily retail battle. For most of us, our entire career has been centered on marketing and catering to Baby Boomers, that massive group of Americans born between 1946 and 1964. Some quick math shows that group will celebrate birthday 51-69

this year. Currently they total about 74.9 million people, and that number will shrink every year forward. Even sadder, that demographic-for the most part, is done buying furniture and mattresses. Perhaps a replacement item here and there and a small spend for downsizing, but be aware that for marketing purposes, that lake is fished out.

Don't lock up the store quite yet! Boomers, as a buying demographic, are being replaced with Millennials, people born between 1981 and 1997. Their numbers are strong, 75.1 million brand new consumers for all kinds of household goods; electronics, appliances, furniture and bedding. Progressive retailers who market to this new age group will flourish in the coming decade! Store owners who promote like it's 1979 will disappear from the retail landscape (Think Radio Shack). Millennials think and shop differently than Baby Boomers and Generation X (born between 1965 and 1989). They have different desires, demands, and expectations. While you may have struggled with 12:00 flashing on the Beta-max,

"If it takes longer than 5 minutes from shopper decision to order completion, you may not be sunk, but you are sinking!"

they control their smart phones and master multiple apps and functions almost instantaneously.

Dylan (Mr. Hecht to all of us guests) drives a Scion and texts on a Samsung to friends on their HTC's. He'll reach into his LG for an Angry Orchard after work while watching HULU, and munch some chips from Whole Foods. Re-read that sentence and notice that those brands were non-existent or insignificant in 1995. Clearly, legacy brands like GE, Whirlpool, RCA, CBS, Miller, and Safeway have no significance in Millennials' shopping patterns. It will be the same for the brands you tout today - Thomasville, Sealy, Broyhill, La-Z-Boy, and more. Our contemporaries saw the value in owning Drexel, Henredon, and even Bassett. Our children are happy to get that cool chair from IKEA. And yes, they understand the assembly instructions!

Millennials were raised in a Microwave food, 30 minute pizza delivery environment. They seek quick satisfaction of their needs with a no hassle

path to purchase. They shop Amazon partly because of the price, and also because of the Point, Click, and see it on your doorstep experience with a website that knows your name, address, and credit card number. Retailers that duplicate that process are tomorrow's winners. Look at your store's operations and policies and start to remove all of the roadblocks and stop signs. Set a stop watch on your check out procedure. If it takes longer than 5 minutes from shopper decision to order completion, you may not be sunk, but you are sinking!

It's more than the ease of shopping that makes Millennials want to spend money with a store. It is an environment that reflects their lifestyle and concerns. I graduated college with only one debt, a lost library book! Millennials finish schooling with debt equal to a small condo in Sarasota. They have lived through a period with two recessions and little real wage growth. While they may earn good money today, many Millennials are skeptical of long term employment with a single entity. Combine that with tuition debt and you will understand why they are frugal with many purchases. Their expectation is that you should offer 0% finance terms (that's all they have heard post-9/11). They like to keep control of their money and will seek stores with no-cost terms, even on low cost purchases. Based on Amazon Prime's success, free delivery and hassle free returns are

the price of admission for your store to stay in the game. Contrarily, Millennials will spend and wait for items considered cutting edge (think iPhone 6). Make your merchandise "must haves" instead of commodities

"Their numbers are strong, 75.1 million brand new consumers of all kinds of household goods; electronics, appliances, and if you work it right, furniture and bedding."



"To get a snapshot of your inter-generational knowledge take the short quiz and self-check your answers."

and you will build your margins and reduce cancellations.

In case you didn't know it, advertising has been evolving too! Fewer households are having a daily newspaper delivered, less people are watching network television, and Millennials are cutting the cord on cable and satellite TV. Streaming video, online advertising formatted to mobile devices, and social media are where Millennials get their information and entertainment. The word on the street is that the Internet is not a passing fad. Look at your budgeted advertising spend and if online based advertising IS NOT your largest investment; then you have failed to evolve. The Theory of Evolution states that survival of the fittest does not refer to the biggest, strongest, or fastest. The fittest survivors are those that can quickly adapt.

Like all groups, Millennials want to shop in a place with their vibe, and buy from people that look like them. Check out your store's background music. If you are playing music from the 80s, you are 35 years behind the times. That would be equal to shopping during the 1970s in a store with background music from 1935! Switch up your selection to post 2000. Even if you don't care for the music, you may like the money you make. It's

also time to start thinking about your recruiting efforts. Do Millennials think of your store as the workplace of choice? City Furniture in Florida has done a great job of hiring college students as summer interns. As a result, it attracts younger candidates who can sell and service younger shoppers.

Understand that your candidates will look and sound differently than your current staff. While you may have subconsciously (or possibly knowingly) avoided hiring store staff with tattoos or piercings in the past, it is now the social norm. As always; hiring for attitude and training for aptitude will always get you better long term associates. Millennials desire real time for friends and family. The demands of a retail schedule often preclude this, so move towards a family and employee friendly work week to the greatest degree possible. Consider a 4-day work week or alternating weekend or evenings off. You may need to hire part-time sales and office help to give your frontline forces their desired time off. Larger organizations can attract and retain top talent with tuition reimbursement or retroactive help in paying off college debt based on time employed. It's probably worth \$1000 a year to keep your best people!

In my consulting travels to businesses, both world-class and sub-par,

MILLENNIAL QUIZ

1. The president that followed John Kennedy was named _____.
2. Spotify helps me enjoy _____.
3. Mickey Mantle played for this team. _____.
4. One of the competitive events in the X games is _____.
5. One of the characters on *The Facts of Life* was called _____.
6. Lauren Cohan appears on this show _____.
7. Match the song with the artist...
Songs: *Light My Fire, Crack That Whip, Cruel to be Kind.*
Artists: Nick Lowe, Devo, The Doors.
8. Match the song with the artist...

Songs: Chains, Shut Up and Dance, Trap Queen.

Artists: Fetty Wap, Nick Jonas, Walk the Moon.





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“Look at your budgeted advertising spend. If online advertising IS NOT your largest investment; then you have failed to evolve.”

I often hear my Baby Boomer store owners and managers tell me, “I know my customer, and I know what they want”. My belief is that they may know what Baby Boomers of their income level and gender want, and a vague notion of what the opposite gender Boomers want, but are probably out of touch with Gen-X and Millennials. It’s understandable, as we tend to socialize and interact with people of our generation, no matter when we were born. To get a snapshot of your inter-generational knowledge take the short quiz on the previous page and self-check your answers. You can use that thing called “Google”, if needed.

If you found the odd numbered questions easy and struggled with the even numbered questions, then it would be odd if you were really in touch with your new audience. Learn how Millennials think, look, and shop. You’ll never get better until you change your outlook. Start by listening to some new music. Change up the radio station from XM 7 and you’ll find some of it is really good. Talk to your adult children’s friends (your kids

will just tell you what you want to hear) and invite them to critique your store and website. Flip off Nick at Nite and check out some of the independently produced programs on Crackle and Hulu. If you want to see a retail store truly devoted to Millennials, spend 30 minutes at the Apple store where you can touch and feel new products, bring in a problem to get resolved or just chat about what’s new and exciting. Can you imagine that happening in your four walls?

Blockbuster, Woolworth, Pontiac, and Pan-Am, all once mighty forces in their fields are now gone. They did not adapt to changing times and changing shopper trends. Our industry is no different, with far less stores and far less suppliers than 20 years ago. Move forward with the times. Get to know what your new shoppers find attractive, and what turns them away from your business. Cater to those needs and you can survive and flourish. In the meantime, HITAKS!

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

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

Co-author of the “Better Bedding Selling Tips” featured on Furniture World Online, Gordon has been a frequent contributor to company newsletters, and 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.

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Trending... ACCESSORIES

Best practices for buying, merchandising and profiting from the category

by Russell Bienenstock

Accessories are the antidote to a sea of sameness at furniture retail.

They have the capacity to provide personality to retail furniture store environments, yet are often treated as an afterthought. That's why Furniture World interviewed experts in the accessory field to get ideas about how stores can do a better job of buying, merchandising, selling and profiting from accessory items.

The Big Opportunity

Furniture World asked David Gebhart, CEO of Global Views, the manufacturer of home accessories and furniture to comment on how most furniture stores view the category. "One thing I can tell you," he says, "is that some furniture stores tend to view accessories as a painful necessity. But once they commit to having acces-

sories programs, they are surprised by the amount of volume they can do. Likewise, commissioned furniture sales people underestimate the value of focusing on accessories in furniture store environments. They may focus on selling a big dining room without mentioning the vase or candlestick that's sitting on it."

Sharon Davis agrees about the value of accessories to furniture retailers. She is the Executive Director of Accessories Resource Team, the decorative accent and accent furniture industry association, better known as ART. The association co-produces the ARTS Awards with the Dallas Market Center, holds its own annual ART Conference, and produces programming and events. "Accessories can be a huge profit center for any furniture store," she says. "Those that do it right see a high return on investment from the home accent side."

One of the best and most obvious attributes of adding accessories is they do not take up floor space.

Global Views' David Gebhart recalls, "I grew up at the Bombay Company, and when I first went to work there in 1988, they weren't big in the accessory business. At that time they sold mahogany furniture and displayed a few things on the walls. And the discussion I had with Bombay's CEO

at that time was, 'We're only talking about investing money in accessory items to make our furniture look better, and it will increase our sales volume without taking up any additional floor space.' If it hangs from the ceiling, if it sits on a surface, it's totally free real estate."

Why Do So Many Furniture Retailers Under-perform?

Paul Thompson, a consultant who does space planning, product development and merchandising in the gift and home furnishings industries, tells us that there are two major reasons why furniture retailers do a poor job with accessories. The first is that, "they often don't have the extra dollars to buy accessories like they should, and don't purchase them deep enough." The second reason is that they may not have the expertise to buy, and display them well. "Buyers," he notes, "do not necessarily know how to style a room." They may know the costs, the turns and the margins on categories and individual pieces, but not always the best way to finish that room out, which is important for making money with accessories. "Lots of retailers don't know how to handle accessories. For example, they place lamps all over the store, and sometimes it's hard

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METALLIC MOCHA

COLOR TRENDS from Carpenter + Company's Trendscape Color + Trend Spring/Summer 2016 report.

Dusty Denim Blu: Tones of dusty, denim blues combine to offer up a chambray chic and comfortable mid tone color. A slight tinge towards turquoise takes it to a new hue. Simple textiles, forms and patterns work best. We like that faded, washed and crumpled aesthetic.

Ape for Apricot: Beautiful blushes offer us a feminine focus that range from a warm, red-cast to a slightly sharper pink-cast and these warm the palette. Apricot works nicely with taupe and warm greige, but is just right with clean white.

Ultra Violet: Purples seep into subtlety with this color. Sitting in the midst of the range with a slightly blue or pink cast, it leaves us feeling as though we just got whiff of a berry sweet. Utilizing it with other tonals and deep dark pinotage add sophisticated flair.

Plant Life Green: Jungle plant life is lush, fresh and engaging. Leafy, foliage greens inspire the depth of this seasons' potent plant life green. Just as in nature, sitting fairly central on the color spectrum, it plays well with all the other greens in the palette, especially the herbal and citrus ones.

Sun Spot Yellow: Sour and potent, this lemony yellow reminds us of the power of solar energy. Pair it with black and white or sharp leafy greens to make this color look fresh and fruity and engage us with that sharp citrusy quality.

Metallic Mocha: The influence of the new browns and taupe on the palette has reached the range of metallic. Copper becomes a molten mocha bronze. Textures allow for the play of light along interesting surfaces. Organic forms add interest.

for shoppers to make a purchase decision because they're not also in a collected area." More advice from Paul Thompson on merchandising accessories will be presented in the July/August issue of Furniture World.

"Stores that are under accessorized are just not putting their best foot forward with the tools we have to work with today," adds Jason Phillips, Vice President of The Phillips Collection, Founder/President of Jason Phillips Design, and current President of the American Society of Furniture Designers (ASFD). "Many stores, especially single store retailers and small to medium sized chains need to be a little more confident in their buying position and in their store aesthetic.

"Larger retailers such as Pier One, are in a different position. For them it's just a question of hitting the right trend mixes with the right marketing tools and the right consumer outreach to get sales. I admire West Elm which has it's own amazing design nucleus. They're one of the hottest for me right now along with Restoration Hardware and some other major players."

Seth King, Surya's Vice President Sales adds, "Accessories bring a huge amount of value to the look of a store. Much of the problem, for some retailer owners is to figure out how they get from where they are, to where they need to be. It's tough to go directly from lining up sofas in the store to achieving a Pottery Barn look over-

night, but there are some logical steps they can make along the way, and the first and most important of these is that ownership needs to be behind the effort, push it."

This article will circle back to describing more detailed tools to bring a lagging accessory program from where it is, to where it needs to be, but first lets take a look at design and color trends.

The Trends

Patti Carpenter, President and Creative Director for Carpenter + Company suggests that, "Conservative retailers who won't take giant leaps forward in terms of what they're willing to do with, say, upholstery color, can look at patterns, simple geometrics or subtle colors to give classic furniture a lift." Carpenter works with home decor clients doing development with a focus on color, print pattern, surface design and materials. She also does private label product development for clients pairing them to artisan producers to develop exclusive handmade products. Illustrating this and the second installment in this article series are images she's composed that reflect upcoming trends for 2016.

We asked Carpenter to review what's trending, and make suggestions about how to improve retail displays.

"Accessories," she suggests, "are

where retailers can play with color. It's easy to bring in colors with pillows, throws, and other accent textiles, also vessels, vases and similar items. That's how to add a dash of inspiration. They should also play with patterns."

The Runway and Home Fashion Trending Together

Looking at the marketplace, the trends and combinations may seem to be all over the place. Carpenter's most current Trendscape Color +

Trend Spring/Summer 2016 report (copyright 2015, all rights reserved) names trends that range from 70's psychedelic, to butterfly wings, to pale, feminine tones. Carpenter says, "you wouldn't necessarily see these trends on the floor now," but in 2016 you're going to see this level of blues start to emerge. You're going to see powdery kinds of colors. You're going to see lavenders. That's what we're tracking. We work, anywhere from 18 months to two-and-a-half years out, but you will start to see them at trade shows.

"Right now, there's a beauty in

what's going on with home fashion," she explains. "There used to be a lag time between what happened on the runway and in the home. Both are impacted at this stage simultaneously by the trends. Now they are closely related, and are being impacted by many of the same social and cultural influences.

"There are many ways that retailers can interpret the trends for their customers. There are many to draw from right now, dictated by a retailer's own sense of style, and who their customer is. The reason we publish the Palette is to illustrate how retailers can put col-



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POP ART COLOR

COLOR TRENDS & PALATTES

from Carpenter + Company's Trendscape Color + Trend Spring/Summer 2016 report.

Raw White: Rough and raw, highly tactile finishes and textures inspired directly from the wilds of nature are where white will win this season. From molecular and skeletal structures to wintry birch and raw and vegetable-inspired ceramics.

Fade to Black: Bold, and anything but basic, black is back in full force. Forms are geometric, very graphic and almost otherworldly. We see both matte and shine finishes showing that black too can play with light.

COLOR PALATTES

Beyond the Pale: Fresh and subtle, barely-there pales with a nod to neon as accents. The focus is on watery aqua and sweet frosting yellow. These pretty pales won't fade or wash away.

Watermark: Calming and restful watery turqs and blues are tinged with sharp algae greens this season. They offer up a combination that is vital and simultaneously soothing. Patterning that recalls the dance of light on water is alluring and calls us into the surf.

Sunrise Sunset: A heated palette of warm sun drenched reds, deepened with a touch of blue to add interest. Pair them with shades of russets and burnt oranges. Look to the skies at days' end for inspiration and pause to admire the splendor.

Pop Art Brights: Quirky bold color that is just a bit off-kilter. Complex and dynamic, this palette recalls a retro feeling of the late 60's and 70's pop art scene. Bold blocks of color and patterned patchwork enliven rooms and retro robes on the runway.

ors together. Even though it may seem at first glance like the trends are all over the place, they are actually quite specific. For example, we are seeing changes in the level of saturation of color.

"There's a pale palette we've been talking about for a few seasons. Colors that might have shown up in Spring-Summer seasons are now being used all year long. We are seeing powdered interpretations moving forward as well, where before we saw them as rather oily. So, the trends are not all about the color, they are also about the finish, whether it's a dense, flat, matte textile color or a shiny, reflective silk or satin."

Commenting on why many stores struggle to incorporate color in displays, she continues, "It depends on the type of store you're looking at. There's a big surge in color, happening in home furnishings in items such as accent pillows and throws.

"There's also a lot of color happening in accent chairs, it's huge. We're seeing beautiful new shapes coming through in furniture, and I'm talking about from the very high end all the way down. This past weekend, I visited Room and Board and Pottery Barn. The weekend before it was Design within Reach, Restoration Hardware and Crate and Barrel. In certain channels of distribution we are definitely seeing color coming through. In

Ethan Allen I was amazed to see some really great patterns on side chairs and dining chairs, for example."

Pattern trends that stand out for this season include, "a lot of repeat patterns. Those can be geometric or organic forms that just repeat and repeat and repeat, one behind the other or layered together. I've also seen, big water-colored blossoms. In terms of the newest florals, we're see

"Conservative retailers who won't take giant leaps forward in terms of what they're willing to do with, say, upholstery color, can look at patterns, simple geometrics or subtle colors, to give classic furniture a lift."

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into area rugs in fifty standard
shapes and sizes. Custom sizes
are also available.

The display holds 96 samples of
27"x18" carpet and only takes up
6 square feet of showroom space.

Contact your sales representative for more
details, or reach out to us directly by calling
(800) 223-1110
or emailing
info@nourison.com

Nourison™
Timeless Design for the Modern Age



The Nourison Compact Rug Display is the easiest and most effective way to sell area rugs in your retail space. You can select from 100's of popular rug styles from traditional to contemporary in wool and wool blends. Customers can easily shop the rack and remove samples to place on the floor or compare with color swatches. Once a selection has been made, Nourison can produce the rug in 50 standard shapes and sizes in deliver the rug in 10-14 days. Custom sizes are also available. With the Nourison Compact Rug Display, you can start adding to you bottom line in minutes.

MORE COLOR PALATTES

from Carpenter +
Company's Trendscape Color
+ Trend Spring/Summer
2016 report.

Prism Play: Powerful punched up pink, orange and turquoise will sit with citrusy greens, grapes and bold blues to keep us smiling and optimistic. Clear sharp colors work together for clear, clean lines and simple structures. This Rainbow of hues is hot!

Saturation Point: Sharp shards of saturated colors are jarring and provocative. Bold and bright, and not for the faint of heart. Playful and prismatic, they peak our interest in making a powerful, painterly statement.

Nuance Neutrals: Nuanced neutrals of colored whites with a slightly peach or blush cast are paired with beige, taupe and soft warm whites. Warm grays continue as an anchor. Add a pale mint or ice blue and a touch of terracotta as an accent for a point of interest.

Earthen Embers: Warm and tantalizing russets and burnt oranges lead the way with touches of teal and leafy greens and golds reminding us of the true splendor of changing Autumn leaves.

Dusky Darks: Delving deeper we are inspired by root vegetables for moody, dusky darks with a focus on the cooler tones of teal, purple and moody blues. These are punctured with sharp olive-cast greens and golds.

ing daisies replacing lots of the roses that have been out there for a while. Tropical prints are coming on strong including big palm fronds in all kinds of ways plus flamingos and palm trees, even a Gauguin kind of look. We're seeing motifs that incorporate vine patterns. It's much more botanical. There are different ways florals are being used, including what I called an 'Asian Persuasion'. It's a trend we will see moving forward, ranging from Asian brocade to cherry blossoms to the blue and white Delph kind of coloring seen in vintage and antique Chinese porcelains. Also Japanese Anime patterns and koi fish. Butterfly patterns have come back around as well.

Something furniture retailers might do, she suggests is, "to talk about textiles. There's a lot happening in accent textiles with texture, prints and patterns. So where, a few seasons ago the trend was to have maybe three or four solid color pillows on a sofa, now at least one or two of them will have a pattern. Becoming

comfortable with mixing and matching color and pattern is something that's a useful skill to have at retail.

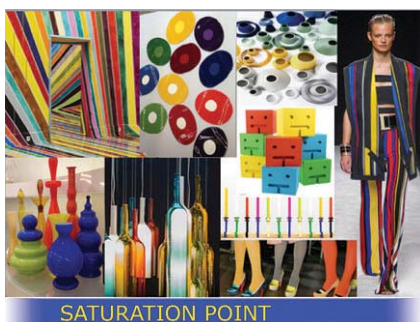
"Also knowing how to use texture is important, and having a sense of how texture can add a visual impact to what's happening on a piece of furniture."

Fashion forward retailers are increasingly using accent furniture as well as smaller accessory items to add a pop of color and interest. Carpenter observes, "In furniture we've gone from ornate silhouettes to simpler forms, with the popularity of mid-century modern and also styles that are square, tight, solid and almost stark. And then there's another direction that's coming. I'm seeing many more rounded backs on sofas and chairs. Rounded arms, not in a camelback sort of way, but more contemporary, clean and sleek. Those kinds of styles are interesting to mix and match in with more traditional pieces to give a bit of a refresh. I'm noticing the legs on furniture beginning to splay outward, and that's something we will talk about in our Fall '17 report. The whole idea of this splayed leg, adds another visual line. It's interesting because legs have previously been very straight, very square."

David Gebhart of Global Views agrees with Patti Carpenter that accent furniture can help to make retail displays stand out. "Retailers should really be looking for something to differentiate them from their competitors,"



PRISM PLAY



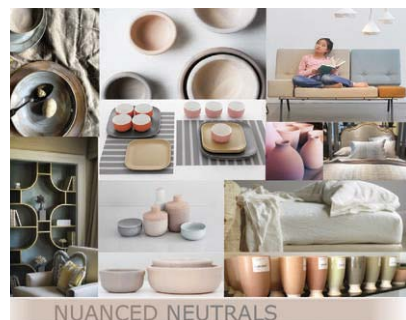
SATURATION POINT



EARTHEN EMBERS



DUSK TO DARK



NUANCED NEUTRALS

"The reason we publish

the palette is to illustrate how retailers can put colors together. Even though it may seem like the trends are all over the place, they are actually quite specific."

he says. "And, they can do that by finding the perfect accent table to put in a brown wood environment. Maybe made of metal, or stone, or another material. When I talk about accessories, I talk about accent tables as accessories as well. 'Wow' furniture pieces mixed in with ordinary furniture pieces create really interesting looks in store environments."

Other trend ideas Patti Carpenter sees include, "adding a table top area to incorporate new molded forms. These are not just circular plates, but plates and platters and saucers actually having molded patterned forms, giving more of an artisan feel. We're seeing a lot of smaller geometrics we call 'Geo A Go-Go.'" With tiny textures repeating, and a lot of black and white stripes.

"And there's so much going on now with print and pattern in rugs. We've called them "Art Under Foot".

"Even books are being wrapped in 'palettes of color' that can, for example, bring attention to a dark brown bookcase to infuse a room with color."

Shopping Accessories

"Knowing the latest trends means absolutely nothing if you can't put it into practice," Resource Team's Sharon Davis adds. "And to do that retailers have to be relatively organized before going to a show." ART offers an exclusive discount to ART member retailers who shop select resources at market. A variety of retail furniture, home accent, design studio and lighting showrooms that are members of ART.

"Pre-market planning is a big deal," Davis continues. "Do some research to find out what's selling for you and what your customer is looking for. Get up to date on the latest colors and trends. If you know where you are,

you will be ready to punch it up with new resources found at market. As an example, if you are using a wall art supplier whose core products are not performing as they should, perhaps the images or framing is dated. You may not even realize that until you see what's trending out there. I've worked with a number of retailers that have never shopped accessories at High

Point. Several of them just shopped New York, and there's just no way in the world they could ever see the breadth of product that's out there by having experienced one trade show in one region.

"Many rely on in store visits by reps, and don't go to many markets. It's easy to get into that rut. But trends and merchandising are changing quickly in



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Trending... ACCESSORIES

our industry and most of ART's vendors are working to stay on that leading edge. Retailers are not doing themselves much good if they don't window shop the accessory floors at market because that's where fabulous ideas come from. Vendor showrooms have different seasonal styles, so retailers can get all kinds of ideas about how to freshen things up, and also find new resources.

How To Get The Right Look

"So many times furniture stores buy a small smattering of accessories, display them in the store, but don't do it with conviction, purpose, or intent, comments Global Views' David Gebhart. "The stores that are most successful are the ones that really go for it, full-blown go for it, by making an important statement. There are several different ways to do it. Accessories can be used as just icing on a big cake, sprinkled around a furniture store, or retailers can create an accessory gallery within their stores. The people we work with who are the most successful do both."

It's important to buy across the whole range of function and material," Gebhart continues. "So many people come in and buy just ceramic to add a pop of color to their furniture environments. That does work, but I think that they need to view accessories in a different way. They should look at them more from a point of view of how they function, how they work together. Focus on the whole picture with all the different categories and mediums of the accessory world represented. We have a lot of ceramic and porcelain,

but we layer on glass, wood, metal, iron, in all different categories as well, from functional things, like candlesticks and boxes, to pure decorative items like bowls, and different kinds of ceramic pieces. When you come into one of our showrooms, you see everything merchandised in a very attractive, beautiful way. The people that are most successful with our lines are the ones that say, 'I want to duplicate that in my store environment,' instead of cherry picking.

"There are a lot of retailers in our industry that have created beautiful merchandising statements, but if you don't have a team of people that are visionary enough to put together a merchandised look for your store, then rely on your resources to supply you with that look."

The Phillips Collection's Jason Phillips has a similar view. "In this day and age," he says, "a successful store either has a gift for retail and they curate from hundreds of lines, or they find the right partners.

"Over the past 10 years I've noticed a big change in the types of economic stresses affecting retailers. When the recession hit, it weeded out stores. What's left is a different selling landscape that includes young design start-ups that are into pushing brands, alongside seasoned store owners who are holding on to time tested ways of doing things, building great company brands. Either way, we are at a point where retail stores can successfully promote and exploit furniture and accessory brands. The time is right for more open sourcing in our industry.

"Here's where I see retail going. I can't see retailers having success cher-

ry picking pieces from too many furniture and accessory lines. That used to make sense for retailers who wanted to be more anonymous about the lines they were buying. Now, with the Internet exposing everything, and with brands reaching out to consumers, we are seeing direct-to-consumer brand allegiance which all has to funnel back through the retail model. My point is, I've seen retailers having a lot of success following the Furnitureland South model, which is to represent brands in their retail showrooms. This store within a store presentation gives cohesive energy to presentations. It also facilitates training direct from the factory and allows retailers to better work with manufacturers' design and marketing teams to provide catalogs, brochures, collateral materials, special websites, plus help with promotions and giveaways. This is the kind of partnership that results in more invested interest on both ends, creating synergy.

We asked Phillips if many stores lack the talent or vision to create great accessory presentations. His answer, "A lot of stores do not have the kind of manpower to do a good job. The solution is to bring in the right accessory vendors and say, 'Hey, help me liven this area of the showroom up.' Retailers need to start speaking a little bit more. We're all there to help each other.

Next Issue

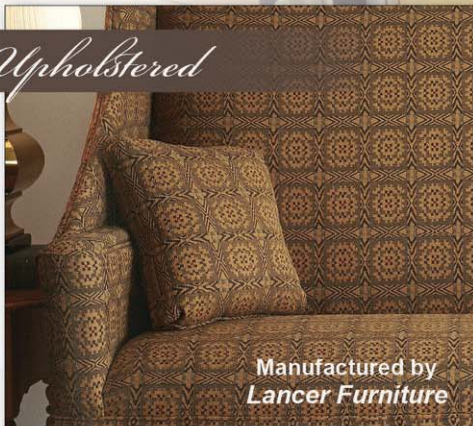
This series will continue with an in-depth look on how to merchandise accessories and sell them more effectively.

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KILLER CASUALNESS

at retail

Casualness can creep in anywhere. It's your job to cut it out and replace it with intention.

by Jeff Giagnocavo and Ben McClure

My dirty little word

for this article is casualness. Casualness can kill. Kill sales, kill customer relationships, kill the upward trajectory and ultimate success of your business.

Recently, I was invited to an event to promote a software user conference. All told, about 250 retail partners were in attendance enjoying the host's food and drink.

During this special session they unveiled the conference agenda and announced a big-name keynote speaker, all major financial investments for them.

The room was filled with their best users, customers, and partners at great expense. So, what was their big killer mistake, their sales-killing deed? It was, in my opinion, that they didn't ask for the sale!

No order form was presented. They didn't tell us about a website to visit to pay for our hotel and user fee. They had all of their partners' credit card information on file, but there was not even a mention of actually purchasing a ticket to this event.

For the duration of the evening we were captives, held hostage by the law of reciprocity with great food and drink. But since they didn't ask, they didn't get.

It's a cautionary tale since this level of casualness is akin to your retail store sending out a mailing to 50,000 homes touting your Grand Opening Sale, but neglecting to include your

address, website, and an offer. I'm exaggerating, but casualness is the enemy of many a retailer. Never forget to make every point of contact include a reason to do business with you right here, right now.

Casualness exists everywhere. It exists in big "brand awareness" campaigns. I recently was witness to a large re-branding effort made by one of our bedding suppliers. The whole ad campaign was based on two photos. These were simple photos, with just a smattering of the actual product, and zero sales copy. If you were to take the name of the company off the bottom of the ad you would be hard pressed to see what this ad is for,

- Women's dresses
- Women's hats
- Draperies
- Carpets
- Lamps
- Luxury Home Sales
- Boats
- Luxury Travel
- Hotel Sales

The question in my head as I watched the presentation, was what happens when this campaign becomes



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"Develop scripts

for greeting customers. Then do the same for every product and service you sell."

a copy cat victim by a larger company with a bigger ad budget?

If there is no "ask", there will certainly be no "get." Never be so casual that your customer needs to wonder what it is that you want them to do when looking at your ad.

So How Casual Are You?

Do you drive tons of traffic to your website without telling your potential customers who you serve and what you stand for in your community?

What greeting is your sales staff using? Is it the same greeting each and every time with each and every customer? What do they present first and why? Is there a script for each product that covers the main bullets that must be presented each and every time?

I was told the other day that I am "intentional." My whole reason for writing this article is to stress that you should be extremely intentional too. The most serious home furnishings retailers have specific professional (and personal) goals. The ones who are most successful address these goals in an intentional way.

Ideas For Adding Intention To Your Store

1. Take a look at all that web traffic you are paying for to encourage

website visits. Are you happy to take your provider's click, like, and links reports at face value. Or can you do something more? You can! Try offering valuable information like a buyer guide, membership club, or discount in exchange for the lead's name and email once they arrive at your website. If you ask, you get. Work to create real communications with real people you can sell something to. This is intentional, not casual.

2. Take a look at your staff. How are they dressed? Is it intentional or casual? Do they all greet in the same fashion or are there variations.

3. Consider the word of mouth business and referrals that come your way. Do you think that a casual approach to how you and your staff work with customers helps convert that referred business?

If all your sales people fail to deliver consistent and intentional presentations, then shame on you. If a referred prospect has a less than stellar experience, he or she will report back to the friend who referred them. It shouldn't be a surprise that you will not earn another referral. No customer will stick their neck out for you a second time if you were too casual to treat their first referred guest the same way you treated them.

4. Simple things can be done to kill this casualness. Develop scripts for greeting customers. Then do the

same for every product and service you sell.

And if your staff tries to tell you that scripts "cramp their style" or "make them sound like robots" or "impede the actual sale itself", ask them this question.

What is your favorite movie or TV show?

Regardless of their answer, you can tell them that the actors in that movie or TV show are all paid very handsomely to deliver one thing and one thing only, a script!

If my software provider had used scripts in their presentation, and remembered to ask for the order, they would have filled their event to 40% capacity 10 months ahead of schedule, with just one touch point!

Remember, casualness can creep in anywhere. It's your job to cut it out and replace it with intention.

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 books "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, visit 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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BEST SELLING

DESIGNS



Nourison

A flowing mosaic of tiny square paillettes reflects soft light and movement in this unique design. The creative color balance of cream and platinum offers a new neutral for the modern home.

Contact information on page 80.



Flash Furniture

These contemporary residential stools are available in 17 different styles and a diverse range of wood finishes, including cherry, beech, walnut, mahogany, birch and natural wood. Not only are they sleek and elegant, they're also sturdy and durable, with swivel seats that adjust from counter to bar height.

Contact information on page 80.

Najarian

From the Rochester collection which encompasses 11 pieces. This bedroom is made from Acacia solids and Oak veneers.

Contact information on page 80.





Surya

The Jolie table lamp features a natural-hued shade and antiqued mercury glass base with light-reflecting diamond bevel design. This table lamp takes its cues from the Hollywood Regency period, imparting a sense of refined elegance and timeless appeal.

Contact information on page 80.



Capel

Park Lane is a new collection of vintage hand knots, made in India of blended New Zealand and Argentine wool. The collection is available in seven colorways including the new vintage black and five sizes (2'6" x 9'6", 3'6" x 5'6", 5'6" x 8'6", 7'6" x 9'6" and 8'6" x 11'6"). A 5'6" x 8'6" rug may retail for \$1,699.

Contact information on page 80.



Stein World

"Living on the Edge" side table reflects the latest trend in nature-inspired design. Its live edge top has a natural finish that highlights the beautiful wood grain complemented by a black metal "X" base.

Contact information on page 80.

Omnia

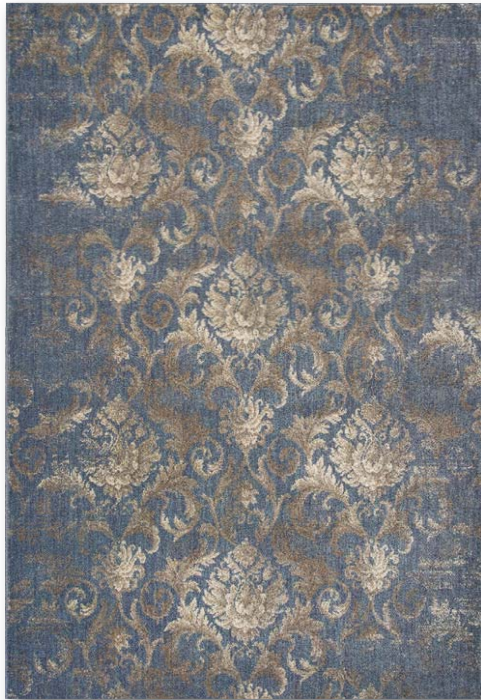
The Dreamsations® Sleeper Program encompasses all the comforts of premium stationary seating with the added function of a luxurious memory foam sleeper. Available in king, queen, twin or cot size sleepers incorporated into a sectional, sofa, chair or ottoman. Features a variety of arm and leg styles in either leather or fabric.

Contact information on page 80.



BEST SELLING

DESIGNS



Kas Rugs

Blue Bordeaux from the Zarepath collection of machine made vintage transitionals in space-dyed polypropelene with frisee texture. Available in seven sizes from small scatter to 9'x13'.

Contact information on page 80.



Lane

The Comfort King Recliner has extra firm seat cushions plus tufted back and padded chaise ottoman. It is supported by heavy duty wood frame with reinforced arm posts that can withstand 500 lbs.

Contact information on page 80



Broyhill

Twill Sleigh Bed includes five slats with three support legs, twill panel headboard option, classic carved and fluted wooden feet. It is fully upholstered with padded twill texture material.

Contact information on page 80.



Jaipur

The Traditions Made Modern Collection features designs inspired by textiles around the world housed at the Museum of Mexico. The pillows and poufs are a blend of polyester and cotton.

Contact information on page 80.



Global Views

Elegant oversized Italian art glass bottles make a strong visual statement in any environment. Placed upon a chest, sideboard, or the center of dining table these Carnival Bottles create visual impact.

Contact information on page 80.

Elran

The Tatyana collection features articulating head rests. It has an oversized box style arm, chaise lounge seating and a foam back. Manual recliners come with an inside pull handle. Shown here with optional power recliners. Matching loveseat also available.

Contact information on page 80.





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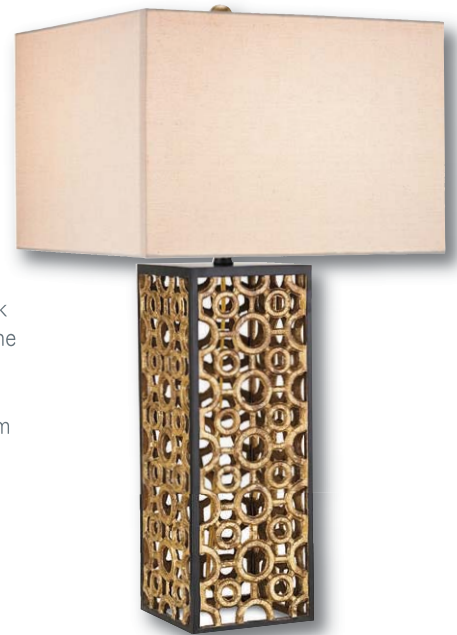
Evoking a feel of modern elegance, the uniquely constructed Tivoli collection offers traditional patterns that have been beautifully distressed to give classic designs an updated look. These wool and viscose rugs are hand tufted in India.

Contact information on page 80.

Currey & Company

Open metal-work and a textured Antique Gold & Black finish adds sophistication to the 36" high Cusco Table Lamp. The design is reminiscent of a 1950's folding screen or room divider.

Contact information on page 80.



Furniture of America

Even with its bold look and rich cherry finish, there's more to the "Northville" bedroom set than meets the eye. It features footboard storage drawers, hidden drawers and a USB power outlet on the nightstand.

Contact information on page 80.



Horizon Home

New from Horizon Home is the Dakota upholstered group with leather-like trim and nail head accents.

Contact information page 80.





Vietri

Antique finished bottles create a simple statement of glamour, bringing a dramatic accent to any room. Each label commemorates an Italian wine region. Designed in Italy. Retail prices range between \$91 and \$172.

Contact information page 80.



Phillips Collection

A mirror that deserves a second look. Organic, glamorous, unexpected, its scale and style allows it to be the focal point of any room. Created out of artisan-grade resin and finished in hand applied gold leaf, this piece demands attention.

Contact information on page 80.



Borkholder

The Arroyo Seco bedroom chest is rendered in solid, quarter-sawn white oak in a Borkholder Brown finish, and features hammered metal hardware.

Contact information on page 80.

Sunpan

The Vixen Console Table has a concrete top and acacia wood base. Crafted from a natural concrete mix, each piece will look different, with variations of grey hues that will enhance over time.

Contact information on page 80.

♪ *King of the wild frontier* ♪

BROWN SQUIRREL FURNITURE

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

It was in 1971 when the legend officially met the ledger! President Doug Matthews Sr. presided at the landmark meeting with his ad agency. Doug had dreamed up a new idea for his Knoxville, Tennessee furniture store and they were trying to arrive at a name for the enterprise. A big conference table, a list of about 250 possible names. Someone somehow mentioned the Brown Squirrel, and everyone looked around at each other. "My Dad, knowing the story, thought this was brilliant," said Preston Matthews, now President, "Because it was a name that had easy recall and could be symbolized. The squirrel lives in harmony with nature, it had history with the story." I guess you could say the Squirrel became part of the family with a seat on the corporate board!

"Dad opened Brown Squirrel in an area that was so far west on Interstate 40 that a lot of people thought it wouldn't work. It was right in the middle of the Sherrill farm and we had horses and cows on each side of our property. Now 44 years later, the town grew right past us but the visibility of our store is unmatched as you drive on I-40. I guess Dad's long term vision of this location was either very

incredible or we're just lucky. Now instead of a farm on both sides of us, we are surrounded by HGTV's corporate headquarters (Scripps Networks).

"Our sign facing I-40 is 35 feet high, we are grandfathered on this sign, it's the highest billboard on Interstate 40 and it's also exactly on the city/county line. People know they are in the city when they see our sign!"

But it was two decades before that auspicious occasion when Doug opened his first furniture store "after his WWII service as a B-17 navigator/instructor. When the War was over, he went back to University of Tennessee and received his degree in Engineering. He also taught math at the University to returning veterans. He met Mom at University and they were married in 1947. He worked for Sterchi's Furniture in downtown Knoxville in the late forties and he thought he could do this himself. So he opened Modern Day Furniture on Kingston Pike in Knoxville in 1951. I have the original sign displayed in our new addition. In 1959, he moved his store further west and changed the concept to a more high-end interior design model, and changed the name to Wellington Galleries. It was a very

successful store with a lot of great designers and it furnished many of the better homes here in Knoxville.

"He traveled around the country looking for ideas and he saw that Levitz had developed the warehouse/showroom concept. No one in this market had seen anything like it in 1971, and they did really well."

Previous generations had laid a sturdy and eclectic foundation for the Matthews, creating legends of their own. Preston provided some insights. "My grandfather on my Dad's side was born in Rochester, New York. He was a traveling salesman when my Dad was born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1922. He told me he'd lived in 12 different cities by the time he was in the eighth grade. I heard stories about him growing up during the Depression in 1933 and how they got by.

"I personally can go back as far as my great grandmother on my dad's side. Her brother was Frank Pulver. He invented chewing gum and he sold his company to Wrigley's back in the early 1900s. He also invented the first vending machine which dispensed gum for a penny. My aunt Beverly (dad's 90 year old sister) and the Smithsonian Institution actually have

"My grandfather told a story that was passed down from his father and grandfather about Davy Crockett. And here it is...

"Back in the early 1800s," says Preston Matthews, "Davy Crockett was the best hunter and shot in the mountains of Tennessee and Kentucky. One day he and his buddies went hunting for bear up in the mountains and had no luck. While they were walking through the woods, they came upon a squirrel high up in the trees above them. Having no luck hunting for bear, they decided to shoot at squirrels. So he aimed up at the squirrel and shot but missed, and the squirrel just jumped on another branch. He shot again and missed. His

buddies were all laughing and poking fun at him because he was the best shooter in the mountains and was legendary . . . but he couldn't hit this evasive squirrel! It was like the squirrel was taunting him, there was something mystical about it!

"After chasing this squirrel through the forest and using up all his ammo, he gave up finally and they headed back to camp about two miles away. Once they got there, they were all sitting around the campfire drinking, eating and telling stories and they heard a noise above them in the trees. They looked up and it was the same squirrel they'd been shooting at; it had followed them to the camp! So Davy grabbed his gun and put the squirrel in its sights and he wasn't going to miss this time. The squirrel actually had come much closer down the tree to them and was just sitting on a branch right above him about 10 feet away. He had no fear of the man who'd been shooting at him (or her) all afternoon. So Davy put the squirrel square in his sights again and the squirrel didn't move at all.

"Davy was getting ready to pull the trigger but just couldn't do it because this little cute animal, living in harmony with nature, had no fear and didn't flinch. So he put his gun down and what happened next was incredible! The squirrel jumped down from the tree and climbed on Davy's shoulder and wanted to be his friend. Maybe it was the first time this animal had seen a human and didn't know any better. He hand fed this little animal some fruit and nuts.

"So this is the essence of the Legend of Brown Squirrel Furniture, unique, eco-friendly and a part of its environment!"



Original store pictured along with the ribbon cutting ceremony for the new store.

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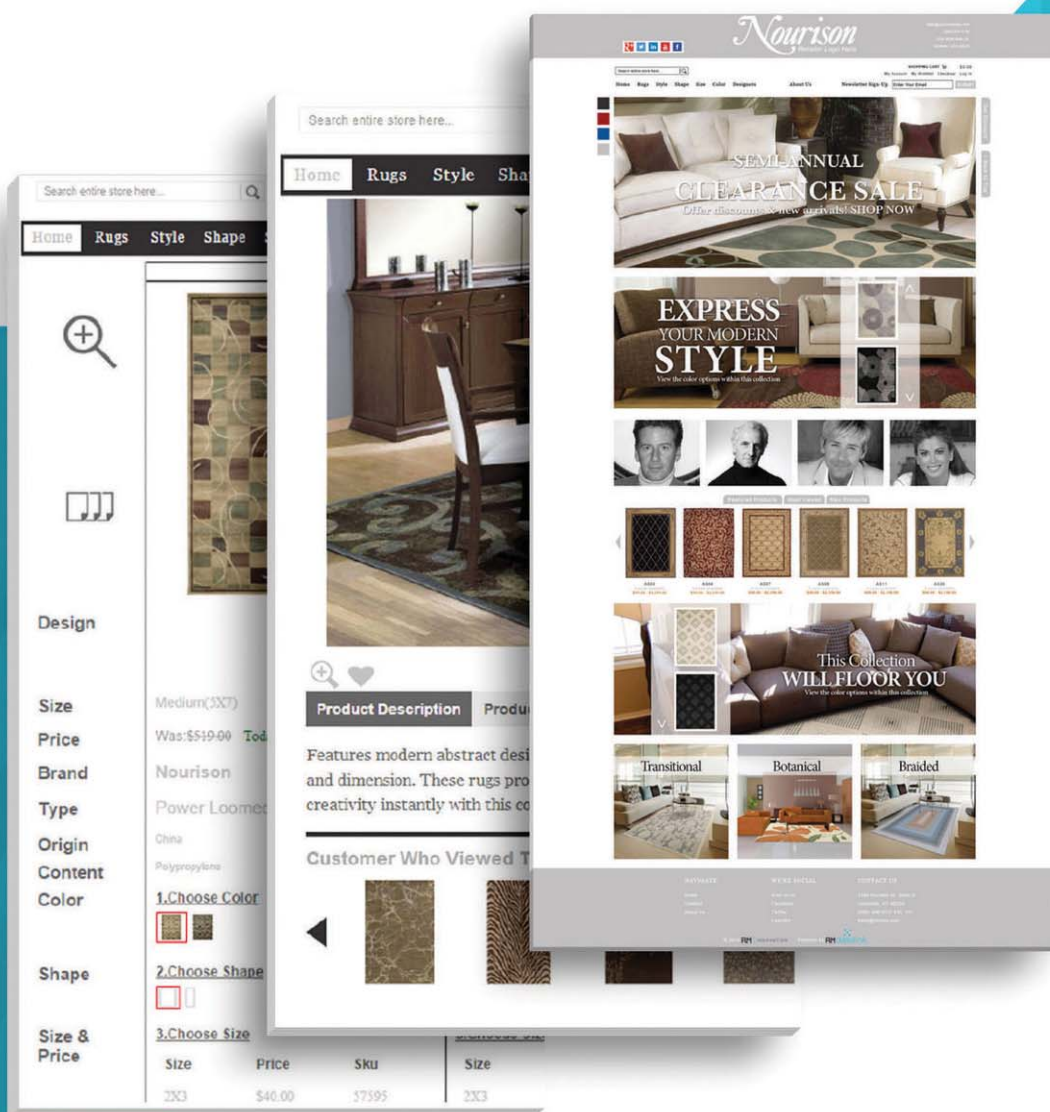
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Brown Squirrel Lodge, an eye-catching log cabin representation, reflective of the area. Preston Matthews and Ron Becker (General Manager of Memphis, TN - based Great American Home Store) stand in front of a 30 foot photographic mural of Brown Squirrel's fabled Smoky Mountains.



the original machines.

"I know a little more about my Mom's side. My great grandfather, Alex Hickman, was a doctor in the mountains around here back in the late 1800s, specifically around the community of Kodak, part of the Sevier/Gatlinburg area. My grandfather always traveled with him by horse and carriage to deliver babies up in the mountains, and by the time he became an adult he'd decided he didn't want to be a doctor! His dad gave him \$100 and he walked to Knoxville, about 40 miles away, started his new life and became very successful. He founded Knoxville Paperbox Company in the early 1900s which manufactured corrugated paper boxes. They became a pretty big company and he did very well until they sold in the mid to late 1950s. The building still stands off the Interstate by downtown Knoxville with the original name on it. My Mom and Dad married in 1948, and my grandfather gave them the property as a wedding gift which adjoins his old farm and house, built around 1911. I live next door to my Dad to this day."

The 1971 venture proved to be a

positive move, and "We thrived in the '70s and '80s. I took over the company in 1988 when I was 27. I became president and my oldest brother Doug Matthews, Jr., vice president when he joined the company in 1994. I didn't change the store back then, but I would guess we've been talking to Connie (Post) for close to 20 years. We bought the store from Dad about three years ago, and that's when I started seriously thinking about what I wanted to do with Connie's help.

"Dad has been resistant to change and, looking back, he was probably right. I don't think we would have made it through 2008-2009 if we'd had any long term debt to pay. We had none and we made it through and I learned a lot about making our business more efficient. If I only knew back then what I know now! That being said, I knew we had to change. Connie knew, too, so we just climbed out on the limb together and made it happen."

Retail strategist Connie Post had a challenge on her hands, a happy challenge. Chief executive of Connie Post International, Connie has spent nearly 30 years advising the home

furnishing industry. She's become the design and marketing doyen of a formidable "more than 18 million square feet of retail and wholesale space around the globe". Connie is the author of "A Beautiful Room Will Change Your Life: Your Personal Guide to Color". *

"She's the best," said Preston. "I told her my vision and she knew what to do and executed it to a 'T', an image that is in tune with our community and our local region."

The new design, the first renovation in 44 years, was a complete turnaround. Said Connie, "We moved the showroom entrance out to the front of

"I knew we had to change. Connie (Post) knew, too, so we just climbed out on the limb together and made it happen."

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"Connie not only modernized us

but she produced an atmosphere that was in tune with our community and our local region to give customers the sense when they first walk in the door that this is their hometown retailer."

the building. Prior to this, the entrance had been behind the warehouse racks that customers walked through. It was patterned, of course, after the old Levitz design of the late '60s early '70s that was so new and exciting in the industry and highly successful. This move gave Preston and Brown Squirrel the opportunity to show a new face and rebrand as the new ON TREND retailer in the market.

"It was extremely exciting for me to do this for him. We have been friends for a very long time and I really wanted to help his business grow. Next we will attack other areas for updates after he has time to recover from this monumental shift!"

The public got a strong hint of great things to come when teaser ads featuring a small furry brown animal warning "Get ready Knoxville" began to appear on television and Brown Squirrel's website. And there

were other tantalizing announcements including icon John Bassett III's scheduled appearance at the Grand Opening. President of Vaughn Bassett Furniture, he'd promised to sign his vastly popular book, "Factory Man"* at the Opening, all proceeds to be donated to the Wounded Warrior Project.

Customers were told on the website, "Whatever you're thinking, think bigger!" Every hour from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. prizes would be presented, \$2,500 in furniture given away, free memory foam pillows to the first 50 people through the door.

It was the month of February and winter is not always kind in the Smokies. "I was praying to God for three weeks prior to the Opening that we wouldn't have a major snowstorm. The day came and it ended up at 60 degrees with a perfectly clear blue sky! Everything just came together and the

traffic was overwhelming. Annually, our heaviest traffic day is probably Labor Day. At the Opening we had three times that number. I've got the best advertising agency in the world for furniture, these guys just get it, so the quality of the ads looked like something out of New York, really good stuff."

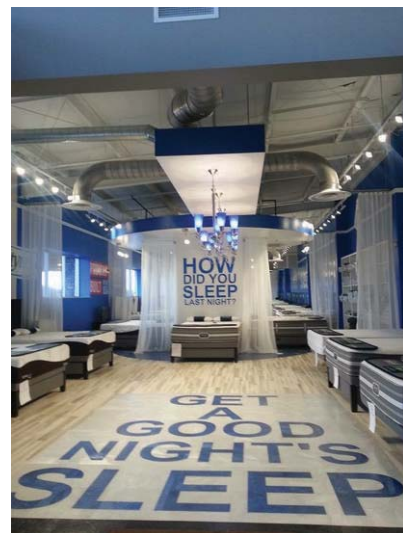
A neat touch, consumers were given a web overlook of the project with progress photos of the renovation as it moved through its various stages.

Response? "Our sales were out of the park starting Opening Day! But 10 days later the winter weather hit and we couldn't deliver for about eight days. The positive side was that March and April were great delivery months!

"When you look at percentages, each month since has been up over 50 per cent from last year. Last year wasn't the best year for us, but we still made a profit."



A walk through Brown Squirrel Furniture is an adventure. Customers sense when they first walk in the door that this is their hometown retailer.



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A walk through Brown Squirrel is an adventure. "Connie not only modernized us, but she produced an atmosphere that was in tune with our community and our local region to give customers the sense when they first walk through the door that this is their hometown retailer."

Historic connections through dynamite Knoxville photographs from the 1800s to the present day take pride of place opposite Simmons Beautyrest Gallery, one of the largest in the U.S. Then one is confronted with a monumental reminder of Brown Squirrel's fabled Smoky Mountains, 30 feet tall, a gorgeous, enveloping photographic

mural. Connie positioned it as a stunning backdrop for National Elements, an area that features unique reclaimed wood furniture and architectural lumber from old buildings.

The friendly updated image of the resident squirrel with its acorn reward is to be found everywhere in the new interior, Connie pointed out, on "huge signs and price tags". The acorn is also to be seen in television and web exposure.

Tear yourself away from Natural Elements if you can and move on to a space where the heart of America's home furnishings industry resides, a reminder of the strong tradition of local artisans. The England Gallery represents memories but then projects to forward thinking. Brown Squirrel was at the head of the line many years ago at the Hickory Furniture Market when England presented its one sofa at the show and the Matthews "took it home"! The England plant is just 40 miles away from Brown Squirrel's showroom/warehouse three acres,

Above, view when entering the store and Grand Opening Day traffic queuing up.

"When you look at percentages, each month since has been up over 50 per cent from last year."

"the next county over", and Preston stressed the importance of "doing business with local companies" like England and Jackson/Catnapper, only 70 miles from Knoxville. "I want to reward the people, our good neighbors, the one's we've worked with for a long time."

Just to the right is the very special Brown Squirrel Lodge, an eye-catching log cabin representation, "reflective of the area", with yet another stunning natural backdrop, a photo mural of foothill forests in autumn colors through the cabin's "windows". Preston confesses that the Lodge is one of his favorites, "I like the atmosphere and other people love it, too." Furnishings have been chosen with great care and customers are responding with enthusiasm, eager to



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John Bassett, author of "Factory Man" with Preston Matthews and Doug Matthews Sr. in Brown Squirrel's Made In America Gallery along with vintage photos that make a real "equating-to-jobs" connection with Brown Squirrel's customers.

by nearby Oak Ridge, the science and technology national laboratory managed for the United States Department of Energy, "and everyone in between," said Preston.

Another important space at Brown Squirrel is devoted to leather, Preston's own "specialty" and his area of expertise when holding staff training workshops. "Only genuine leather, not any leather match, really great stuff from Simon Li and Futura".

Talented Renee Matthews has the title of "Store Decorator" and, says Preston of his wife, "She is phenomenal!" Her reach extends beyond design and color to a broad knowledge of music and, in sync with Brown Squirrel's new spirit, she has created three zones for the store with special emphasis on pervading demographics. The zones begin at the parking lot where speakers have been installed delivering "up-to-date, cheerful music that gets you in a happy mood so you're dancing when you come into the store!" said Preston. Inside Squirrel, music is programmed to the age of shoppers. Observation has revealed that people tend to shop at different times at different ages. Between 12 and 1:30-2 p.m. "aging baby boomers" appear after they've had lunch; big band music is their ticket! Later in the afternoon younger women, out to pick up their children from school, are treated to the Nora Jones genre. At night Renee and Preston schedule more upbeat, urban music. "In the bedding area we have this real soft soothing type music; it makes a huge difference to the atmosphere of the store."

With the renovation earthquake,

fermenting, then arriving at its blockbuster conclusion, the need for staff adjustment and guidance was ever present. Said Preston, "A lot of training with the different manufacturers occurs all the time. And I am very blessed to have a general manager with a lot of passion for our business... he coaches our sales staff. His name is Steve Hanschen and he was my GM in 1989-1993. I stole Steve from Haverly's! He was so successful for us that another company out of the Market hired him away from me by doubling his salary (it's a long story!) and to this day he says it was a mistake to leave. But a plus, he did meet his

create their own "Lodge".

Then the Made in America Gallery that features Vaughan-Bassett Furniture, where John Bassett took the scene with his book that February day. There are compelling vintage photos, some virtually life-sized, of the Bassett family and men and women at work in the Virginia factories lining the walls. "It makes a real equating- to-jobs connection with people who are actually building our furniture, a timely wake up call to consumers."

The population of the city of Knoxville is highly diverse demographically. Not far from Brown Squirrel Lodge there is a space called Urban Lifestyle, "our own twist on loft living, more sophisticated, more modern with a really cool background, a huge picture of the Knoxville skyline". Architecture in the region runs the gamut from log cabin to Art Deco, Gothic, Victorian and Craftsman, an unusual mix.

And the mix of people ranges from retirees who are attracted to the area because of its natural beauty, to the thousands of professionals employed

"Inside Squirrel, music is programmed to the age of shoppers. Observation has revealed that people tend to shop at different times at different ages."



Taken Prisoner: The other side of the Brown Squirrel Furniture family tree, Renee Matthews.

Preston says his wife Renee Matthews, Store Decorator is “phenomenal”. Her family also has an interesting back story. Renee’s mother, father (Tom and Eleanor Lewis) and two older brothers were taken prisoner by the Japanese in the Philippines in 1941, about two weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The family were kept in a horrendous camp, once the campus of Santa Tomas University, for three years. Renee’s parents raised her brothers with an allotment of only one bowl of rice a day for each family.

Tom Lewis had worked for Parke-Davis Pharmaceuticals internationally before the War and had been setting up a distributorship in Manila when the Philippines fell. With his contacts, he was able to organize an underground network to get medication and supplies to other prisoners in need from Manila and fortunately was never caught. He kept a detailed manuscript hidden in a bamboo shoot in the roof line of the shack they occupied. It was well known in camp that if contraband was discovered by the Japanese, they would force the prisoner to dig his own grave before shooting them.

Her father weighed 195 pounds when first incarcerated, 90 pounds when rescued by the Regiment of the Texas Rangers, “the greatest rescue story in all of WWII”. Her mother weighed less than 80 pounds. Astonishingly, the rescue party was led by Renee’s uncle, her mother’s brother. There were originally 1400 prisoners at the camp, at the time of rescue, only 160.

Once WWII came to its conclusion and the family made it back to the U.S.A., they were recognized as the first POWs to return. There is a famous picture of their ship navigating under the Golden Gate bridge, flags waving, water hoses spraying, welcoming them home.

The Red Cross found them a room “with beds”, magically to them, the first beds in which they’d slept in more than three years. And that night, the story goes, Renee’s older sister was conceived. Renee was a “late baby”, her mother almost 45. Renee and Preston treasure the original 500 page manuscript. Perhaps there is a movie in the making!



wife in the town he moved to and they are still happily married today! Fast forward 20 years, I brought him back last August to launch our new format. He's like my brother and I couldn't have picked anyone better!"

Brown Squirrel's website is far from ordinary. It blends all the solid, upfront information that consumers hope to find, but there's a light touch of whimsy sparkling in unexpected corners. There's the story of the swimming pool cleaner who rescued (guess what?) a squirrel in danger of drowning and resuscitated it. There's a hellaciously decadent recipe for chocolate pie! A side bar targets Letterman-like April Fool's Day pranks, 10 of them, one fiendish suggestion, "Replace Oreo filling (or any cookie) with toothpaste!" Really, it's there, just look if you don't believe me! In February, opening month, a picture of a smiling polar bear relaxing in his pool at the Knoxville Zoo appeared with the caption, "Nobody else loves the cold weather like this guy!" And a few clicks over, an announcement of Southern Lady Hot Tea Month. What could be more clever?! Fun entices social media-attuned consumers to return again and again to Squirrel's website. Mixed amongst such diversions are really well executed Tips and Trends, a piece entitled "Choose Your Style", a well designed Room Planner and good stuff about delivery, clearly stated. And, of course, really beautifully defined design categories of quality home furnishings, expertly presented.

In store there's more evidence of the company's playful side. The Squirrel Himself (or Herself?) occasionally makes personal appearances in animated cartoon commercials. And kids are often celebrated with balloons and coloring pages. Says the website: "Our intention is to make furnishing living space fun, efficient and worry free as possible."

And Squirrel is even taken seriously, well sort of, by Forbes! Mention was made along with a photo of Scrips' Knoxville headquarters: "The home of cable channels Food Network, HGTV and Travel Channel is tucked between the old Brown Squirrel Furniture Store and the Dead Horse Lake Golf Course at the foot of the Great Smoky Mountains in Knoxville, Tennessee. The main building curves around a lake where, on pleasant

"The population of the city of Knoxville is highly diverse demographically. Not far from Brown Squirrel Lodge there is a space called Urban Lifestyle, our own twist on loft living."

days, employees take meetings in paddle boats. You know you've found the right place when you see the big mural of the squirrel." Notoriety of the best sort!

The web visitor gets a look at Brown Squirrel's charitable involvement with Second Harvest, Habitat for Humanity, Goodwill, Mission of Hope, the Red Cross and other worthy organizations, provided "in the knowledge that we have been blessed that we might be a blessing". And they offer customers involvement under the heading of "Delivery and Pickup". The text reads, "If you need to dispose of your old furniture in a way that might allow it to enjoy extended usage", they suggest using various of their designated groups as links.

Set in "The greenest state in the land of the free", it's only natural that the environment plays a large role in the Matthews' thinking. "We're re-branding Brown Squirrel as even more eco-friendly, considering all the things we do to reduce the carbon footprint, from our electric car charging stations to L.E.D. lighting, recycling plastics, cardboard and pallets. And that's why you now see an acorn in the O of Brown Squirrel. We even have acorn door handles when you enter the showroom.

"It will take time but if we are successful I would like to go solar. Our store is positioned perfectly to get sunlight all day long. That's really my vision," said Preston, "and if our community sees it too I think we have a real good chance to be successful

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Doug Matthews, Connie Post Preston and Renee Matthews pose during the construction phase.



Three generations of the Matthews clan (bottom left) are shown standing in front of the Modern day Furniture Sign from 1951 including (l-r) Doug, Tom, Preston and Doug Senior. Top right is Steve Hanschen, General Manager of Brown Squirrel Furniture.



"When RTG came here in 1996, we lost 20 per cent in volume that year. It has taken almost 20 years, but now I think we have a better chance by just being ourselves, servicing our customer and trying not to beat them on price."

for the long term, maybe another 44 years. That's the goal anyway.

"There is a giant consolidation within our industry. A lot of the smaller stores are getting squeezed out from big companies that have a lot of capital from the online guys (Wayfair) and from the companies that are vertically integrated such as Ashley and Rooms to Go. On a larger scale, look what's happening in Dallas with NFM, a 1.2 million square foot store than runs on low margins. I have friends that have stores there and I'm even nervous for them. When RTG came here in 1996, we lost 20 per cent in volume that year. It has taken almost 20 years, but now I think we have a better chance by just being ourselves, servicing our customer and trying not to beat them on price. But if we do, we have to import it, and that's where the big chains have a huge advantage from an economy of scale standpoint. Stores like us are at the bottom of the totem pole when it comes to container shipments. But we do import because we have to compete. The whole landscape is changing and we have to figure out how to carve out our own niche. That's why I decided on the Made in America approach, the quick shipping uphol-

stery from England (500 fabrics and leather custom order, in your house within 21 days, etc.), that's something the chain stores can't do and we can. And this has been a great model of success for our mid-sized family owned business.

"All that being said, I also have the best store designer in my corner, Connie! So, with everything else we do, we have as well been blessed with one of the most beautiful and updated showrooms in our state. The space she did I would put up against anyone in the country!"

One of Preston's favorite maxims, "Don't be afraid to be bold or different". Great advice! Here's an appropriate quote from that legendary song, "A fightin' spirit in a thinkin' mind!"

- John Bassett III's "Factory Man", a New York Times bestseller. "How One Furniture Maker Battled Offshoring, Stayed Local – and Helped Save an American Town."
- Connie Post, "A Beautiful Room Will Change Your Life: Your Personal Guide to Color", a selection of the Homestyle Book Club. Affordable Design Solutions.



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REBUYING & NEW BUYING TWO DIFFERENT MINDSETS

by David McMahon, CMA, EA

Improve your buying just a tiny bit and you will be rewarded with a better product mix.

There are two types of stock purchasing activities that are necessary: re-buying and new buying. Executing these activities properly and coordinating them together will improve sales and profitability.

Improving buying practices is a big opportunity. Many operations are either not re-buying efficiently or buying new merchandise haphazardly. Some businesses simply don't re-buy the right product, at the right time, in the right quantity. Then they go to market without focusing on the proper categories and just roll the dice. Believe me, to varying degrees this malpractice is very common.

In this article, I will tell you why this happens and how to correct it. If this helps you improve your organization just a tiny bit, you will gain a better product mix for your customers and salespeople.

Re-buying is a "left brain" activity. The left-side is analytical. It is comfortable with numbers. It typically approaches problem solving with a black or white solution that is proven with hard facts.

New buying is a "right brain" activity. The right-side is creative. It is comfortable with art. It typically approaches a problem with a colorful solution that is created based on intuition.

When a person who is dominant with either left or right brain is responsible for both types of buying they can cause merchandise mix issues.

To illustrate, here are two examples:

First, Jane, an accomplished designer and visual merchandiser performs the dual purchasing duties.

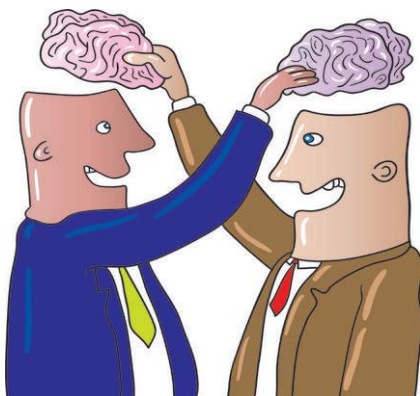
- She listens to what she hears from people in terms of what they like. She loves to set the showroom and is not involved in back-end opera-

Understanding The Challenge

The reason why operations have difficulty with purchasing is because:

Re-buying and new buying are conflicting mindsets. They use different sides of the brain.

"Re-buying and new buying use different sides of the brain."



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"First a 'red light, green light'

process can be put in place for buying that is based on the current level of inventory."

tions.

- She relies on vendor reps to guide her through the re-buying process and simply does not have the time or desire to "play" with silly computer reports.
- When she goes to market, she picks what she believes will make the floor look better and what customers will buy. Of course, she is not right all the time with new buys, but she is pretty good. Often times, though, old merchandise that did not sell sits around too

"New buying, even though it's a more creative process, should as well have defined steps to improve focus."

long in both the showroom and the warehouse.

- She would rather move an older piece of merchandise to the warehouse and wait for a clearance sale than mark it down on the floor.
- Jane's organization is constantly battling over inventory and best-seller stock-outs.

In a second example, Fred, a science-major at college and talented industry operations guy performs dual purchasing duties.

- He routinely analyzes the company's data and loves his spreadsheets.
- He does not take advice from reps concerning re-buying.
- He runs a tight ship. The organization seldom runs out of its proven best sellers and generally inventory is kept at a consistent level.
- He does not enjoy going to market to source new product. He makes buying decisions on open-to-buy spend without considering the visual fit in the line-up.
- Fred's organization is constantly battling lackluster vignettes and a "sea of brown" on the showroom.

Both of these situations hurt sales, profits and cash flow. In Jane's situation, constantly growing inventory causes a shortage of cash that is necessary for re-buying of best sellers that produce the lion's share of profits. In Fred's situation the showroom is rath-

er boring and not visually together so customers are not impressed.

When an organization can take the best characteristics from both these mindsets and focus them to work together, a better merchandising system can be created.

The Key To Better Purchasing

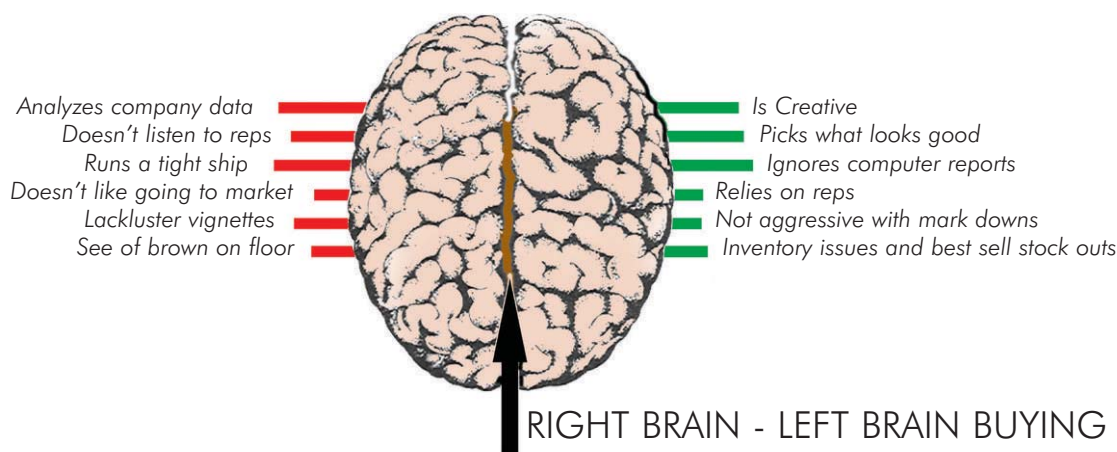
1 Define the process for re-buying and new buying. Rebuying, being analytical in nature, will involve reviewing vendors and categories on a routine basis. The goal here is to keep a very high level of best-seller in-stock days. For merchandise that you sell repeatedly the buyer will need to reorder based on the prime factors of rate of sale, current stock levels, and lead time. This process will allow customers to get immediate gratification on the product that is proven.

New buying, even though it's a more creative process, should, as well, have defined steps to improve focus. First, a "red light, green light" process can be put in place for buying that is based on the current level of inventory. If the green light is on, then this buyer has the OK to spend money on new merchandise up to a point where the inventory will increase an allowable level. For example, if the desired level of inventory is \$1 million and the current level is \$975,000, the buyer has the green light to purchase \$25,000 in new merchandise provided the best seller re-buys have been done.

In Memory of Our Leader Joseph P. Cory

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There are many ways to adjust the specific focus of a new buy. The one that makes the most sense to me is to focus on the categories and vendors that are currently producing, and look for opportunities at gaps in the showroom line-up. For instance, if leather sofas are doing well and there is a hole in the line-up at the \$2,000 retail level, the buyer should focus on finding a landed cost leather sofa for under \$1,000.

2. Separate the purchasing roles amongst the right people. In most organizations, it makes sense to split these roles between two different people with the appropriate mind types. Depending on the size of the operation, these people can hold other responsibilities, but ideally their tasks should fit their personality. For example, the left-brain re-buyer could perform other functions such as initiating merchandise transfers, preparation of price tags, managing the nail-downs, markdowns and best-seller education. The right-brain new buyer might perform other tasks such as setting the floor or customer design.

It should be possible in most operations to split these buying duties. For small volume stores where the buyer needs to be the same person, I recommend really coming to grips with what type of mind-set the buyer is: analytical or creative. Then work on or get assistance with the weak area.

The key here is to put the right people

in the right job.

3. Review to ensure that the separate buyers work seamlessly together.

Remember, the common organizational goal is a better product mix to maximize sales volume, profit and cash flow. These two roles must communicate closely and often. Without this element the two-buyer system will not work well. There must be full transparency regarding what is currently on order and the direction of the business. For example, if the re-buyer sees that customers are buying Amish wood dining rooms and imported tables are dead, you don't want the new buyer to go out and buy a bunch of new imported tables.

There should be weekly buyers meetings, a pre-market strategy meeting and a post-market recap. In the weekly meeting, the discussion should focus on current inventory levels, review the open to buy for new merchandise, and determine any action items to improve vendor and category performance.

The pre-market strategy meeting defines the focus of the market. It's when the analytical buyer delivers the overall results of merchandise performance. The visual buyer then presents areas in the line-up that are without representation. Together they can make a list of the exact areas that will be researched.

The post-market recap is used to discuss the findings. After all the

information is gathered, this is the time when final purchasing decisions are made. Both buyers will know exactly what is coming in and when to expect it. Once products arrive, it is the re-buyer's responsibility to track the rate of sale and determine if they are winners to keep or dogs to discontinue.

I have witnessed improvements for retailers who switch to this system. Their floors look better, are more organized visually, and inventories are kept at more manageable levels. Sales and profits grow due to a greater percentage of best seller in-stock days, fewer items on markdown, and a faster turns that allow for trials of new product more often.

This ongoing coordination between new and re-buying keeps the buying team going in the best direction for the overall betterment of the business. If your organization can match personality types and mind-sets with the nature of the roles over time you will provide a better customer experience. An improved merchandise mix will yield a faster turning and more exciting showroom.

About David McMahon: David McMahon, is a Management Consultant and Certified Management Accountant. He is Director of Consulting and Performance Groups for PROFITsystems, a HighJump product. You can reach him to discuss improving your situation at david.mcmahon@accellos.com.



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Case Study: How a regional furniture chain
pulled their data together to sell more furniture.

By Anders Ekman, President of DataMentors

Data is getting more complex by the day, digital and social channels are multiplying, and consumers are increasingly doing more shopping and research on-line before even stepping into your store. What does this mean for you? Today's on-the-go furniture consumers are more difficult to target than ever before.

Jeff Giagnocavo of Gardner's Mattress & More, recently wrote an article for the January/February issue of Furniture World discussing just this – how to better reach consumers with messages and offers to which they are most likely to respond. By drawing

a “line in the sand” and deciding to open a second discount location, Gardner's can focus on their most profitable customers while still appealing to customer segments looking for bargains. (See Jeff's article at: <http://furninfo.com/Authors/List>)

As a data management company, we frequently work with furniture retailers to help them draw their own line in the sand – using data solutions to make strategic business changes to better target profitable customers and new “look-alike” prospects.

We recently worked with a regional, multi-store furniture retailer who was struggling to evaluate their marketing

data to better target consumers for acquisition and retention. Because their data was in multiple systems, marketing was heavily reliant on the IT department to get it into a format that could be used. Procuring lists was often a time-consuming and unproductive process.

Duplicate customer records also caused a high level of wasted marketing expenditures. Without a system to identify and merge duplicate customer records, mailings were sometimes sent to the same person or business. This not only damaged customer relationships, but the retailer needed a better way to prudently monitor marketing budgets.

By implementing a solution to better manage marketing data and perform analytics, this retailer reduced marketing spend and was able to better align offers to the right consumers, drive up-sell and cross-sell opportunities, increase customer retention and loyalty.

Many retailers tend to shy away from a marketing database project, believing the project will be overly time-consuming. However, managing

“Analytics can be used
to identify a variety of other opportunities as well,
such as sales trending by store location or which
customer segments are most ideal for cross-sell
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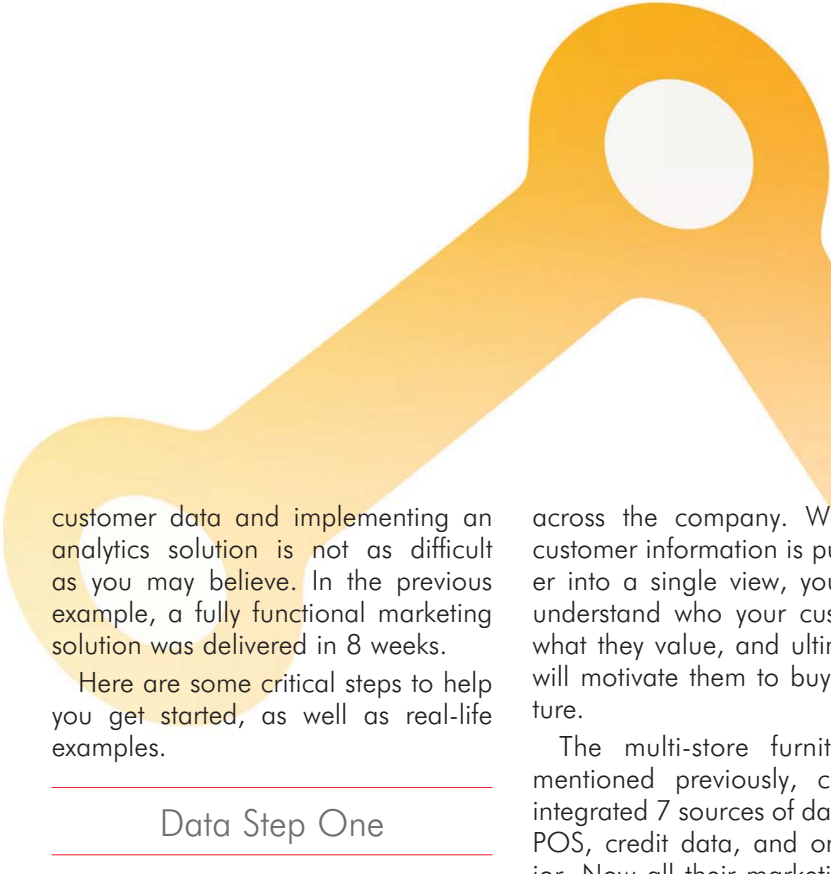
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"To identify your high-value customers and best prospects, use an analytics solution to analyze behavioral characteristics, demographics, psychographics and potential revenue value."

customer data and implementing an analytics solution is not as difficult as you may believe. In the previous example, a fully functional marketing solution was delivered in 8 weeks.

Here are some critical steps to help you get started, as well as real-life examples.

Data Step One

Pull Your Data into a Marketing Database: Your customers are interacting with you across multiple channels, such as billing departments, POS, digital media, customer service centers, email, and more. This data may be stored in multiple systems

across the company. When all this customer information is pulled together into a single view, you can better understand who your customers are, what they value, and ultimately, what will motivate them to buy more furniture.

The multi-store furniture retailer mentioned previously, cleaned and integrated 7 sources of data, including POS, credit data, and online behavior. Now all their marketing channels are supported with an emphasis on digital and mail.

Your marketing database should also include controls to ensure the data is accurate and remains current. Data decays at an average rate of 2 percent per month, which means you can expect 25 to 30 percent of your company's contact data to go bad each year under normal circumstances. (Source: NetProspex) Customers move, names are misspelled, and households split. A marketing database solution will include data quality measures, ensuring you avoid being a victim to the adage "Garbage In, Garbage Out".

Once you are ready to move forward with a marketing database project, a data solutions provider will perform the following functions:

- *Perform a business needs analysis to help you determine what data should be integrated, how you prefer to access the data, and other strategic goals you are trying to accomplish.*
- *Use a software solution to integrate multiple data sources and types, eliminate duplicate data,*

and consolidate customer data into a single record.

- *Append missing customer information, such as household income, age, occupation, hobbies, and other key demographic and psychographic attributes for a more complete view of the customer.*

Step Two

Identify Your Best Customers and Prospects: Your furniture customers are rich resources of information. To identify high-value customers and best prospects, use an analytics solution to analyze any number of customer characteristics, such as:

- **Behavioral Characteristics:** *Analyze behavioral characteristics such as frequency of purchase and which response channels customers use. For example, did they respond to an email, direct mail piece, or browse on-line before visiting your store?*
- **Demographics:** *These are factual characteristics, such as age, gender, occupation, and income. For example, are the majority of your customers female or male? Where do they live? Are they single or married?*
- **Psychographics:** *Evaluate their values, attitudes, lifestyles. Psychographic information answers questions such as what motivates your customers to buy your products and services? What are their key values? What are their hobbies and habits?*

"Data decays at an average rate of 2 percent per month, so you can expect 25 to 30 percent of your company's contact data to go bad each year under normal circumstances."

- **Value-Based:** Measure the actual or potential revenue of customers and prospects and the costs of maintaining relationships with them. Analyzing these attributes will help you better allocate resources to the most-profitable customer groups.

Based on any combination of these characteristics, you can identify key customer segments and develop marketing strategies designed to generate the most profit from each unique customer group. Incorporating business intelligence tools will allow a retailer to perform a variety of customer centric analytics based on these characteristics, as well as online behavior and in-store purchase history trending over multiple years. For example, it becomes easy to:

- Determine a demographic profile of your best customer over the last 7 years and match in real time against a consumer file of new prospects within 30 miles of a store location for an outreach campaign.
- Identify a customer subset that has purchased certain categories (living room, home office) and append with updated address and demographic data to execute onboarding campaign for different promotions.

Analytics can be used to identify a variety of other opportunities as well, such as sales trending by store location or which customer segments are most ideal for cross-sell and up-sell offers.

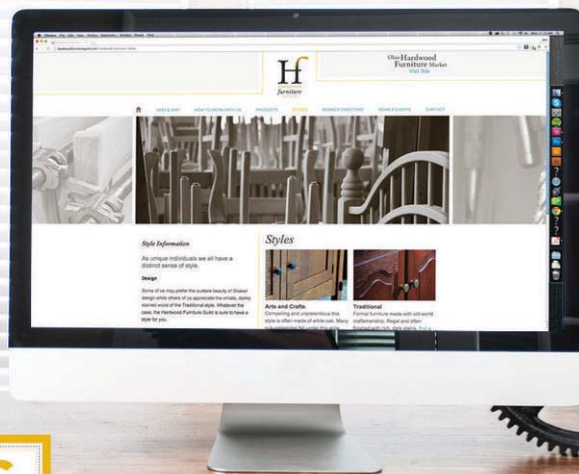
Step Three

Market to Consumers with Targeted Campaigns: While media outlets such as television and newspaper advertising will continue to attract new shoppers, using data for targeted campaigns has the potential to really ramp up your customer acquisition strategies. With a marketing database and analytics solution in place,

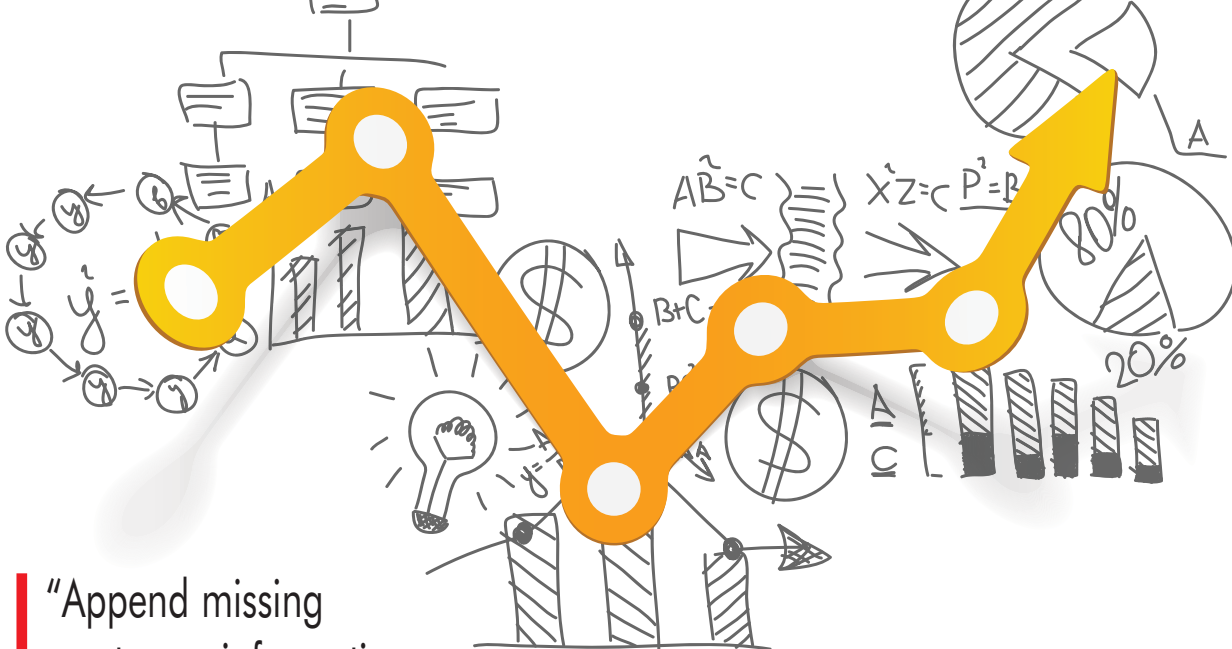
“Duplicate customer records also caused a high level of wasted marketing expenditures.”

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"Append missing customer information, such as household income, age, occupation, hobbies, and other key demographic and psychographic attributes for a more complete view of the customer."

your customer and prospect records can quickly be exported for targeted multi-channel campaigns, such as direct mail or email marketing.

Once a data solution is in place, profiling and behavioral trigger based marketing automation can be used to find new sales opportunities:

- Use of purchase history to determine when it's time to buy something new.
- Cross merchandising (When you buy a bed, get \$100 off a new mattress).
- Frequency campaigns (We haven't seen you in a while).
- Special events and direct mail campaigns (private shopping

events and special store events based on a customer's location and total sales amount).

For years, furniture retailers have used strategies to broadcast to the masses. However, take a look at some of these compelling statistics from retailers using data to deploy targeted direct mail and email campaigns:

- 44% of consumers made at least one purchase last year based on a promotional email they received. (Convince and Convert)
- 60% of marketers say that email marketing is producing an ROI for their organization. (MarketingSherpa)
- On average, direct mail advertising gives a business a 13 to 1 return on investment. (DMA)
- 70% of customers renew a business relationship because of a direct mail promotion (DMA).

With an integrated marketing database and analytics solution, you can reap huge competitive advantages and will be better primed to expand your marketing strategies into other areas, such as more digitally focused strategies to attract millennial consumers. Of course, it all begins with the data, or more importantly, data

that has been transformed into comprehensive insights about your best customers and prospects.

About Anders Ekman: Anders serves as President of DataMentors. Previously, Anders was Executive Vice President of MRM Worldwide, serving as Eastern Region head and Chief Growth Officer. While at MRM, Anders drove the company's evolution by bringing data-driven innovation to clients such as the US Army, MasterCard and Kohl's. Anders has also served as a Senior Vice President at Digitas, building CRM infrastructure and marketing success for the firm's largest clients, including GM and AT&T Wireless.

About DataMentors: DataMentors provides data quality, data management, data-as-a-service, and business intelligence solutions. DataMentors, recognized by Gartner for data quality for the past seven years, provides valuable data insights to help companies increase revenue, maximize customer value, reduce risk, and grow businesses.

DataMentors is offering a free data assessment to Furniture World readers. To schedule an assessment visit <http://solutions.datamentors.com/data-quality-analysis-new>

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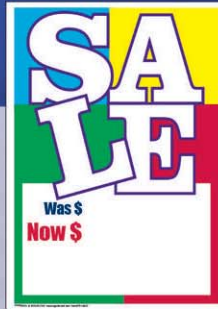
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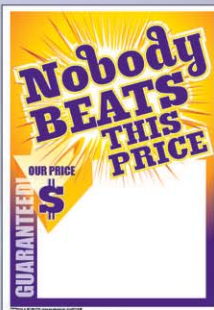
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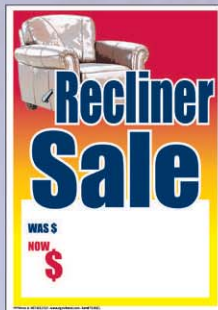
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TOP TEN *BAD* SALES HABITS

And how to break them.

by Kevin Cundiff

Have you identified the top ten worst

retail sales

habits? No?

That's fine,

because we did

for you. Here they

are, along with a

few ideas on how

to stop them.

Anyone who's ever tried to give up chocolate or put in more time at the gym knows that bad habits are easy to form but hard to break. And in the monkey-see-monkey-do world of retail sales, one person's bad habit could spread to the entire team; bad habits equal lower sales and declining revenue.

#10 Low self-confidence

Problem: Good salespeople are confident, and confidence is contagious. If a salesperson isn't confident in their product or in the act of selling, consumers won't be confident about a purchase.

Solution: Knowledge is power. Know your products and the confidence of both you and your customers will grow (and so will your sales). Practice role playing to rehearse pitches and overcome objections and it will translate into success.

#9 Leading with price

Problem: Once price is established, it has to be overcome with value. This can often be difficult because custom-

ers may have already been turned off by the cost.

Solution: Always lead with value. Using knowledge of your customer's specific needs, build a mountain of benefits that will easily tower over the cost you present later.

#8 Failing to Close

Problem: Sales reps present the value of a product without a closing statement resulting in an awkward silence. The natural reaction is to fill the silence with a data dump, a communication breakdown that can kill a sale.





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"Demonstrate that you've listened by presenting only what will resonate with the customer, instead of hurling value props until one sticks.

Solution: At the end of the benefit presentation, employing soft closing statements such as 'How does that sound?' or 'We will set that up for you today as well, sound good?' can take the customer to the finish line. You'll either receive a 'yes' from your prospect, a clarifying question you can answer to close the sale, or an objection you can overcome. Avoid the awkward silence and guide the customer to the close.

#7 Failing to Connect

Problem: When sales representatives don't learn anything about their customers, it's very difficult to inform them of how products and services can truly enhance their lives.

Solution: Take time to learn about customer needs and link those needs to the right product or service solution. There's no need for a 'hard close' if a customer trusts you. Connect and they will take your recommendations.

#6 Terminology

Problem: Slinging around fancy-schmancy adjectives about your products doesn't necessarily help you sell more. While certain terminology may be well known internally, it is likely foreign to the customer.

Solution: Know your audience. Talk about products using vocabulary the customer is accustomed to. However, you should still be sure to use the correct legal or compliance language

laid out for you.

#5 & #4 – Believing You Don't Have Time or Your Store Is Too Busy

Problem: These two habits go hand in hand. Look, we're all busy; the customer and you included. Still, you have a job to do. Take a breath and proceed.

Solution: Always provide customers with the best experience possible. This includes making them aware of any potential products and services that could benefit them (#10) and treating them like they're the only person in the store (#7).

#3 Overwhelming Customers

Problem: Sometimes knowing the product isn't the issue, but learning how and when to use it is. Just because a sales rep knows everything doesn't mean the customer needs to hear it.

Solution: If a connection with the customer has been made, deciding what information to share, and when, becomes easy. Demonstrate that you've listened by presenting only what will resonate with the customer, instead of hurling value props until one sticks.

#2 Clerking

Problem: There's a difference between

clerking and selling. Clerking is simply exchanging money and asking if they'd 'like fries with that.' Don't be a clerk or a cashier, be a salesperson.

Solution: Sell! Sell! Sell! Don't let the customer steer the conversation. Establish a sales process that builds value before you get to the register. Doing this will help you become a bona fide salesperson who can improve your customers' lives.

#1 Not Selling Everyone

Problem: Why, why, why would every customer not be offered products or services? Who knows? But it happens. (Insert excuse here.)

Solution: No more excuses. No more making decisions for the customer. Present to everyone. Remember, you lose 100 percent of the sales you don't offer.

About Kevin Cundiff: Kevin Cundiff, is VP of Warranty Retail for Foretrga. Foretrga Financial Corporation is a subsidiary of Tiptree Financial Inc., is a single source insurance company that, through a network of preferred partners, offers a range of specialty program underwriting, credit protection, and warranty solutions. Delivering multi-faceted coverage with an unmatched service experience for both resellers and their customers, Foretrga solves immediate, everyday needs, empowering consumers to worry less and experience more. For more information visit <http://www.foretrga.com>



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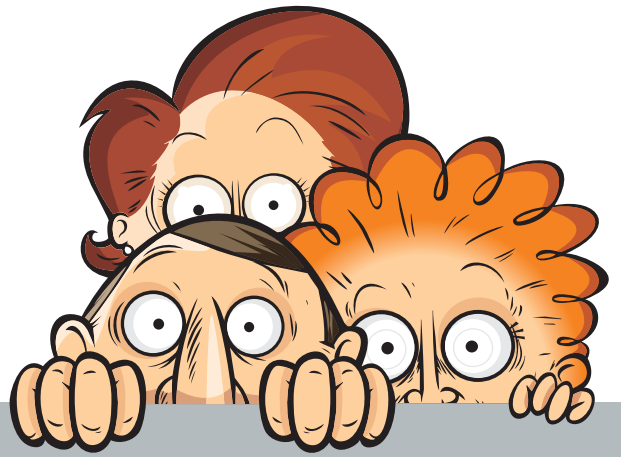


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ADVANCED TRAINING

Part 3: Steps Of The Sale - The Meet & Greet.

by David Benbow

This is the third article in a series which discusses the Steps of the Sale. In previous articles, we offered a check-list that every Retail Sales Associate (R.S.A.) must

have under control before he steps on to the sales floor to take an “up.”

Before we start, it is important to remember that EVERY “up” has great potential value, both to the store and to the R.S.A. The store has invested thousands of dollars in advertising and store preparation to get these potential customers to come through the door. It then becomes the mission of the R.S.A. to interpret the customer’s needs and wants, and with this interpreted information, solve the customer’s problem. Will the R.S.A. succeed or fail in this mission or did the store management waste money and time to pull the customer in? It all starts with the “encounter.”

Once again, I am going to refer to the dictionary for the origin and definition of the word “encounter.” The word encounter seems to derive from the Latin term in contra, which translated means “in against.” Viewed from this definition, we suddenly realize that many RSA-Up meetings actually happen in the old Latin sense of the word. In other words, the meet and greet sometimes turns into a confrontation rather than a friendly “welcome to our store.” Why is this? How do we keep the encounter from becoming a confrontation?

“The meet and greet sometimes turns into a confrontation rather than a friendly ‘welcome to our store’. How do we keep the encounter from becoming a confrontation?”

The Customer’s Side Of The Story

Retail sales people, because they talk to so many strangers all day long, often forget the customer’s point of view. Before greeting the up, ask yourself, “Why is the customer in our store?” Surely the “up” you see walking through the door has something else he or she would rather be doing. Why did they take time out of their

The Encounter

Some sales trainers like to call this the “Meet and Greet” and that’s fine if you want to call it that. In this article, however, I’d like to analyze the so-called Meet and Greet as an encounter between a potential customer (an “up”) and a sales person.

busy schedule to visit your store? The reasonable answer to this question is, the customer has a problem of some sort and they need a solution. Chances are, they only have a vague idea of how to solve the problem. In some cases, they aren't even sure if they have a problem. They are in your store because they think that furniture, of some sort, may be the answer to their question.

Not only do they have some sort of problem, the customers are very likely feeling somewhat anxious. They have a problem they don't know how to solve, they'd rather be doing something else, and they are worried about spending money that probably isn't in their already pinched budget. They are unfamiliar with the store and they know they are about to be pounced upon by some salesperson who is a total stranger to them; a stranger that they are already suspicious of and

probably do not trust.

The R.S.A's Side Of The Story

The sales associates in the store, meanwhile, are quite often bored with the whole thing. They have been doing this forever. They've talked to thousands of ups. They'd rather be

somewhere else, too. But, they have to work to make a living, so, here they are, on a beautiful Saturday morning, with twenty other salespeople, waiting for, and often dreading, that first "up", who is always "just looking" or "waiting for something to call their name."

In big stores, the up rotation is frequently quickly confused, and sometimes, a customer walks in and

"Don't forget many visitors to your store are on edge the minute they pull up into the parking lot. Who knows what troubles are weighing on their minds?"



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RSA

STEPS OF THE SALE

nobody knows which salesperson is “up” in the rotation. So, there is a scramble at the desk to see who greets the new up; the up who may not want to be greeted to begin with.

The Collision

So, now we have the ingredients for an encounter that could easily turn into a collision. Collisions, by definition, are unintended accidents in which one, if not both parties involved are to blame. In this in-store, meet-and-greet collision, who is at fault? Who else can we rightfully blame but the Retail Sales Associate? Sure, the up may be in a bad mood, or a bad person, but they still sleep on something and have furniture in their house, so they are a potential customer, no matter how they project themselves to the greeting R.S.A. You can't blame the up. The up is who he is. He is not out trying to improve himself. He is not reading this article. It is the R.S.A. who must adjust his style to the incoming customer, whether good or evil.

Don't forget, many visitors to your store are on edge the minute they pull up into the parking lot. Who knows what troubles are weighing on their minds? They are going to respond favorably only to a kind, caring salesperson who is prepared to help them solve their problem.

On top of all this, many salespeople have the bad habit of pre-judging the entering customer based on his appearance. Depending on the customer's age, dress, and what they

are driving, the greeting R.S.A. may have, unfortunately, already formed an opinion, fairly or unfairly, of the worth of the new arrival.

How To Fix This Problem

Since it is unfair to blame the new customer, no matter what his issues may be, the R.S.A. has to be ready to handle anything the customer throws at him. Therefore, it makes sense for the R.S.A. to be prepared, both in all the areas of knowledge and salesmanship, but also in projecting a winning attitude.

The newly arrived potential customer does not want to be greeted by a bored, complacent sales associate that is greeting his ten thousandth up and is thinking “If I get one more ‘lookie-lou’ today, I am going to scream.”. In Broadway-type shows, I am told, the performers live with the attitude that, even though they've done the same show, night after night, year after year, most of the audience has never seen the show. For the fresh face in the audience, it is their first time to see it and to them, it is brand new and exciting. So, the performers, remembering this, never let up, never relax, never get complacent or bored. Every show must be done with the same enthusiasm as the first one. The R.S.A. must have the same attitude as the performers. In a way, the R.S.A. is putting on a show for the customer. The R.S.A. is a performer. The new customer has never seen the show, even though the R.S.A. has performed it many thousand of times before.

“Let's say
out of 100 customers,
33 do not want to shake
hands with a retail
stranger; 60 of them
don't care one way or
another; but seven (who
may be either politicians
or car salesmen) really
love to shake hands with
strangers.”

I would suggest then, that the professional R.S.A. is wise, as part of his training and preparation, to learn how to “adopt a winning attitude” every time before greeting a customer. I've seen the great ones do this. No matter what bad news or down mood prevailed while waiting in the lounge for the next up, the professional “puts on a happy face” for the customer and forgets all his previous troubles. He is totally, sincerely committed to solving the customer's problem, and the customer recognizes this and responds favorably.

So, how does the R.S.A. put on the happy face with every customer? Make it a habit. I would suggest forming good habits through practice and self-discipline. A lot of what effective sales associates do correctly, whether you like to hear it or not, is done through the force of habit. By this, I mean good habits formed through practice and training. The effective sales person learns his craft so thoroughly that many of his positive actions are done as a matter of habit. Good habits make for good salespeople.

Now, What Do We Do With It?

This sounds like a lot of work just to explain a successful "meet and greet." Of course, we know the greeting is just the beginning, but putting your best foot forward and making a good first impression are the door-openers to solving the customer's problem and making the sale.

So, here is the scenario. The customer has walked through the front door of the store. The R.S.A. knows he has to help this customer and it is to be hoped, make a sale. What happens now?

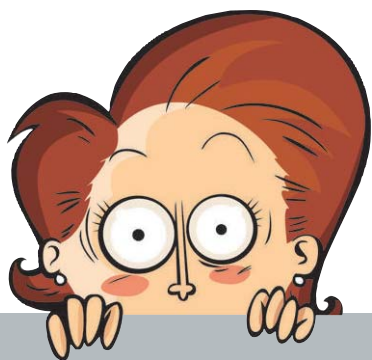
The Approach

Before you greet, you must approach. My dictionary defines "approach" as "to come closer, or draw nearer." It may not seem like it to the unobservant, but much is happening in the few brief nanoseconds of the Approach. The R.S.A. is pre-judging the "up" and the "up" is pre-judging the R.S.A. As John F. Lawhon observed in his book "Selling Retail," these first few critical seconds can often make or break a sale. Everybody knows the old saying, "You don't get a second chance to make a good first impression."

Don't forget, every customer is different, but at this point, the R.S.A. does not know how different. How will this

"In these first few critical seconds, the R.S.A. is pre-judging the "up" and the "up" is pre-judging the R.S.A."





RSA

STEPS OF THE SALE

up respond to a big, dazzling smile? How will he or she respond to an offered handshake? Should the R.S.A. approach the customer directly or in an off-hand, indirect way? Should the R.S.A. stand and wait and make himself available to be approached by the up? What happens if you do this and the customer ignores you and walks on by?

The Greeting

Let's talk about handshakes for a minute. Maybe it's just me, but I don't like the offer of a handshake from a stranger selling retail. I also do not like a Retail Stranger asking for my name. If I decide to buy something, that's when I'll tell you my name and shake your hand, not before. I think

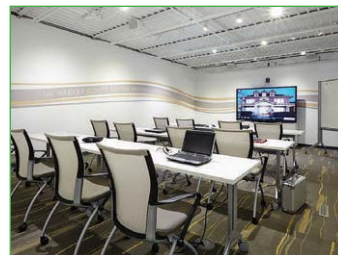
it is a risky move on the part of the salesperson to ask someone's name and offer to shake hands. Here's why I think this. I think a lot of retail customers feel the same way I do. Most customers do not go into the store to make a friend (that is the job of the R.S.A.); they are in the store of necessity, not desire. They have a problem they need to fix, and they want to get it fixed and be gone. (Of course, this probably doesn't apply to those browsers who are there to "get ideas.") Just for argument's sake, let's say that out of one hundred customers, thirty-three do not want to shake hands with a retail stranger; sixty of them don't care one way or another; but seven customers (who may be either politicians or car salesmen) really love to shake hands with strangers. Does the sales associate want to

risk offending one-third of his new customers, by offering an unwanted handshake right at the get-go? Will the other two thirds be offended if you don't offer to shake their hand? An unsolicited handshake from an R.S.A. is, in my opinion, more likely to annoy the customer.

The same principle applies when the R.S.A. introduces himself. To illustrate my thought, let me digress for a moment. When you visit a restaurant and take your seat, the waitperson comes up to cheerfully greet you, and almost always tells you his or her name. How often does that waitperson ask you for your name? Does he ever offer to shake your hand? No? So, regarding the greeting of the customer, I think it is a good idea to follow the practice of good waitpersons at restaurants. The R.S.A. should

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MEET & GREET

offer his name and his service with a cheerful, helpful greeting and then get on with discovering what the customer came in for. If they want you to know their name, they will tell you.

What Do You Say To The Customer?

Before we get into "opening lines," let's review briefly our first goals we want to accomplish with the "meet and greet."

1. First, we want the customer to feel comfortable and at ease in the store and with us, the retail sales associates.

2. Second, we must grab the customer's attention in a positive way, so that he or she WANTS to talk to us.

3. Third, the R.S.A. must take control of the sale. (For more on this subject, see my article in the March/April 2014 issue of Furniture World posted at <http://furninfo.com/Authors/DavidBenbow/37>).

What then, do we say to the cus-

tomers that will accomplish the three goals listed above?

Opening Lines

A lot of sales trainers make a big deal out of the opening line. And they should make a big deal out of it. The opening lines, of course, are the first words out of your mouth when addressing the customer. In almost every encounter, it is the R.S.A. that speaks first. If the up speaks first, that can help the R.S.A. grab control of the sales situation. It probably means the up came in for something specific and knows what he wants.

So, if the R.S.A. bears the burden of speaking first, what should he/she blurt out? What does almost everyone blurt out? "How may I help you?" "Can I help you find anything?" What is the up's answer ninety-five percent of the time? "I'm just looking." "I'm just getting ideas."

Do you wonder why the close ratio is so low, especially in furniture stores? It is this type of listless opening exchange which has a lot to do with it.

What is wrong with "May I help you?" It sounds pleasant enough. The

salesperson sounds helpful and not pushy. Here is what is wrong with it. It lets UP off the hook. He answers blithely, "I'm just looking" and goes on his merry way and the salesperson has been dismissed with those three little words that everyone dreads. How

"Welcome
to our store, if you
have any questions,
someone will be
hovering down at
the end of the aisle
waiting to answer
them."

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"This statement offers useful information

to the customer; perhaps even information that can save him money or help him buy, or alert him to something going on in the store that he might have been previously unaware of."

does the R.S.A. gain control after the up says "I'm just looking?"

Did the R.S.A. learn anything at all about what the customer wants or needs? No, and now they've sauntered off down the aisle and the R.S.A. has let them get away.

So, it sounds like "How may I help you?" does not work very well, doesn't it? What we need is an opening line that the customer doesn't expect; something that will grab his attention; something that will help the R.S.A. gain control of the sale.

I don't claim to have a magic wand that will create a great opening line for every customer every single time, but maybe we can come up with something that will at least wake up the customer and make him pay attention to us.

Peter Marino put forth an idea many years ago in his book *The Golden Rules of Selling Bedding* (still available from Furniture World) which I think is the best single principle I've heard for creating an Opening Line.

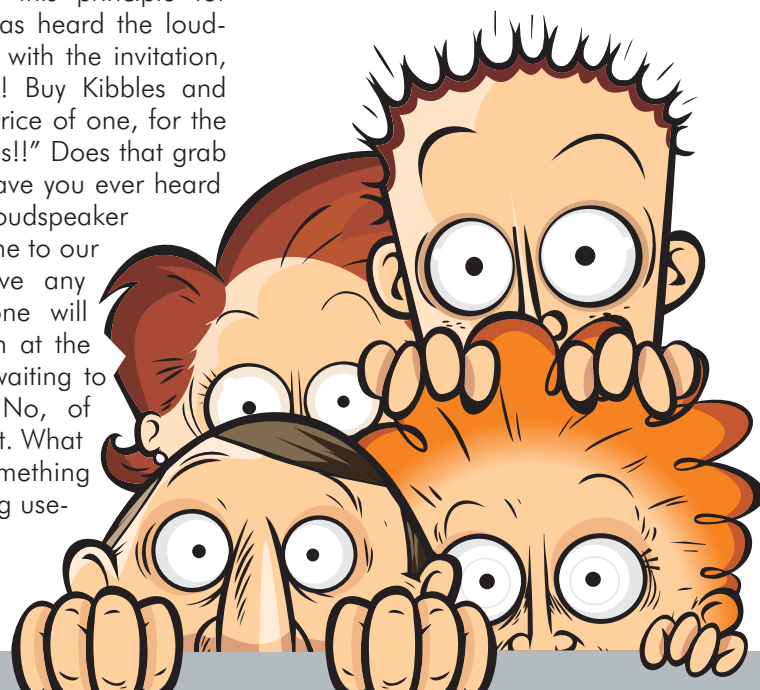
He called this the "general benefit statement." Rather than some bland 'How may I help you?' or 'Welcome to our store,' the R.S.A. should make a declarative statement to the newly arrived up. This statement offers useful information to the customer; perhaps even information that can save him money or help him buy, or alert him to something going on in the store that he might have been previously unaware of. For example, "Folks, we are having a one-day special where everything in the store can be financed for sixty months, no interest, same as cash." This benefit statement can also be phrased as a Did You Know question. For example, "Folks, did you know that all our king size sets are being sold for the queen set price, for the next three hours only?" Of course, do not take these opening lines literally; these are just examples. The mass retailers, like Wal-Mart have been using this principle for years. Everyone has heard the loudspeaker come on with the invitation, "K-Mart shoppers! Buy Kibbles and Bits, two for the price of one, for the next fifteen minutes!!" Does that grab your attention? Have you ever heard the guy on the loudspeaker mumble, "Welcome to our store, if you have any questions, someone will be hovering down at the end of the aisle waiting to answer them.?" No, of course you haven't. What you hear is something exciting; something use-

ful; something to grab your attention.

This opening line should change frequently, depending on the Benefit Statement. It should not be canned; it should sound spontaneous. Think about this. What is the store doing special on any given day? What new products have been placed on the floor? What is the store advertising? What kind of special financing is the store offering? What can you, the R.S.A., say that will generate some excitement and interest in the newly arrived customer?

Summary

The first Step of the Sale, the 'Meet and Greet,' is where the R.S.A. makes his first impression on the newly arrived customer. It can get the sale off to a good start with an interest-



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ing, impactful, informative greeting or it can go off into a forgettable, self-guided tour with a risk-free, but bland, everyday, "May I help you?"; a greeting guaranteed to fail over ninety percent of the time.

It is time to run some risks. Develop some powerful "General Benefit Statements" with which to greet the new customer.

Don't ASK if you can help the new customer. Actually HELP him with your opening line. It just might work.

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. He offers hands-on training classes for retailers on a variety of subjects and on-line classes that can be downloaded from the websites mentioned above. David can be contacted via e-mail at dave@bedsellersmanual.com or in person at 361-648-3775.

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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