

# furniture WORLD



***Seven Deadly Sins of Retail***

***Best Accessory & Color Ideas***

***Advanced RSA Education: Qualifying***

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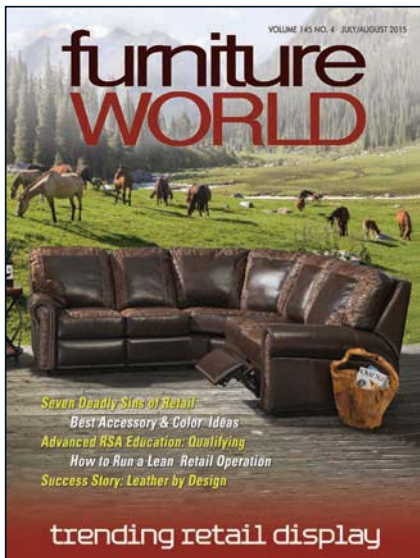
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# IN THIS ISSUE

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**Cover:** Pictured is Frisco from Omnia, a new introduction. Made in America, Omnia's diverse line of hand-crafted stationary and motion upholstery appeals to a diverse cross-section of consumers. Available in over 500 fine leathers and fabrics. For more information, see pages 18-19 in this issue or visit [www.omnialeather.com](http://www.omnialeather.com).

- 08** Seven Deadly Sins of Retail  
Avoid them and your business can flourish. Ignore them, and you may lose your retail soul!
- 14** Trending Accessories  
Best practices for buying, merchandising and profiting from the category - Part 2.
- 28** Trending Color  
No furniture store owner should discount the huge effect that color can have on consumer purchasing behavior.
- 28** Best Selling Design  
Editors' picks of best selling furniture and accessory designs.
- 50** Qualifying Questions: Advanced RSA Training  
Part 5 of our Steps-Of-The-Sale series. Do your RSAs fail to ask even the most fundamental qualifying questions?
- 64** Lean Business Practices: An Introduction  
LEAN practices allow businesses to realize their potential. First of a multi-part series.
- 72** Retail Profile: Up Market Down South  
Solid merchandising and advertising pay off for Leather by Design.
- 88** Maximize Return On Your Training Investment  
How to best select, design and deliver education programming that will have a significant and lasting impact.
- 94** First Exchange At Retail  
Prospects may be the most overlooked people in your furniture business. Here's what to do about it.



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1333A North Ave. #437  
New Rochelle, NY 10804  
Tel: 914-235-3095

FURNITURE WORLD: (ISSN0738-890X) - Published every other month by Towse Publishing Co., 1333-A North Avenue, #437 New Rochelle, NY 10804. Subscription: \$19 per year; \$39.00 for 3 years, \$29 Canada, \$4/copy; Foreign \$119 (USD only). Periodical postage paid at New Rochelle, NY and additional mailing offices. US POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Furniture World, PO Box 16044, St. Louis, MO 63105. Publications Mail Agreement Number 41659018. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: PO Box 875, STN A, Windsor ON N9A 6P2. Copyright 2014 Towse Publishing Company, all rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is strictly prohibited.

US POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Furniture World Magazine, PO Box 16044, St. Louis, MO 63105.

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## EDITOR'S CORNER

Elevator Speeches  
For Every Sales Associate

**E**very furniture retailer should invest time to craft one great Elevator Speech (ES). An ES explains what your company does, why it's unique and interesting. It needs to be short enough to deliver to a prospect during a brief ride from the first to the fourth floor. This prospect is someone you may never see again if you fail to captivate, once the bell dings and the double doors open.

Creating a great Elevator Speech is not easy, and rehearsing it is mandatory. Your ES needs to be memorable, giving your prospect a positive feeling about what you do and why they might want to buy from you.

Let's take this ES idea one step further. Your store is not only about your retail brand, it's about the brands you carry. Sales associates find themselves standing next to an Up only for a short time. They stop along the way to present products, just like an elevator stops at select floors. Every Up can walk out those double doors at any time... ding! Can your RSA's quickly explain what makes each product they choose to show unique, interesting and worthy of buying? What if each of your suppliers could supply an ES for their company brand, as well as for each collection they produce? What if your sales associates were armed with this information, drilled it and perfected it?

Russell Bienenstock  
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**WORLD**

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# SEVEN <sup>Deadly</sup> SINS OF RETAIL

by Gordon Hecht

Avoid the seven sins of retail and your business can flourish. Ignore them and you will miss opportunities for saving your retail soul.

**T**he retail home furnishings business may seem simple and easy to your shoppers, neighbors, and maybe even some of your employees, but those of us with long-term involvement know IT'S HARD! In your Circle of Concern, those things you have little or no control over are your competitors, interest rates, the weather, advertising costs, and the local economy.

In your Circle of Influence, those things you do have some control over are the Seven Deadly Sins. Avoid them and your business can flourish. Ignore them, and you will miss opportunities for growth, profit, and comfort. Don't chance losing your retail soul because many factors can be fixed with little or no cost; others require investment. But business is a game of invest wisely and reap returns. It's up to you to make that investment.

## #1 SIN: Don't offer your customers Legendary Customer Service.

I have rarely spoken to an owner or manager who does not believe that it's a sin to not give good customer service. The problem is that many companies give good service, and

good is just not GOOD ENOUGH. Companies with legendary customer service win the war for scarce retail dollars. In order to be legendary, you must remember that shoppers are not an interruption; they are the reason for your existence. Shoppers are one of your costliest Paid-in-Advance assets when you consider the cost of advertising and occupancy. And, with the daily war for retail dollars hotter than ever, your relationship with shoppers and customers is more delicate than ever. Protect that asset as if it were gold, and handle it like porcelain!

FedEx grew from a college term paper to a multi-billion dollar company with the service motto, "the sun will never set on a customer issue". Be sure to return all phone calls, e-mails, and Facebook posts. When in doubt on how to resolve an issue, err on the side of your customer. Be sure that your frontline troops dress professionally, and provide shoppers with a logical buying experience so they can more easily select furniture that fits their lifestyle and budget. Thank you cards and follow calls are old-fashioned and take time. However, they are still very much appreciated by

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"It's time to recruit today if you are not 100% delighted with the performance of everyone on your sales team."

---

your customers, so see if you can squeeze the 15 minutes it takes to send them, into your day.

## #2 SIN: fail to invest in your building.

Houses and stores have a lot in common. Farmers think it's a sin to "fix the house before you fix the barn", meaning you have to take care of business first if you don't want to end up sleeping on the street. Starting today, look at your carpeting, walls, and windows. Chances are if you haven't painted, steamed or cleaned since 2013, your structure is DIRTY. Nobody wants to buy clean furniture in a dirty store! Make sure your store sign lights up completely, and if you are lucky enough to have a reader board, be sure the message is timely and changes weekly. Make your restrooms a SPA, and fix that leaky roof.

Want to know if your building is in top condition? Here is a simple test. Imagine you were going to lease a new building for a store. Would you lease YOURS?

## #3 SIN: Never recruit until you need someone.

Take a tip from major retailers, recruiting is a 365 day a year job. Wal-Mart, Old Navy, McDonalds, and Macy's recruit EVERY DAY. It's sinful for an HR manager in any one of those stores to not have a drawer full of resumes and applications! It's time to recruit today if you are:

- *Opening another store location any time this year.*
- *Are not 100% delighted with the performance of everyone on your team.*
- *If you have another competitor opening a store in your market.*
- *If you don't have a \$800,000 to \$1,000,000 writer on your sales team.*

You can start recruiting by posting a sign in your window, and adding a recruiting box (Come Grow With Us - Business is Great) on every print ad. Even consider adding a recruitment tab to your website.

## #4 SIN: Turn your store into your home.

I don't know about your house, but at my house we are not ready to receive guests 365 days of the year. We don't vacuum the floor every day, sometimes there are dishes in the sink, and other times we can write "I love you" in the dust on the coffee table.

You and your sales team spend a lot of time in your building, including evenings and weekends. Store owners that allow the sin of letting the front desk get littered with coffee cups, pop cans (soda cans for those not in the Central Time Zone), and food wrappers, signal to customers that they are an interruption, not a reason for existence. Same goes for playing computer games or updating Facebook on cell phones, having a TV in your store on and tuned to a news channel, reading the newspaper, or not standing up BEFORE the customer enters the building. There are a lot of empty hours in the retail furniture business, try to make them productive. Maybe make a thank you call or write a card!

## #5 SIN: Prejudice.

There is still some prejudice in retail, but not the sin you may think of first. We often get an ill-informed impression of our incoming shoppers based on the car they drove in, clothing, other appearance, single versus couples, too young, too old, local speech accent, number of children, and the

"Chances Are if...  
you haven't painted, steamed or cleaned  
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# Deadly SINS OF RETAIL

#1 prejudice of all time; Not treating the shopper who has been in five or more times and has not bought, as well as you treated them on their first visit. All of those people have something in common. They all SLEEP, SIT and EAT! And your store sells stuff to help them do that. Treat them all like guests and they will buy.

## #6 SIN: I never sell THAT model.

Not as bad as pre-judging people, but another business sin is not presenting all of the merchandise in your store. I love to hear about premium upper end furniture purchases! selling leather sectionals, fancy bedroom sets, and dining rooms that seat twelve are awesome! Sell those and sell them often, and your business life will be amazing. But don't accept having RSAs forget the mid-line and budget line product! If you want your sales team to become great closers, they have to sell all models that you show, not just the ones they like or that pay the most commission.

## #7 SIN: We can't sell these items because they are much cheaper at Ginormous-Mart.

There are bargain hunters everywhere, but not everyone shops for the cheapest price. Some of the most expensive places to buy cigarettes are convenience stores, and yet 7-11 still sells a ton of them! If you guessed that the benefit is convenience, you WIN! Shoppers will buy lamps, rugs and mattress protectors from you, just because of the convenience factor.

The sin is in making accessories "add on", instead of must-have parts of the purchase. If you want to sell accessories, learn what makes them great, price them right, show them to every shopper as part of the purchase, and include them for two to seven dollars a month on a 60 month contract. Shoppers will buy from an expert!

Don't fall victim to the Seven Deadly Sins. Commit to developing and executing a plan to resolve the issues plaguing your operation. The alternate is to ignore them, and then you will find out how deadly the Seven Sins can be!

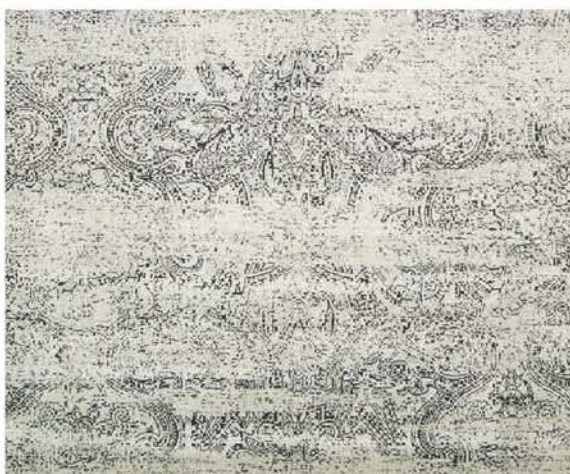
**About Gordon Hecht:** Gordon Hecht is a Growth and Development Manager for National Bedding Company's America's Mattress stores, nearly 400 mostly locally owned and operated bedding stores across the country selling Serta-branded and America's Mattress-branded mattresses. He started his 30+ years experience in the Home Furnishings industry in Las Vegas, NV as a delivery helper and driver.

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.

He joined National Bedding Company in 2014, and works with the Serta Retail Concepts Group to grow America's Mattress stores' market share

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

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# Trending... ACCESSORIES

## Part 2: Buying, merchandising and profiting from the category.

by Russell Bienenstock

**F**or this, the second installment in Furniture World's "Trending Accessories" series, we asked a panel of accessories experts how retailers can do a better job of buying, merchandising, selling and profiting from the accessory items in their stores.

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### Choose The Right Accessories

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In the May/June 2015 issue (see [www.furninfo.com](http://www.furninfo.com)), trend expert Patti Carpenter, President + Creative Director for carpenter + company identified the major trends in accessory colors and palettes. When asked how retailers might incorporate these trends into their sales processes, she suggests that retailers, "start by focusing on each customer's general overarching style, then consider how to move that person forward. Right now, trends are more evolutionary, more subtle. Huge revolutionary changes are not occurring every season. So, retailers need to help customers make simple and subtle changes that won't break the bank, but that can help make their spaces look more refreshed, updated and contemporary."

To do this effectively it's obvious that salespeople must know more about each prospective customer. "Retailers,"

she says, "should engage customers, find their preferences, become a partner. It's not a one size fits all. That exchange, that interaction is what keeps brick and mortar retail relevant. If a store is not taking full advantage of the face time they have with each customer, they aren't giving them much more than they could get by shopping online. The whole point of them coming in is to experience that interaction. So stores should definitely take this opportunity to engage in a very different way."

"You don't have to be everything to everybody, adds accessory consultant Paul Thompson. "But given where your store is right now, you need to at least look innovative and current. I hate it when I visit furniture stores that make me feel like I just stepped back into 1989."

Paul says that the sale should always start with great displays because, "if the dining room table isn't accessorized with a lazy susan, and there isn't a small sculpture above the hutch, or that large ceramic rooster with a cornucopia and some fake fruit coming out of it, plus small mirrors on the wall, hurricane candles, dishes and all the other accessories that evoke a French Country, American Classic or other lifestyle, the salesperson just can't start talking about them."

The good news, says Jason Phillips,

**"Consider**  
the life cycle of the  
products you buy.  
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on keeping them in  
the store? Dealing with  
accessories efficiently  
takes good planning."

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## KALEIDSCOPE

### ACCESSORY DESIGN TRENDS

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

**Kaleidescope:** Among the Trendscape print/pattern/ surface trends identified by Carpenter + Company is Kaleidescope. Repeating patterns of fractured fractals adorn everything from pillows, to tiles, and accessories. Kaleidescope colors are often bright and sporadic and the feeling of movement is key to this pattern play.

**Starburst:** Another Trendscape print/pattern/surface trend identified by Carpenter + Company is Starburst. Shown are a variety of simple forms and complex interpretations. The Starburst trend is being incorporated into mirrors, table top, accent pieces and even textile patterns.

Get information on additional trends from Carpenter + Company contact [editor@furninfo.com](mailto:editor@furninfo.com).



## STARBURST

Vice President of The Phillips Collection, Founder/President of Jason Phillips Design, and current President of the American Society of Furniture Designers is, "People in general are much more excited about their furniture purchasing decisions, due in part to all the home improvement TV shows. Husbands are getting involved, so it's more of a fun process. Consumers are not just shopping because they need a new sofa to replace the one their dog chewed up. They're changing a room, adding accents. Retailers need to make it fun."

### Ask The Right Questions

"When retailers sell a dining table they better sell eight dining chairs with it," adds Phillips. "If they don't, there's a problem. It's the same with accessories. That's management 101. Managers need to ask associates, 'who did you talk to today and what did you offer them?'"

"Sales associates can do better by really listening to customers and seeing where their eyes go," he observes. "If they say they are looking for a new coffee table, find out if it is for the living room. Then ask if they are happy with their sofa and lamps. Inquire if they are interested in looking for a large mirror or have thought about updating the look of their room with a new chandelier or some pendant

lights."

Trend expert Patti Carpenter agrees that asking the right questions sets the tone for the accessories shopping experience. "If a customer just purchased a couch, ask if they are looking to place something interesting above it. Perhaps they want you to show them what's very popular now. If the couch is a neutral color, suggest they consider your new line of wall art that will bring color into their room. Help them to choose lamps to put on their side tables as well as other items you carry that add color and interesting shapes to make a nice statement."

### Get The Big Picture

When asked about the need for good qualifying questions, accessory consultant Paul Thompson observes, "The most important thing is to try to find out what their big picture is. And what they desire." He also says that it's prudent to get additional information such as, "Are you renovating or remodeling? Is there a style you want to move away from or go towards? If they just came in for a mirror or a lamp, and you've established some rapport, ask where that lamp is going to be placed, and if they have other plans for that room. Remember to also ask if there are other items that will be needed. Then, tell them that your store has the items they need that are new, or the latest style and

# "It's very important

to understand how merchandise is performing, but once you get this information, it's just as important to discover the reason why."

color. Keep the conversation going. A lot of times shoppers think they don't need direction, but they really do. And, remember to let them know that you are glad they came in, and to make them feel special when they first walk into the store. Then, try to figure out what they need, what they can afford and how this lamp, mirror, rug, pillow or large ceramic rooster is going to impact their lives. What they need and want are often two different things.

"If you ask what kind of budget a shopper is working with," continues

Thompson, "and they want something more than they can afford, remember that often price isn't the problem, it's finding the right thing, so try to get them to fall in love with your products."

## Best Merchandising Ideas

When asked about merchandising, ART's Sharon Davis offers, "Some retailers go through their accounting system to identify and replace items that are low performing and decide

to replace them, but that isn't the best way to merchandise creatively. Just replacing low performing accessory items is not enough. The process has to start by paying attention to the trends of the day, including merchandising trends, color trends and product trends to keep things fresh on the floor. Without this focus, retailers miss out on a big opportunity. It's very important to understand how merchandise is performing, but once you get this information, it's just as important to discover the reason why. And, just

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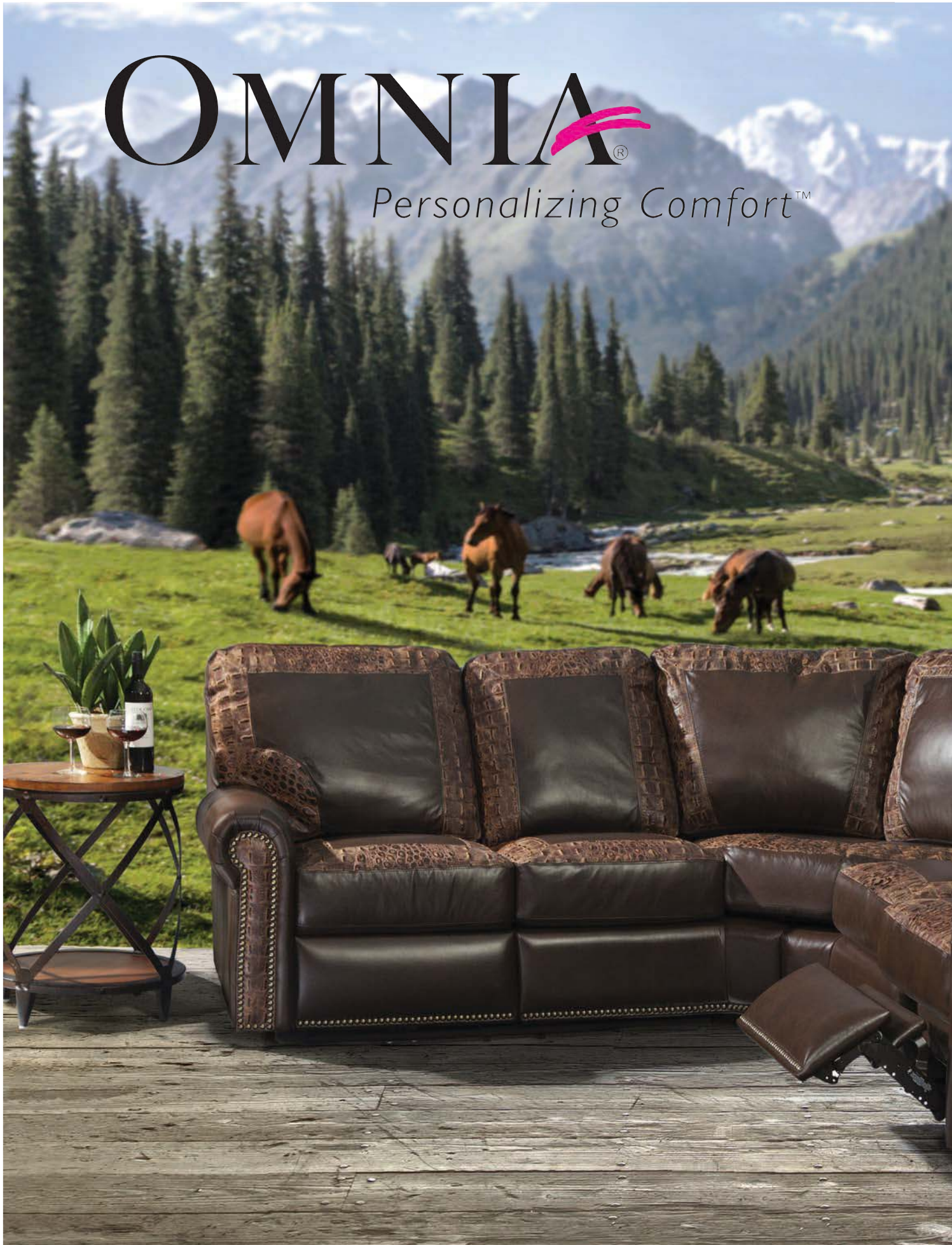
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# Trending...



IRRIDESCENCE



TERRACOTTA

## ACCESSORY DESIGN TRENDS

**Iridescence** : Among the Trendscape print/pattern/surface trends identified by Carpenter + Company, Iridescence or light play continues to be a key point this season with oily, slick reflective surfaces. Colors dance across the surface of textiles and glass. CMYK light bulb in the collage above causes colored shadows.

**Terracotta**: Another Trendscape materials trend identified by Carpenter + Company, is Terracotta. Natural and simple, this humble material takes a chic turn into clean products with structure and solidity. The color is also important as it recalls the warming browns of the palette and is reminiscent of Masala from Pantone with its subtle red undertones. Included in the collage above is the Vitamin Product lamp.

To get information on additional trends from Carpenter + Company contact [editor@furninfo.com](mailto:editor@furninfo.com).

maybe you need to take a long look and see what your mix is all about.

Consultant Paul Thompson observes, "many retailers miss the mark when replacing poor selling accessory items. "Let's say a retailer gets rid of the bottom selling 20 percent of lamps, the dogs. Do they replace these items with something new and innovative? A lot of times the answer is 'no'. They replace them with items that are not so distinctively different.

## Rotate Them In & Out

How do retailers decide how to change up their accessories? Thompson says that there's lots of information out there. "You just have to decide what looks you want to put on your floor. Then decide how to incorporate your inventory, making it look good. Just because a retailer is happy with how the big-ticket furniture items on their floor are selling, doesn't mean they can't profit from showing accessories to help support sales. I wouldn't tell a furniture retailer to start showing a bunch of small candles and decorative items if they're not comfortable selling small accessories. Instead, I might suggest showing oversized accessory items such as hurricanes for candles, and glass, resin or ceramic items on a wooden pedestal. Larger

decorative elements that provide good retail margins, can nuance the displays, and create lifestyle settings.

"Perception is huge in retail, so your store should look fashion forward," he continues. "Even if you don't change the furniture on the floor that much, the way you rotate products in and out of the front of your store, in that seasonal set area, determines how shoppers feel about you. If they see the same old piece of furniture in a new way, it will be new to them. So give some thought to the front quarter of your store. How should it change seasonally? Also,

**"Even if you don't change the furniture on the floor that much, the way you rotate products in and out of the front of your store, in that seasonal set area, determines how shoppers feel about you."**

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**Metallic + Mirrored:** Among the materials trends identified by Carpenter + Company is Metallic + Mirrored. Highly reflective shine is the direction for anything silver. Polished and bold silhouettes make for products you cannot take your eyes off of. They seem to say, “look at me looking at you”.

To get information on additional trends from Carpenter + Company contact [editor@furninfo.com](mailto:editor@furninfo.com).

"Consider the life cycle of the products you buy. How long do you plan to keep them in the store? Lots of retailers just show and sell items until they are sold. Others buy a collection and plan to sell it for just six months. This second group has a real plan to get accessories out the door. Then if it isn't sold in six months, they just sell it at clearance or get rid of it. Another idea for getting rid of old merchandise is to feature items that have been on the floor for too long or are sitting in the warehouse in a digital or printed catalog."

Dealing with accessories efficiently takes good planning. Paul observes, "Red accessories, such as red hearts, stockings and candles sell great at Christmas time, but where do they go when Christmas is over? Well, the red candles can go to Valentines Day, right? So you have to think about the lifestyle of each product from the moment it hits the floor. Just roll them

"I tell retailers all the time that the trend is what you're showing. So, whether an item has been in your store a long time or not, that's the trend that you have to work with! If you want to change displays to reflect more fashionable trends, then take pieces and parts already in inventory and use them as parts of new displays based on color and viability. If all your furniture is brown, then you're going to have to add pops of color. The same leather sofa can look six different ways if you style displays to reflect six different trends. Accessories are jewelry to the store, they're like earrings to a woman. It's the accessories that make an outfit or a room pop and take it to another level.

We asked our experts to suggest practices Furniture World readers can incorporate to help salespeople sell more accessories. Patti Carpenter



22 FURNITURE WORLD July/ August 2015

# "The same leather sofa

can look six different ways if you style displays to reflect six different trends.

Accessories are jewelry to the store. It's the accessories that make an outfit or a room pop and take it to another level."

suggests, "for salespeople who don't already have design experience, it's important to start to make that a focus for them. There's so much information available today. Retailers can do simple things such as getting reports from Pantone or from someone like me. Or, go online to see how other stores talk about their trends for the season.

"There's certainly much to be learned by just being an avid reader of good home decor magazines that provide information about new colors and finishes. There is a lot of information on color in Better Homes and Gardens and Elle Decor's color issues. Simple resources like magazines and Google searches can certainly give sales people talking points about upcoming trend and color directions."

"Every single store ought to have a subscription to the good design magazines like House Beautiful, Luxe, El Decor and Veranda," agrees ART's Sharon Davis. "Every retailer should have a library of traditional as well as contemporary issues for salespeople to flip through during slow times so they can find out what's trending in the design universe and the world of décor. There's no reason whatsoever why they shouldn't be doing that. It's an easy way for owners and managers see their salespeople become more knowledgeable about design and do better, period. Salespeople should be reading design blogs and following style spotters at the High Point show. There is a lot of downtime in retail, that's for sure, so why not make the best of it.

"And it can be fun. Other underused resources are accessories sales reps

who will gladly provide all sorts of resources and educational presentations to help retail salespeople do a better job.

"Retailers are also welcome to join ART's webinar series that includes training on trends, merchandising, sales training, lighting and social media. These are all listed on the [accessoriesresourceteam.org](http://accessoriesresourceteam.org) website

under events.

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## Traffic Building Events

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How might retailers make accessories more important to consumers by promoting them as major and exciting elements of room design, along with lighting and paint colors?



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# Trending... ACCESSORIES

Patti Carpenter thinks that consumer events and seminars are a great way to build traffic. "I've started to see more stores inviting in paint people, Benjamin Moore and the Sherwin Williams, to talk to customers about where paint colors are going, because it's a foundation for starting to layer in furniture and accessories," she says. Having a Saturday afternoon or Wednesday morning seminar allows retailers to make a case for how their accessory selection ties into what's coming, and can help to lead customers to purchase."

Today seminars and events are easier to promote through social media, comments Phillips Collection's Jason Phillips, "It's important for retailers to embrace social media. I don't mean just posting Facebook updates, but using cutting edge social media such as Instagram hash tags, having contests for consumers, mobile to promote events and mixers, support charities, and work to engage customers with brands. It's not just the chic-est brands that make the most noise these days. So, find your audience, embrace them, tap out to the local media, tap out to your vendors."

Sharon Davis recalls, "Recently during one of our webinars a speaker suggested to retail participants that the word 'sale' needs to be dropped from the retail vocabulary. Instead retailers should create events that people want to come to. There may, of course, be some merchandise at an event that is on sale. The trick is to advertise an interesting seminar, demonstration or a charity event. There are a million different ideas that can be promoted

through social media. For example, on the ART website under the refurbish section, there is a video from Global View that we produced showing three different, fresh looks that can be created by just changing accessories on three core pieces of furniture. Any store can, in a vignette area, create an in-store demonstration like this. It's a great visual tool to show shoppers how they can freshen up the same furniture they've had for 20 years by adding accessories to create an entirely different look."

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## Promoting Accessories

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Circling back to the topic of how retailers can figure out how to properly merchandise their stores, Paul Thompson suggests that store management needs to do some research to find out how people in their trading areas live; how they are furnishing their homes, apartments and town houses. Identifying these differences helps pinpoint the types of accessories they are likely to buy. "And maybe," he says, "lifestyle settings in your store should be representative of that clientele. Perhaps it's an urban look, a Country Home look, or a transitional dwelling for young married couples. Accessories are a big part of creating these lifestyles."

Another hint he gives. "Ask salespeople why customers buy or don't buy accessory items you sell. They may tell you that a certain lamp sells because it's functional, or that you have an advantage because other stores in your trading area don't have

a decent selection of decorative mirrors. Define why things are selling. Salespeople often have a different take on why things aren't selling. This exercise can be enlightening, especially for stores that don't actually have regular store meetings."

Another idea Thompson floats is to get sales and design associates to create a "visions" or 'trend' board. "Ask them," he says, "to design rooms of furniture and accessories they would buy, using internet resources and magazines. One retailer, I worked with," he recalls, "reviewed the layouts salespeople presented, picked the ones he liked and looked for the pictured items at the High Point Market. Doing this gave his store the added advantage of getting employees involved, and those sales associates whose designs were

**"Salespeople often have a different take on why things aren't selling.**

**This exercise can be enlightening, especially for stores that don't actually have regular store meetings."**



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## *Trending...* ACCESSORIES

used, felt responsible for producing sales, because it was their idea.

"If your customers are reading Elle Decor and Architectural Digest," he adds, "you need to know that, because that's what's informing them. If your town puts out a home and fashion magazine that's part of a home tour, you need to know about that as well because it will let you know what designers are doing in your area. No retailer has any excuse for thinking they don't know what to do about trends. Many retailers could improve displays by just taking pictures out of any magazine, then reproduce the color, the placement of the furniture, the styling of the floor, and placement of the decorative accessories. It's not that hard. Architectural Digest features high-end furnishings, but there's no reason this look can't be translated to any price-point.

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### Manage The Process

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Closing our discussion on accessories, Surya's Vice President Sales Seth King stresses, "Retailers need to have somebody in charge. When customers walk into a Pottery Barn or a Crate and Barrel, displays look fresh and new every day. But many other furniture retailers don't have people responsible for taking care of this, so their displays get picked apart and they just don't look as good. There needs to be a constant, everyday discipline to make this happen. It's not always the number one

mindset for furniture store managers, but customers walking into a store on a first visit, need to be impressed. Furniture and accessories need to be nailed down which means keeping more backup inventory or working with suppliers that quick ship. When this doesn't happen, customers will end up leaving to visit a Home Goods or a home decor discount type retailer.

"The issue for many furniture retailers is to figure out how to sell the full lifestyle to their consumers. A lot of the responsibility for this rests with sales people. If they're used to selling big-ticket items, be it a rug or dining room table and chairs, there's a tendency to just skip over the accessories. But, if they understand the value that accessory sales brings to retail, I think, it would change a lot of minds.

"A lot of times, managers don't even measure how their sales people are doing in accessories. Retail managers need to measure sales performance before they can coach them on how to become more successful. They can say, 'this month you made X-dollars selling sofas, and Y-dollars in accessories.' They may have done a very good job or not, but until it's measured and pointed out, salespeople are just going to continue to do what they've been doing. Positive change has to start with upper management. Store owners need to make a commitment to selling accessories if they want their sales teams to buy into the process and help sell more product."



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# Trending... COLOR

The right colors make a huge difference in the selling power of retail displays.

*by Kathy Andersson, Sherwin-Williams*

**W**hen evaluating the sales success of a store's inventory, no furniture store owner should discount the huge effect that color has on consumer purchasing behavior.

A bedroom set may sell well in one store but head to the clearance floor in another store just a few miles down the road. This difference in purchasing behavior can be influenced, positively or negatively, by color. That's why a basic understanding of color in merchandising – including color psychology, color marketing and socio-color information, is critical to practicing creative, leading-edge visual merchandising.

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## Color as a motivator

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The opportunity to make an impact with color begins with the store's

exterior through attractive signage, plus strategic and innovative window design. The real opportunities, however, lie inside the store.

Consumers are more aware than ever of the latest trends in fashion and home interiors thanks to instant access to information online and sites like Pinterest, Houzz and Tumblr. And, while our eyes are seemingly fixed on the digital devices we carry, consumers still visit physical retail spaces and are drawn to all types of visual communication. In fact, according to a 2004 Chain Store Age article by M. L. Tullman and R. K. Clark, "Revitalizing Visual Merchandising – Restoring Balance to Retail Environment Entails

Engaging All Five Senses," customers in the retail environment are affected by visual communication 80 percent more than that of our other sensory organs.

Creative color combinations and comprehensive trend vignettes significantly contribute to consumer purchasing behavior. Visual cues that assist in the connection of the product, the brand and the experience will ultimately create a stronger sense of loyalty to that product / brand. An effective "presentation" of furniture, includes on-trend colors and accessories that create an impression and provide an appropriate feeling of recognition for the targeted demographic.

Many retailers have found that selling a product is easier when they "sell the ambiance" – and that is achieved through lighting and color. Color draws attention and can influence mood. A 2006 research paper, "Impact of Color on Marketing", by Satyendra Singh, states that up to 90 percent of snap judgments made about products can be based on color alone.

"Color should really be an overriding piece of the strategy to make things more relevant to the consumer," says Jena Hall, furniture industry product

# *See What's New*

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

*Styled Right. Priced Right.*

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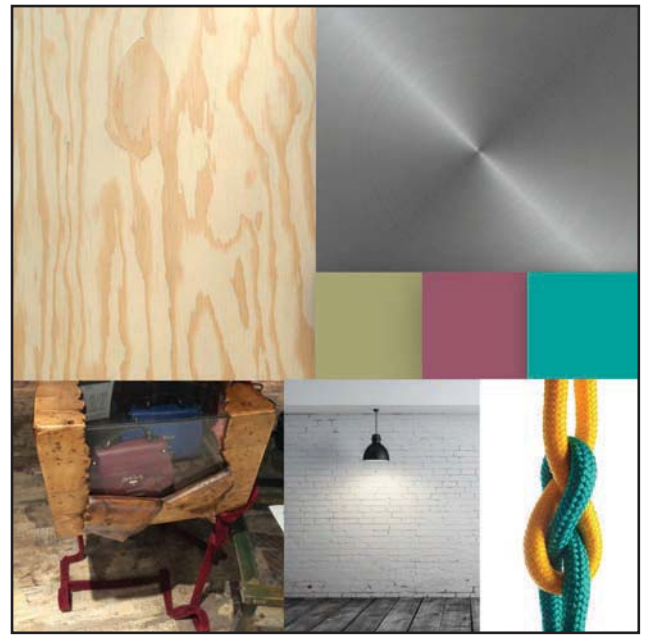
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*Her Closet w/Chandelier (above): Here's an idea for a walk-in closet with built-ins. The closet is painted in Sherwin-Williams #SW Red Obsession flat paint. The color is picked up in a rose-patterned flower rug, plus added red accent trim in the ottoman and sofa. The red is married with a grayish stain on the floors, which is also one of the hot trends today . Design by Jena Hall, Home Inspirations store, Paramaus, NJ.*

*Above, the "Construction Chic" collage has an industrial vibe, using every day materials, neutral tones with some eclectic colors intermixed. It's edgy. It supports pop-up stores, and transparent*



*business models. Sherwin-Williams colors Edgy Gold, Cordial and Thermal Spring are shown along with plywood and a silver gun metal-type texture, ropes, an industrial looking fixture against a painted brick wall and reclaimed flooring. This look is common in retail clothing and shoe stores, but can be used to create an edgy, industrial look with furniture that appeals especially to Millennials and Gen X.*

designer and merchandising expert. "When a consumer walks into a store and it's all put together for them in a compelling way through colors that complement the upholstery or the fi - ish, it brings everything together."

Hall notes that retailers often don't have a lot of walls to work with and, as such, may not be inclined to create vignettes. But creating backdrops, she notes, gives the customer's eyes a place to rest. And when you are selling by price, fashion and/or quality, and not by the pound, that can make a significant difference, Hall notes.

"Walls are important," she says.

"Vignettes can create an ambiance. Otherwise a consumer walks in and sees a sea of furniture; their eyes can't focus. Creating lifestyle vignettes marries the upholstery with finished case pieces, and the colors used on the walls are critical. They can kill a collection or they can enhance it. If a store doesn't have an interior designer on staff, they can work with an advisor or consultant to determine the right tones and shades, rather than just putting up a coat of paint."

For example, a recent project with a new retail concept for New Jersey based, HOME INSPIRATIONS Thomasville,

"Brightly colored or very ornamental/visually busy products require only a simple canvas of a neutral, light gray to allow the product to stand out and not be disruptive."



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# COLOR

led Hall to work with Sherwin-Williams to design a color palette. The four HOME INSPIRATIONS stores utilize a variety of lifestyle vignettes that make the products displayed relevant to the consumer, providing diverse looks with a wide range of products. That not only includes the furnitures' finishes and upholstery offerings but the finishes and colors used on floors and walls.

Allowing consumers to identify the wall colors or wall coverings and the finishes of the floors in this and other retail settings such as Rooms to Go, Pottery Barn, West Elm and Williams-

Sonoma allows them to take home the look and feel of the vignettes along with furniture and accent pieces they purchase. Design teams source and select the finishes, often selecting seasonal colors to set the mood.

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## Strategic color selections

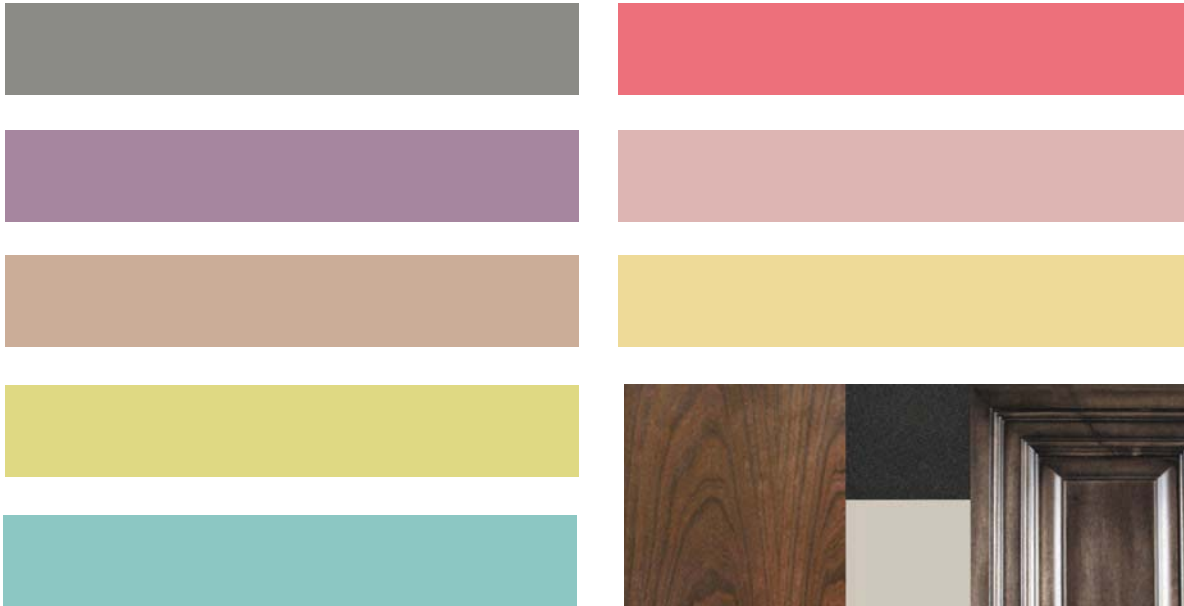
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Making color selections in a store work to the retailer's full advantage is part of the overall process. Strategic color selections tie it all together to create a lifestyle experience that speaks

to the consumer.

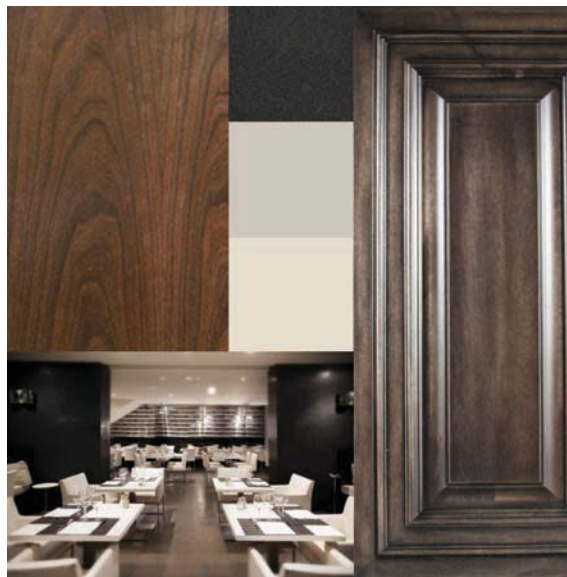
Some basic examples show the need for pairing colors appropriate to the pieces and styles.

Consider, for example, a mid-century modern walnut wood furniture collection. This would show well paired with iconic mid-century hues of mint, pale pinks and grays on adjacent walls, in accent rugs or even in live greenery combinations. Now, consider the same furniture with neon green, purple or electric blue color-blocked walls. The effect would be completely different and unlikely to



Shown above are colors from Sherwin-Williams that could be incorporated into a Mid-Century Modern display theme: "Classic French Gray", "Radiant Lilac", "Pinky Beige", "Pink Flamingo", "Appleblossom", "Sunbeam Yellow", "Chartreuse" and "Holiday Turquoise".

Classically Modern image from Sherwin-Williams at right includes clean lines, neutral colors, concrete stone, marble tile and contrasting surfaces that add interest. The grays used in these spaces are warming, and this look supports a museum theatrical looking scene ideal for retail spaces showing, for example, mid century modern furniture. At right, colors shown include a black which is a powder coating on metal, plus "Worldly Gray" and "Divine White" also from Sherwin-Williams.





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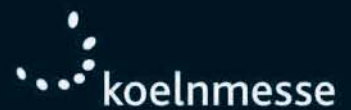
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*Bibliotheque (left): Color used as a motivator, creates impact making displays more relevant to consumers. This room setting is a small entertainment area. The Ambella Home Bibliotheque bookcase has dark turquoise shelves. Rug is turquoise and teal, sofa in a deeper shade of teal (leaning towards peacock), and case is black with gold leaf accents, a major trend for accent furniture. The gold is repeated on a coffee table, that picks up the same finish as the bookcase accessories and accent table. Walls are covered with textured wallcovering that has a slight shimmer of gold and silver, creating a painted texture effect. Metal tables are by Caracole. Design by Jena Hall, Home Inspirations Thomasville, Paramus, NJ.*

*Brooklyn Bridge Dining (above) in the same store includes a photo mural of an urban lifestyle, providing a sense of depth and space in the small room. Distressed wood floor provides an informal relaxed look, a major decorating trend. Table and chairs by Somerton Dwelling.*

## “Retailers

don't often have a lot of walls to work with. Creating backdrops gives the customer's eyes a place to rest.”

be well received. Neon colors are not an appropriate pairing with the period furniture, and the targeted demographic would not relate.

Brightly colored product or very ornamental/visually “busy” product requires only a simple “canvas” of a neutral, light gray to allow the product to stand out and not be disruptive. Consider how art galleries design their spaces and light subjects. Simple shapes pair nicely with the subdued color as well.

A rough-hewn collection of wooden furniture with casual textiles and accessories that have a re-purposed feel will merchandise best with colors and lighting that share the same ethos and mood. Stay with warm, soft effects and

colors, and finishes that don't communicate cold and sterile; no gilded walls or silver leafing should be found here.

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### Keeping it fresh

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Colors trend along with consumer tastes and desires; that means that retail furniture wall and vignette displays need to keep current to remain effective “silent salesmen.” Some coatings suppliers offer annual color trend analyses, such as the Sherwin-Williams Colormix™, that not only speak to consumers choosing paint for their homes but to furniture and cabinetry designers and retail designers who choose finishes for their products and



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# Trending... COLOR

The "Authentic Approach" Look: It's about, mixed materials and being eco-responsible and transparent in business models. The collage at left includes reclaimed bricks from a concession area. Texture is important here. Patina imperfections, warm colors, matte surfaces, some bamboo and worn looks, and oiled/ waxed oak finishes all mixed and matched together. The overall aesthetic is still fresh and new.

Colors don't have to be bright and bold when creating an Authentic Approach look, although they can be. Neutrals can be used such as the Sherwin-Williams "Canyon Clay" also shown along with the muted brown "Kaffee" and beige color "Wool Skein".

There is lot of visual and physical busyness in this setting so furniture should be clean and simple. This aesthetic could work easily with upholstered goods and metal furniture, interesting wall treatments, art and ceiling fixtures. Acrylic and plastic furniture geared towards transitional or contemporary styles might work well.

stores, respectively.

Often, coatings suppliers work directly with product designers and retail design consultants to plan accordingly as product finishes change and retail settings are strategically adjusted. Some of these are even adjusted regionally to take advantage of and meet specific consumer tastes. What may work in the southwest, for example, may be completely wrong for the northeast.

Of course, there are costs involved in any such venture – but it's best to look at the big picture and consider the expense of developing vignettes and color palettes as an investment

in the business. Helping the customer visualize, after all, can help you visualize – and realize – retail success.

**About Kathy Andersson:** Kathy Andersson serves as manager of Color and Marketing for the Product Finishes division of Sherwin-Williams. Andersson is a chairholder and has been a member of The Color Marketing Group (CMG) since 1996.

With over 22 years experience researching trends in interiors and consumer markets, Andersson successfully leverages her knowledge of formulating and application to guide manufacturers through their color and finish strategies process. Andersson is

responsible for the division's global color strategies, design and marketing efforts including color trend research and analysis as well as societal and lifestyle trend monitoring for industry segments consisting of furniture, kitchen cabinets, electronics, wood building products and general finishes for various substrates.



Harlowe & Finch bedroom by Thomasville: Vignette features a wall finished in a Sherwin-Williams color #SW6270 Soulmate, selected to enhance the room setting of the upholstered headboard, plus the sofa and chair fabrics. Jena Hall notes that walls are important. "Creating backdrops," she says, "gives the customer's eyes a place to rest between diverse and competing displays."



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# *Best Selling* DESIGN



## Cystorama

The Graham Collection has a geometric design featuring interlocking circles. Finish is hand-painted antique silver. The collection includes four chandelier options, a wall scone and a semi-flush fixture.

Contact information on page 100.



## Capel Rugs

Eloquent Garden features an Oriental and Persian fusion. Hand tufted in India with floral motifs, rendered in pure 100% wool. Available in three new color ways: navy, grey and brown. Sizes include 4'x6', 5'x8', 7'x9', 8'x11', 9'x12', 2'x8' runner and custom sizes. A 5'x8' rug may retail for \$449.

Contact information on page 100.



## Horizon Home

The Dakota upholstered group has an old world feel that blends colorful jacquard with stripes. Features include leather like trim and nail head accents.

Contact information on page 100.



## Style Craft

The Shabby Sheek table lamp with painted glass accent features a designer fabric shade.

Contact information on page 100.



## Phillips Collection

River Stone tables were inspired by the Ayung River. Oversized yet low in profile, they are available in many finishes. The gel coat material is super-durable with the color going all the way through the piece, ensuring any scratches or chips over the years will not be noticeable.

Contact information on page 100.

## Omnia

The Cartwright is part of a new introduction of a diverse line of hand-crafted stationary and motion upholstery. Available in over 500 fine leathers and fabrics.

Contact information on page 100.





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# *Best Selling* DESIGN



## Feizy Rugs

The Goshen Collection of hand woven Soumaks are made in India of premium pure wool pile. Inspired by the classics, patterns have been recreated in muted tones of gold, red, brown and black with rich accents of terra cotta, sage and cream. **Contact information on page 100.**



## Flash Furniture

Contemporary black leather soft recliner and ottoman have a wood base with floor glides and stylish leather inserts. Features include soft pillow top padding and thickly padded arms for maximum comfort. Its durable upholstery is eco-friendly and easy to maintain.

**Contact information on page 100.**



## Maxwood Furniture

The Sydney, with ornate details on both the headboard and footboard can be customized with four different colored crystal knobs, available in two sizes. Shown here with pink crystal ball knobs and optional storage drawers under the bed.

**Contact information on page 100.**



### Surya

Cordelia lamp features an iron base with oxidized finish and layered, laser cut double shade. This lamp infuses living space with a sophisticated look and a modern edge.

**Contact information on page 100.**



### Accent Decor

This festive holiday tree is made of wood and wire. The base consists of pure wood, and the trunk of the tree is wrapped in wire detail. Ornaments included.

**Contact information on page 100.**

### Leather Italia USA

With supple slate grey leather and sophisticated contemporary styling, Sienna is an excellent value in 100% leather. Suggested retail \$799 to \$999.

**Contact information on page 100.**



# *Best Selling* DESIGN



## Craft+Main

Casa Blanca Accent Tables are made of simulated wood with hand applied multi step finish. **Contact information on page 100.**



## Loloi

The Nika Throw is from a new collection of seven throws constructed of polyester, acrylic, cotton, wool and more. Each throw measures 50" x 60". These throws offer warmth, style and a pop of panache that is sure to brighten any room. **Contact information on page 100.**



## Donco

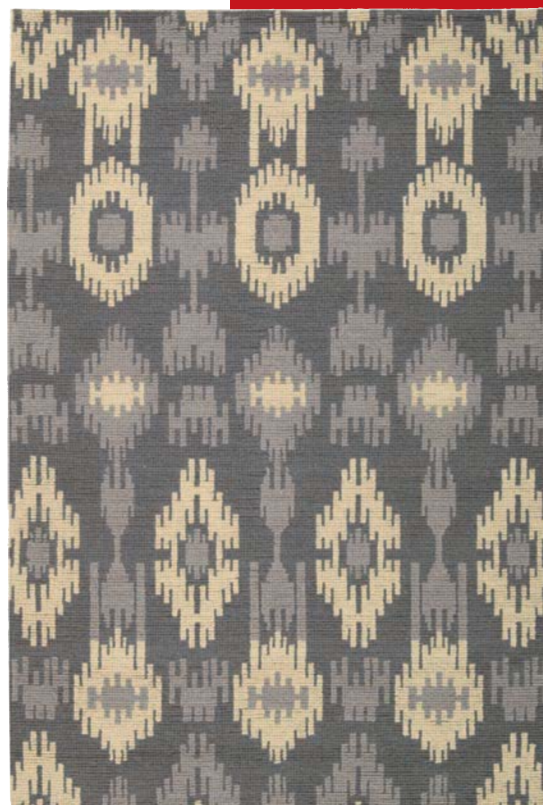
This bunk bed with a twin over full is made of solid Pine with dark cappuccino finish. Shown with a twin trundle bed underneath.

**Contact information on page 100.**

## Sunpan

This concrete end table is uniquely molded to resemble the trunk of a tree. Painted in a stunning gold finish for a contemporary and urban look.

Contact information on page 100.



## Nourison

The Barclay Butera Prism Collection features loop pile flatweave designs with a play on texture. The hand woven, wool collection reinterprets classics such as flamestitch and ikats with a new modern flair.

Contact information on page 100.



## Nouveau Concept

This new TV base measures 66". The finish "Intrigue", with black accents, gives a trendy look.

Contact information on page 100.

## Borkholder

Shown is the Crescent counter-height dining table and stools with butterfly leaf extension.

Contact information on page 100.



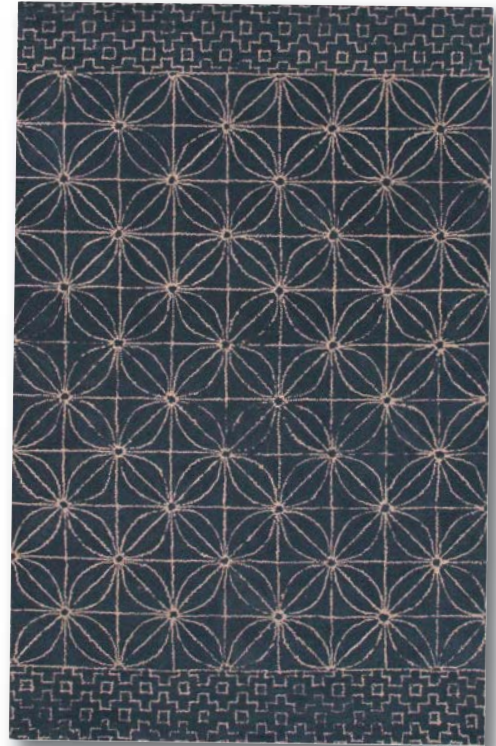
# Best Selling DESIGN



## Thomasville

This dramatic outdoor bed can be easily rotated towards or away from the sun. It features an aluminum frame woven in synthetic wicker that looks and feels like a water hyacinth. The bed cushion includes a drainable fiber cushion that allows water to flow through to avoid inside storage. Contact information on page 100.

Contact information on page 100.



## Jaipur

From the Traditions Made Modern Collection the Constellation rug is indigo-colored, hand-tufted with small, finely woven yarns that mimic Sashiko, a form of decorative stitching unique to Japan. Made out of 100% wool it is warm and soft and is designed to last.

Contact information on page 100.



## Manhattan Comfort

The Adrian Armoire is the ultimate in convenience. The doors, with optional mirrors, open smoothly and silently on telescopic slides, revealing a roomy and spacial closet within.

Contact information on page 100.



## Twin Star

This faux stone electric fireplace mantel has been carefully engineered to look and feel like real stone. The wood base and top with corbels complement the stone mantel, creating an elegant focal point in any room of the home.

Contact information on page 100.



## Kas Rugs

Reflections is machine woven from Belgium done in Frisee yarn polypropelene construction. Available in four sizes. Suggested retail for 5'x8' is \$299.

Contact information on page 100.

## Four Hands

The Charles Swivel Chair is reminiscent of 50's era automobile interiors with stiched channeling and dramatic shaping. It swivels on angular, brushed aluminum base.

Contact information on page 100.



## Fashion Bed

The bold, retro-inspired Prelude bed, is offered in a bright orange fabric as well as green sage. This design boasts a dramatic headboard upholstered in a linen-look (and feel) fabric artfully applied with symmetrical darting.

Contact information on page 100.



# Best Selling DESIGN



## Orion Rugs

The Mardi Gras collection features a bright and bold color palette mixed with unique and artful designs that will deliver a colorful punch to any space.

Contact information on page 100.



## Rizzy Home

This pillow is made of 100% textured cotton with a zip closure. The embroidered design features tribal medallions in a diamond pattern checkered across the pillow in gray, natural and white. Available with a down or polyester fill.

Contact information on page

## Fabelli Group

The Bijou has a modern classic design with its 64", leather diamond tufted headboard. Available in genuine leather, ecopelle or fabric. 100% European made.

Contact information on page 100.



## Mastercraft

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

Contact information on page 100.



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# Bedding & Furniture ADVANCED TRAINING

## Part 5: Steps Of The Sale - Qualifying.

by David Benbow

**Q**ualifying, is the step of the sale that is considered by many trainers to be the most important.

This article will discuss why we need to qualify and present a methodology and plan to correctly qualify.

What do we mean by the term "qualifying" or "to qualify"? The Oxford English Dictionary lists thirteen different definitions of the word, and none of them satisfactorily describe how we qualify in retail sales. The basic dictionary definition of "To qualify" means to determine the value or usefulness or fitness of a given subject for further consideration.

When a retail salesperson (RSA) "qualifies" an "up," he must find answers to the following questions:

- *Is the up a potential customer?*
- *What is the up looking for?*
- *Can my store satisfy what the customer needs and wants?*
- *How can I maximize the value of this particular up? (This means simply, stepping up and adding on to increase the value of the sales ticket, while at the same time making a happy customer who will come back and buy, year after year.)*

So, the simple definition of "qualifying" is: asking questions. The RSA asks questions and hopes to get answers. These questions are called "qualifying questions." I know this sounds simple-minded, but the reason I spell it out this way is because so many RSAs fail to ask even the most fundamental qualifying questions.

Why does the RSA need to ask questions? Obviously, the main reason is to find out what the customer is looking for. Only rarely will the customer volunteer to give a detailed list of his furniture problems and home decorating or bedding aspirations. The customer usually says something like, "I'm just looking for ideas." If you accept that statement at face value, and fail to ask qualifying questions, the customer will exit the store a few minutes later, still "looking for ideas."

NOTE: When a customer says "I'm just looking for ideas", don't hang your head and walk dejectedly back to the desk. This is your cue to take action. GIVE him some ideas. Help him with ideas. That is your job, after all. You should answer, "Great, this store is full of ideas and designs by

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# RSA

## QUALIFYING

some of the greatest furniture minds in the business. Help me out a minute. Let's find out what it is you are hoping to accomplish in furnishing your home. This place is practically an idea factory, especially if we have your thoughts on how you would like to decorate your home."

Let me also make another important point. When the customer says he/she is "looking for ideas," that usually means he/she DOES NOT HAVE any ideas. In other words, much of the time, when a customer walks in your store, she has, at best, only a very dim idea of what she wants or needs. Very few people are design

geniuses. Almost all customers need help. The RSA, through training and expertise, should be the source of that help and those ideas.

Qualifying is not just about discovering what is on the customer's mind. A professional RSA who is thorough and thoughtful will also build confidence in the customer's mind. People like to buy from knowledgeable and professional salespersons. Carefully executing the Qualifying step demonstrates the professionalism that customers appreciate, and unfortunately, rarely find

Another benefit of careful qualifying is that the more the RSA knows about the customer and his needs, the fewer objections the customer will raise when the RSA makes an attempt to close the sale. Good qualifying by an experienced professional RSA can anticipate many common objections. (We will cover customer objections in a future article.)

Thorough qualifying also increases the probability of making add-on sales. Customers usually have more than just one thing on their mind when they visit your store. They may be thinking about every room in the house, but today, they need a new guest room mattress. If the RSA stops at the mattress, he may miss a sale for an entire house full of furniture.

How does the RSA prepare to become a good qualifier? For the mattress and bedding RSA, this means learning all your beds. For the RSA selling a full line of furniture, I'd like to suggest that you spend your down

time studying the fundamentals of home furnishings design and decoration. And, learn all the furniture and bedding on your showroom floor. The more you know about product knowledge, the better you will be at qualifying.

---

### Planning Your Qualifying

---

Proper qualifying requires some planning. Your customer not only has a home furnishings problem of some sort, he probably has budget constraints as well, and fears making a mistake. Everybody has made a costly buying mistake. Your customer is no different. When he comes in your store, he does not want to make another one. In the next issue, we will list many qualifying questions and when and how to ask them. For now, we must understand that the RSA must have a ready arsenal of qualifying questions and know when to ask them. Many questions have a correct sequence and context in which they should be asked.

---

### 7 Principles Of Qualifying

---

The last time I counted, there were seven important principles to remember when qualifying your new "up."

**1**. Know your questions ahead of time, and know the context and sequence in which they should be

**"Let me make another important point. When the customer says he/she is "looking for ideas," that usually means he/she DOES NOT HAVE any ideas."**

ould improve your health and wellness? Were softer than silk? Cooled five times faster than traditional polyester? Were made from technical textiles? Were antibacterial? Provided a refreshingly cooler sleep surface? **What if your sheets... could help you sleep cooler?** Could improve your health and wellness? Were softer than silk? Cooled five times faster than traditional polyester? Were made from technical textiles? Were antibacterial? Provided a refreshingly cooler sleep surface?

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# RSA

## STEPS OF THE SALE

asked. (However, be prepared to spontaneously develop new follow-up questions as the need arises.)

**2.** Actually ask the questions. This may sound redundant, but it is possible to know the questions and then fail to ask them. It happens all the time.

**3.** Remain silent and attentive while the customer is answering your questions.

**4.** Listen carefully to the customer's responses. Just remaining silent doesn't mean you are listening.

**5.** Acknowledge that you heard and understood your customer's responses.

**6.** Then REMEMBER the answers so you don't have to ask them the same question again. Remembering also helps prompt you to ask follow-up questions. This remembering principle is one of the most violated of the qualifying principles. So many times I have heard an RSA ask the customer; "What size were you looking for, again?"

Let me say one more thing about remembering. If you have trouble remembering the customer's answers and responses, keep a notebook or clipboard handy to take notes as the customer speaks.

**7.** Use the customer's answers to prompt more follow-up questions and ultimately to solve his or her problem.

---

### When Does The RSA Stop Qualifying?

---

Is "qualifying" a step that has a beginning and an ending? Yes, and yes. Qualifying begins immediately after greeting the customer and ends when the customer gets in his car and backs out of his parking space. The step of Qualifying, while it has a discrete beginning if done correctly and thoroughly, continues through the rest of the sale. It keeps going even after the sale, with a follow-up program. But, we'll save follow-up for a future article.

---

### Doesn't Qualifying Annoy The Customer?

---

A lot of RSAs don't like to be perceived as "pushy." Or, at least that's what they say. They think that asking a lot of questions makes them seem like a high pressure salesperson to the customer. I understand why RSA's don't want to seem pushy. Very few people like an aggressive, in-your-face, high-pressure refugee from a used car lot in a bad part of town. But, look at it this way. The customer only rarely knows what he wants. Most people like to talk about themselves. The RSA's questioning process should make them feel like the center of attention; like they are special. The RSA who adopts a helpful, friendly attitude, and who genuinely cares about the customer's home furnishings or bedding problem, plus demonstrates this by concerned questioning, should be welcomed by any serious customer.

**"The RSA**  
must have a ready arsenal of qualifying questions and know when to ask them. Many questions have a correct sequence and context in which they should be asked."

---

### The Interview

---

Have you ever read an interview of a famous person, or for that matter, an infamous one? What does the interviewer do? He asks questions to draw out interesting responses from the interviewee, doesn't he? An experienced interviewer also organizes his questions to develop the interview into a narrative that leads to a reasonably satisfying end. The result being that we know and maybe care a lot more about the interviewee by the end of the article.

Don't forget one other surprising little phenomenon. The more you learn

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# "I know you don't want to be bothered with a bunch of invasive questions. I'm just going to let you talk. In fact, while you're talking, I'm going to go get a cup of coffee and clean up some loose ends. If you have any questions, I'll be over there at the desk."

about a customer and his problems, the more interesting he becomes to you. His interests, needs and wants become more interesting, as well. Sort of like a well-done magazine interview. The more you read, the more interested you get.

To qualify as well as a skilled interviewer you need to ask enough questions, the right questions, with answers that lead to a satisfying end. That end being solving your customer's problem, making the sale and gaining a customer-for-life.

What if you pick up a magazine and find a feature article about a celebrity you admire. Let's imagine that the interview starts with the interviewer saying, "I know you don't want to be bothered with a bunch of invasive questions. I'm just going to let you talk (or not talk) about anything that is on your mind. If you say something that our readers might be interested in, I'll make a note of it. In fact, while you're talking, I'm going to go get a cup of coffee and clean up some loose ends from last week's articles. If you have any questions, I'll be over there at the desk." How many RSAs do something similar as a substitute for qualifying their customers?

---

## A Couple Of Examples

---

Let's use a couple of examples. In one example we'll demonstrate an RSA who qualifies his up and correct-

ly interprets his answers, and in the second, we'll show one who takes the customer's answers literally, without interpretation.

---

## The Good RSA

---

It is a fine Saturday morning. A car pulls up, a person gets out and walks in the front door. The RSA, after waiting the "polite" thirty seconds, approaches and greets the newly arrived "up."

**RSA:** "Good morning, how are you today? Before we get started, in case you didn't know, some of the store was re-merchandised last night to make room for our new bedding line from Awesome-pedic. Have you heard about their newest products?"

**Up:** "No, I just bought a new bed last year. We have a new game room and I'm just looking for ideas for casual or outdoor type furniture."

**RSA:** "Really? I love outdoor furniture. Is the furniture going to be inside, or will it be exposed occasionally to weather conditions?"

**Up:** "It's going to be a combination of both."

**RSA:** "Let's head to our outdoor furniture department. We've just received some new groups and they are nice looking, casual with rugged construction that will withstand even rain and

summer heat."

*Note:* Let's hope that the RSA has an intense knowledge of outdoor furniture, including design principles and construction. If so, this RSA, having established a rapport with the customer, is probably asking qualifying questions as they make their way to the casual furniture display.

---

## The Not-So-Good RSA

---

It's the same Saturday morning. Another customer pulls up, gets out of the car and comes in.

**RSA:** "Good morning, how can we help you today?"

**Up:** "We have a new game room and I'm just looking for ideas for casual or outdoor-type furniture."

**RSA:** (Thinking to himself; "Oh, man, outdoor furniture! That stuff is outside in the patio display area and it has got to be 85 degrees out there by now, and 90 percent humidity. I don't know why anybody buys outdoor furniture in this part of the country to begin with, in this heat. That's probably the reason I haven't learned the first thing about that stuff.") While pointing, he says "Yes, ma'am, please head down that long aisle over there, turn right at the big pool table and out the door with the Exit sign, We have all our outdoor stuff out there. Here is my card. Ask for me if you have any questions."

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# RSA

## QUALIFYING

**Up:** "Thanks so much." She is also thinking, "I don't know why I came in this store. I can never get any help. Nobody here knows anything, anyway."

**RSA:** Who has now lost a turn in the rotation, thinks, "Another one getting ideas! No wonder my sales are off. I can't beg, borrow or steal a good up!"

### A Brief Review and Analysis

Remember the four questions from the first page of this article? How did each RSA do? Both RSAs discovered that the Up was a potential customer, although the second RSA did so by accident. Both RSAs discovered why the Up came into the store, although, again, the Up volunteered the information to both RSAs. Regarding whether the store had the merchandise to satisfy the customer's needs, however, the second began to fall down on the job. He admitted

his product knowledge was weak, which means he wouldn't know what follow-up qualifying questions to ask, even if he had been willing to brave the heat to go outside with the customer.

Lastly, the first RSA, because he had exceptionally good product knowledge, knew the right qualifying questions to ask. He was much more likely to maximize the value of the customer by helping to create a game room environment that the customer would be proud to display in her home.

In a nutshell, the first RSA's attitude was, "Let's find out what will work for you." The second RSA's attitude was, "If you find something that works for you, I'll be inside. Come back in and find me and I'll write it up."

The first RSA had Enthusiasm and Empathy. The second RSA had Excuses.

Did you also notice that the "good" RSA had a strong, informative, control and attention grabbing greeting?

This is a variety of the General Benefit Statement greeting we discussed in the last issue.

### Summary

The perceptive reader should be able to see that all of this ties together. Product knowledge is absolutely essential to being a good qualifier. A good Meet and Greet is necessary to warm up the customer for the Qualifying step. Nothing in retail sales

**"I understand why RSA's don't want to be perceived as 'pushy'. They think that asking lots of questions makes them look like a high pressure salesperson."**

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# RSA

## STEPS OF THE SALE

works in a vacuum. You can't just say, "Okay, since it's the most important step of the sale, I'll just learn to qualify and not bother with all that other stuff."

You can't be a good qualifier if you don't know your store's products, advertising, policies, inventory and financing, too.

In the next article, we will discuss qualifying again, but next time we will get much more specific and focus on mattresses and bedding in particular.

We'll discuss a series of different qualifying questions and why and when they can be used.

**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 manag-

"Before we get started, in case you didn't know, some of the store was re-merchandised last night to make room for our new bedding line from Awesome-pedic. Have you heard about their newest products?"

er, sales manager/trainer and store owner in six different metropolitan areas qualifies him as an expert in selling bedding. David is the author of the recently published book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual", a complete, text book for mattress and bedding retail sales associates, beginner and experienced professional alike. The book can be purchased on-line at <http://www.bedsellersmanual.com> or [www.mattressretailtraining.com](http://www.mattressretailtraining.com).

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

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One of the companies new to the 2015 All American Furniture Expo this year is *Maine Woodworks*, a company that is bursting with color, specializing in Maine cottage-style furniture. Wanda Gregg, show coordinator, notes that this year will also feature more new products than ever before. "After our show last year we took time to call buyers and ask what we could do to improve our expo. One of the suggestions was to get more new products to the show. So that is exactly what our manufacturers have been working on. We will dedicate a section of this years buyers guide to boast many of the fine new pieces of furniture that will be exhibited at the 2015 All American Furniture Expo. Plus there will be a number of pieces that won't actually make the buyers guide but will debut for the first time at the expo. This is the show buyers won't want to miss!"

Manufacturers continue to register to exhibit, so be sure to keep checking the Exhibitor Listing on our website throughout the upcoming weeks.

*"The All American Show in Lancaster has become the premier American made vendor/retailer show on the east coast, in a city and in a market that is a hotbed for furniture,"* states J. Gregory Shenenberger, of CVW Investments, Ltd. CVW Investments, Ltd. is the investment company for Country Home Furniture, a Lancaster County based retail store that features one of the largest American made and Amish handcrafted displays in the country.

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

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# LEAN

by David McMahon, CMA, EA

## An Introduction

You will never guess how I can tell at a glance if a retail store is generally well run and their people are effective.

It's kind of funny, actually. Just by walking around and casually observing how people are acting and reacting, it's easy to tell where operational challenges exist.

Overall, when a home furnishings operation gives the impression that everything is under control, the business is likely to be operationally organized. Where there is a sense of chaos, there are likely to be challenging operational issues.

### Signs Of A Business In-Control

- Office people who are quietly going about their work without interruption
- Warehouse crews that are moving at a steady pace in a tidy environment.
- Smiling salespeople, excited shoppers.
- On-time management meetings.
- In-control telephone conversations.
- The absence of in-service merchandise.
- Bright eyed and well-spoken employees.
- Tidy desks, clean bathrooms, clean

break-rooms, well-kept showrooms.

### Signs Of A Business In-Chaos

- Office people who are continually interrupted and forced to over multi-task.
- Too many people in the warehouse either rushing around or sitting around.
- Tired salespeople.
- Frustrated shoppers.
- Unfocused management meetings, constantly being interrupted by the telephone.
- Ballooning service issues.
- Arguments, messy surroundings.

"LEAN is about developing an organization. It is NOT about making broad cuts in expenses or people."

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in inventory can either be hugely profitable or go bankrupt. Gross Margin dollars produced in relation to that Inventory is the key."

- Excess overtime.
- Lack of proper merchandising.
- Lots of people doing lots of work.

Given two operations of equal sales size, those businesses that are in-control will obviously outperform their counterparts in-chaos. They outperform in terms of profitability, cash position, workplace environment, customer experience and future sales growth potential. They outperform because they are more effective and focused on doing their work properly.

## In-control stores are LEAN

LEAN is a practice of continually evaluating and improving a business. In doing so, value-added activities are supported and waste is eliminated. Similar to other practices such as Kaizen, its roots come from Japan and

Toyota. Toyota executed techniques that allowed it to become a dominant force in the world car market. These techniques have since been adapted, modified and adopted by countless organizations. My goal with this series of articles is to create some LEAN techniques that are specific to your B2C (Business to Consumer) environment.

## Definition of LEAN

LEAN is the art and science of continuously examining and improving a business's processes, people and products so that the customer experience is overwhelmingly positive, allowing the business to realize its potential.

LEAN is about developing an organization. It is NOT about making broad cuts in expenses or people.

It is about making cuts in areas of organizational waste so that business productivity accelerates.

## 80/20 Thinking

It is important to subscribe to the notion of 80/20 thinking when implementing LEAN. Also called the Pareto Principal, 80/20 thinking says that a minority of inputs produce the majority of outputs. One of the keys to making a LEAN strategy work is using what works - focusing on knowing what does not work - then improving or eliminating the later. Examples in business are:

- The minority of customers (i.e. 20%) produce the majority of revenue (i.e. 80%).
- The minority of salespeople generate the majority of sales.
- The minority of inventory items produce the majority of gross margin dollars.
- The minority of workers perform the majority of work.
- The minority of marketing produce the majority of results.
- The majority of problems come from the minority of areas.

## Implementing LEAN

Below is my general strategy for

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# LEAN

implementing LEAN. Subsequent articles in this series will present a LEAN strategy for parts of an organization.

- *Establish benchmarks based on performance metrics.*
- *Measure performance using 80/20 thinking.*
- *Find solutions.*
- *Execute to conclusion.*
- *Continue improving.*

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## Establish benchmarks based on performance metrics

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Every furniture business should have benchmarks that it is constantly looking to improve. Each department should also set its own benchmarks and improvement strategies. A benchmark should make sound business sense and allow for an executable strategy to be formed to improve it. For this reason, the performance metric chosen to benchmark off of is required. A performance metric is an operational ratio that gauges improvement.

One example of a good LEAN metric to benchmark is Gross Margin Return on Inventory (GMROI). This is because it measures two values that directly affect desired results: Gross Margin and Inventory. Benchmarking either Gross Margin or Inventory solely on their own will not give a full picture. I've seen companies with \$2 Million in inventory either be hugely

profitable or go bankrupt. The Gross Margin dollars produced in relation to that Inventory is the key. A good metric to benchmark off of helps an organization consistently measure itself, focus on results and execute a LEAN strategy.

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## Measure performance using 80/20 thinking

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A LEAN strategy requires constant measurement of performance. This is where the 80/20 Principal comes into play.

Suppose you are measuring GMROI. If inventory was \$2 Million and Gross Margin produced is \$4 Million, the GMROI is \$2.00. You know where you are overall. However, realize that there are a minority of factors that pull up your performance averages and a majority of factors that pull you down.

Using 80/20 thinking, you can identify which factors to maintain and which to improve or remove. A LEAN strategy uses 80/20 principals to separate top performing areas from weaker ones. For example, you might find that 4 of 20 vendors are producing the majority of your return. First, know what is important to track. Then you can understand what elements within it are producing or reducing.

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## Find Solutions

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This is the strategic and tactical part

of LEAN. Strategy involves big-picture goal setting and sets the direction of the business to improve performance. Tactics define the specific actions that must be undertaken day-in and day-out for the strategy to be achieved. For example, if a business decides that GMROI is a primary metric to benchmark and measures the result at \$2.00, it may set this strategy: Achieve a \$2.5 GMROI by transferring inventory investment into its most profitable vendors and from its under-performing vendors.

---

## Good strategy, right?

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There is more to it than that. Strategy alone does not produce results. With LEAN solutions, defining the specific tactics to be performed in "the trenches" are required. For this example, tactics may be:

- *Increase stock of best-selling items in Vendor X.*
- *Source a quick-shipping vendor*

**"A minority of factors pull up your performance averages and a majority of factors pull you down."**

with extended terms that can capture a better margin to replace Vendor Y.

- Decommission small capacity delivery resources in favor of fewer higher capacity resources.

## Execute to conclusion

Expect results. If you are benchmarking and measuring a worthy metric and have a solid strategy with people who can execute on time and on budget, you will get results. Some say that execution is the art of getting things done. Ensure that your management team has the right people in place and that they, themselves, can execute your strategy and perform specific daily actions so your desired conclusion is realized.

Execution involves regular training, monitoring of progress, improvements in processes and systems. For example, if you wish to improve your GMROI by speeding up your supply chain in Vendor X, you may need to invest resources in systems and training to make that possible.

LEAN is not about trimming overall expenses. LEAN is about better allocating resources. Many times increasing expenses to become better is required to execute a LEAN strategy to conclusion.

## Continue Improving

Guess what? Once you achieve your improvement goals your LEAN journey is just beginning! This may seem tiring. Yes, and, it is a fun and a necessary part of long-term success. LEAN is about never-ending improvements. For example, if you reach your goal of \$2.5 GMROI, it's time to "up the bar" or focus on improving another

business metric. Then the whole strategic LEAN cycle begins again. Continue to navigate the ups and downs. Enjoy your continual journey of success.

Similarly, this is just the beginning of this series on LEAN. Future installments will provide details about executing a LEAN strategy in the various operational departments including: LEAN Marketing, LEAN Sales floor, LEAN

Merchandising, LEAN Warehousing, LEAN Delivery, LEAN Service, LEAN Office, and LEAN Management.

**About David McMahon:** Contributing editor David McMahon, is an Industry Management Consultant and Performance Group Director for PROFITsystems, a HighJump Product. He can be reached at david.mcmahon@highjump.com.



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# *Retail Success* UP MARKET DOWN SOUTH

Solid merchandising and advertising pay off for Leather by Design.

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

**J**eff Cohen, after 30 successful years in the music business, turned his innovative talents and foresight to home furnishings at what proved to be for him just the right moment. It was 2007.

Leather by Design is a 6800 square foot jewel of a destination, set in America's most historic city, St. Augustine, Florida. Pedro Menendez de Aviles arrived on the scene in the fall of 1565, liked what he saw and named his colony's settlement in honor of the patron saint of his Spanish home town, Aviles. And it also happened to be St. Augustine of Hippo's feast day, a good augury, another "right moment". A few years earlier, Ponce de Leon had found his way there in search of the fabled Fountain of Youth. And some say he found it.

So Jeff Cohen in the year 2007 was confronting his own challenge, unquestionably not the first of his and his family's nomadic lives. This adventure began back a few decades when, as a restless 11th grader, Jeff found himself "a part time job in a record store selling vinyl and I fell in love with the music business." He believed he had found his calling. So entranced was he that although he's "not proud to say and certainly wouldn't recommend it, after the summer I took my GED and went to work full time. By January of the following year I was on a truck stocked with all the latest albums, eight tracks (I'm dating myself) and 45s, and I was

asked to develop a wholesale route in North Florida to call on record stores and distribute to them. After developing a second truck, now covering the area from Central Florida to South Georgia, I decided to open up my own retail outlet. I was 21 years old, and that pretty much sealed my fate as an entrepreneur forever!

"During my 30 year music career I switched from retail back to the distribution business with warehouses in Jacksonville (my home town... Go Jaguars!) and Atlanta, and a very successful independent record label that had several acts on major labels and national and international distribution. Although not a musician, I was a critic and became a producer on many of our releases.

"We did mostly rap music. Our only rock/punk record was 'Stevie Stiletto' which we licensed to Europe and Asia. I am still a huge music fan, looking out for new artists as much as I can. I'm still in demand as a consultant on all aspects of the industry from distribution to marketing." (Jeff's son, Eric, is also "in the music business, more of a technician than a musician.")

But that challenge inevitably cropped up. "Unfortunately (or fortunately) digital downloads turned the music industry on its head, and I was

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## RETAIL SUCCESS

lucky (blessed) to sell my business before the bottom totally fell off.

"Here I was, 50 years old and I naively thought someone would want to hire me! Without a degree, I couldn't even get an interview. I realized I would have to go down the same path as before and either start or purchase a (job) business. And while I was working with a business broker, a distress call came in for a leather furniture store that was available for assets only. I looked at the numbers, saw the downward trend but I also saw a lot of room for improvement and decided that all I needed was product knowledge. It was like going back to school. And I was certainly willing to do my homework!" He laughed, "I started off selling vinyl and then upgraded to selling leather!"

Jeff presciently "asked to interview" Steve Lent, an existing staff member, "to learn exactly what he did and to decide if I would keep him. I realized pretty early in our conversation that it

was really him interviewing me to see if he wanted to stick around! Steve had been at Leather by Design since it was first opened in 2004. He was only being used for delivery back then, but I immediately started giving him more sales responsibilities and dealing with service issues. He has thrived, he is my right hand, and we have truly found our rhythm. He coordinates all our service, scheduling and delivery issues.

"While considering making an offer on the store, I researched (googled) furniture retailing, furniture business, etc., and came across quite a few articles. Of the ones I found truly interesting enough to print were a series of stories by Larry Mullins from Furniture World magazine. The articles made a lot of sense to me and helped to convince me that I could transfer all my previous retailing, merchandising and marketing experience. And confirmed that, if I worked hard enough at product knowledge I would be able to turn the store around.

"Now fast forward two months. It was a Sunday. I was working by myself when a nice couple walked in. They were looking for furniture since they had just moved to the area. We talked, I made the sale. When he gave me his name I asked where I had heard that name before. Then he asked if I read Furniture World and it clicked!

"I went through my files and pulled

"And I was certainly willing to do my homework!" He laughed, "I started off selling vinyl and then upgraded to selling leather!"

*Jeff Cohen standing in front of Platinum Record Awards for his work performed on albums by Stevie Wonder and Whitney Houston. Pictured below is the redesigned Leather by Design sign.*



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Original store shown lower right, new store pre-construction pictured upper right and after renovation at left.



out his stories. The rest is history. We developed not only a business relationship but also a true friendship with Larry and his wife, Joan. They are a huge part in whatever successes we may have achieved through Larry's insights and execution of some great marketing.

"The old store was a 3,200 square foot space in the Cobblestone shopping center." Jeff realized quickly that expenses were too high and competi-

tion too harsh. Larry helped Jeff zero in to some "fresh tactics" that began to beat Leather by Design's numbers.

Said Larry Mullins at the time, "Jeff and Steve are relatively new to the furniture industry, but they understand marketing, are computer savvy, learn fast and maintain their poise in this tough home furnishings market. From the greeting to delivery, Leather by Design performs in a passionate, dedicated way: serving the customer and

making the experience fun." He talked about how Jeff "began developing new media communication channels to increase market share. ROP newspaper was still cost-effective with older buyers, especially in smaller cities, and most newspapers were cutting good deals." He reminded Jeff that one should "keep in mind that people over 55 control about 75 per cent of the buying power". He went on to say that "Jeff made several great newspaper buys during this turnaround (2007-2008) and this was key to keeping his numbers up. He picked up a few half-page ads in full color at reasonable cost and good placement on the weather page. The local paper also offered him a series of twice-weekly three column x six-inch ads without color for a very reasonable cost. The paper still insisted on a high premium for color, so he went with black and white. Jeff understood that he had to use every inch of this space effectively to sell, not to 'brand' or 'get name recognition'. The effectiveness of these ads was multiplied because they were all different, yet they were recognized as Leather by Design ads immediately." The concept was good



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"Send **positive** communications

to your customers. No one wants to shop with a loser or leave a customer order deposit with an owner who is dismal about his prospects."

both then and now.

Larry also mentioned “effective copy”. He believes, as did ad guru David Ogilvy many years ago, one of those truths that has proved-platinum over the years, “People do read copy, especially older customers. This is not a matter of opinion. It is a matter of research and fact. Jeff found that many people came into his store with his ad in their hand. It was not uncommon for them to compliment him for his informative ad. Jeff’s ads contrasted with the huge, copy-starved big box ads containing no benefits, no stories and limited-information approaches. He

also posted every ad on his website, so prospects could look them over." A second opportunity for each ad. "And he always followed through with point of sale."

Larry said that Jeff's up-beat attitude was a distinctly positive factor. He relates the story about an older couple shopping one day at Leather by Design. In casual conversation, Jeff was asked, 'How's business?' and Jeff replied, 'Not so bad. We're ahead for the year and optimistic about our future.' The customer was delighted and said, 'I'm so glad to hear something optimistic from a store owner. Good for you!'

"The message here is obvious," continued Larry. "Send positive communications to your customers. No one wants to shop with a loser or leave a customer order deposit with

an owner who is dismal about his prospects."

The demographics in Leather by Designs' orbit give promise for both the present and the future. The relatively affluent junior and senior boomer category has a large representation in St. Augustine, the Palm Coast, Gainesville, Jacksonville, Ocala and Daytona Beach. And these centers also boast university populations, a naval air station, the headquarters of NASCAR and, at Ocala, the "horse capital of the world". Jacksonville is blessed with a deep water port and a solid business foundation of banking and insurance.

"We deliver to all of North Florida," Jeff told us, "probably 75 miles. And we have shipped quite a bit, usually to customers who have second homes in St. Augustine".

In the fall of 2014, Jeff made yet another of his dramatic entrepreneurial decisions, to transition to larger quarters just a mile away, a free standing building on Highway U.S. 1, to provide customers with better opportunities to see, sit and appreciate engaging and satisfying style and comfort. "Now we can show attractive room setups, help customers to visualize how the furniture will look in their own homes, and



Jeff's ads contrasted with many copy-starved big box ads containing no benefits, no stories and limited-information approaches.

Pictured above is son-in-law Zach, daughter Cara, wife Cindy, Jeff and son Eric.



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broaden their wish lists with well-chosen sale-enhancing accent furniture, lighting, rugs and objets."

Key to differentiating the revamped Leather by Design was carrying only up market, higher end leather. "I knew this was generally lacking in St. Augustine so I eliminated lower-end merchandise, carved myself a new niche. I kept the Palliser line, the nic-

est brand we'd sold previously. Then we added Stressless, Natuzzi and Elite. We attracted an entirely fresh group of customers. People no longer have to drive further afield to find quality brands.

"We use Nourison for rugs, Van Teal and Konzept for lamps, and Johnson Casuals and Lands I Brands for cocktail tables, etc.

"We are still newspaper heavy and, unfortunately for us, it takes three papers to reach our target customer base."

## "Every Salesperson Set Records During Larry's Event!"



"Our Slumberland Furniture store underwent an extensive renovation last summer. The entire front of the building was being re-done and it looked like we were closed and had gone out of business. During that time, Larry Mullins developed a massive 9-week renovation event for us. The instructions were easy to follow and he had everything mapped out to the last detail. I was skeptical because I had never worked an event like this. I can't believe how well it went. Our store set sales records working out of a building that didn't even look open. Every salesperson set personal sales records during this sale. Larry's program brought in customers who had never been in our store before. It was a great opportunity for us to broaden our customer base, and we did! Thank you Larry!"

**Andy Howell, Assistant Manager, Slumberland Furniture, Davenport, IA**

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# RETAIL SUCCESS

"We have an older clientele for our Stressless line, although we are actively trying to market to younger more affluent customers that may like the look of the line. Most of our older customers, while they love the style, are more interested in the comfort level the Stressless line provides. Our Palliser, Natuzzi and Elite customers tend to be somewhat younger, 35 to 55."

Transition day came in early January this year. Said Jeff, "After a massive moving day sale, we had a soft opening and then an Open House for our previous customers. We sent post cards and did an e-mail blast, all coordinated with Larry."

"While I was nervous that no one would show up, we had a huge turnout and one of the biggest sales' days in our history! Some of our suppliers shared it with us, Lloyd Davis III and Lloyd Davis IV were here from Stressless; Donna Lane, James Yates and K. C. Greenwald from Palliser, along with Jennifer Caporal from Nourison Rugs."

Back to 2007, Larry had also advised the use of carefully crafted inexpensive newspaper inserts, great attention getters, used on "off" days so there was no competition with the big box stores. "Run your ad when you're the only show in town. If your ad is well done and informative, people will save it." Direct mail was also high on the communications' list, "the most cost-effective and least intrusive medium". Jeff built his mailing list, worked it and kept it current. Said Larry, "Use personal messages with good stories instead of the look-alike promos used

by some large stores."

And then, of course, e-mail. "The important thing is to keep e-mail communication open but not always try to sell something. Give tips about products, offer a free premium just for dropping in, or ask how their purchase is working out."

Jeff added, "I would think now that Larry would want to talk about the fact that Leather by Design, with its niche business, mostly special orders and smaller size, is a different type of store than Larry was used to dealing with but, through listening to each other with respect, we are able to tweak his methods to fit my needs."

As Larry had remarked, both Jeff and Steve are "computer savvy". Jeff said, "Being an entrepreneur (a scrambler!) I was not at all thrilled at the prices being offered to design websites. The one we had done in 2007 was outdated. So I found a template I liked, had them customize it with the colors from our logo, total cost under \$300, then paid someone to start putting our catalogue, pictures, prices, etc. in place. The site is written in Magento, an open source program, so I can purchase plug-ins at very reasonable prices to keep the site new. Magento is an e-commerce program, so selling on the Internet in the future is certainly possible."

"We are still newspaper heavy and, unfortunately for us, it takes three papers to reach our target customer base, our local paper, the St. Augustine Record, the Jacksonville paper, Florida Times Union and the Daytona Beach News Journal, Flagler

"Music, of course, is a feature of the ambiance at Leather by Design. Some Edith Piaf and Charles Aznavour from France, and Khaled and Cheb Mami who are North African singers. Also more obscure Rock, Country, Jazz and Blues tunes."



# "Delivery includes

all the obvious elements, but we also give a leather care class that focuses on the type of leather the customer purchased.

County edition. We just started doing some TV with Stressless, and it seems to be a direction we will do more of. We have done some great promotions with direct mail, especially to our existing customer base. We do regular e-mail blasts to our customers as well as to people who signed up on our website and, of course, that's a no brainer, just a little bit of time creating it and 'send'!

"And we take full advantage of all opportunities to have an 'event'. Our main vendors are good and getting better at timing deals to events and times of year. Palliser especially has been more aggressive about promotions such as free power, discounts on leather, discounts on motion, home theatre, etc. Ekornes, of course, is all about quarterly promotions with leather upgrades, multiple seating, charity promotions (our favorite) and discounts off selected models. Natuzzi has also started targeting all the holidays with promos."

Both Jeff and Steve are firm believers in giving their customers what they want. It's been said that customer demands and expectations tend to rise along with price tags. Steve agreed, "But we're OK with people coming in the store 10 times if that's what they need before making a purchase."

A very popular gesture is their store loaner program. Leather by Design offers many, many different colors and styles for most products, so items are frequently ordered. Sometimes it's possible that six weeks could elapse before delivery. Envision the customer who has just bought a new house before making her purchases at Leather by Design. Now envision her delight when Jeff and Steve lend her a great sofa to enhance her living room until her order arrives!

"Our customers appreciate our removal service more than anything else. We find that by offering to take away the old furniture we lift a lot of stress from the customer. We work very

closely with several worthy organizations in town that provide furniture to people in need, donate what we can and mail the tax receipt to the customer. We want to make it as easy as it can possibly be to buy from us. We also are involved in sponsoring some local schools, and we donate to other charities in the community.

"Our delivery includes all the obvious elements, but we also give a leather care class that focuses on the type of leather the customer purchased. When they forget, we guide them to our YouTube channel where we have a video of Steve cleaning a recliner."

"All our vendors are environmentally responsible and of course we talk about it to our customers. It is a very important issue and our customers are glad to learn about it." A point to note, eco-friendly high quality leather is perfect for all climates, including Florida's sub-tropical regions. It always feels cool to the touch in warm weather, and its smooth surface never scorches

Near right is Sandy Veenstra Leather by Design's decorator and Steve Lent, operations manager.

Far right (l-r) KC Greenwald and Donna Lane from Palliser, Lloyd Davis III from Stressless and Jeff.



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# *Leather by Design* **UP MARKET DOWN SOUTH**

like fiber or microfiber suede.

Music, of course, is a feature of the ambiance at Leather by Design. Jeff said, "I do create playlists and use specific ones based on times of day, days of the week (Sundays are a little wilder!) and who is in the store. Now there you can see my background as I have, along with everything you would expect, some Edith Piaf and Charles Aznavour from France, and Khaled and Cheb Mami who are North African singers. I also will throw in more obscure Rock, Country, Jazz and Blues tunes."

Another important team member at Leather by Design is Sandy Veenstra, in-house designer. "Sandy was working at Furniture Country Gallery both as their in-house designer and doing sales for them. She was impressed with the reputation we were gaining when unfortunately her store became a victim to the economy around 2009/2010.

"She came in to purchase a home theatre seat for her husband, and we got to talking. I hired her on the spot! She definitely brought the fashion to the store that I certainly didn't have, and she was a huge help in choosing the décor for the new store. We're currently employing her grandson as a part time delivery man and her grand-daughter in part time sales on weekends.

"We offer design services both at the store and in customers' homes. We've had several workshops and, frankly, should do a lot more. We have the

best reps in the industry, and we use them a lot. We have taken them up on all offers of working promotions and they are a big hit. They are truly part of our family.

"All my vendors have showrooms at High Point, the only Market I attend once each year."

The Jacksonville Jaguars by coincidence (or was it?!) qualified for the playoffs in that fateful year of 2007. "I am an absolute (fan)atic about our Jaguars! An NFL franchise is one of the most valuable assets that an area can have. The Jaguars have unified people from across the spectrum in North Florida. Although the wins have been very (start the jokes now!) lean the last few years, we are optimistic that we are turning things around on the field

"I was an original season ticket holder, but since I work on Sundays the store is known to have the games on all TVs, especially in front of the Home Theatre Section. I've gotten a crowd more than once cheering!"

Jeff calls Jacksonville his "home town" but he actually began life in Casablanca, Morocco. "Along with over 200,000 other Sephardic Jews, my family was planning to migrate out of Morocco. While most went to Israel, my father was in love with America and decided to apply to immigrate to the U.S. There was a 10 year waiting period and we waited it out in Paris where I lived from age three until I was nine. Our visas finally came and we

Major suppliers include Palliser, Natuzzi, Nourison, Van Teal, Koncept, Johnson Casals, Lands I Brands and Elite.



moved to Jacksonville. My Mom's sister had married an American serviceman who retired to Jacksonville. I am still pretty fluent in French and I also speak enough Hebrew to get into trouble. I have two brothers, Michel five years younger than me and Jonathan 10 years younger. Three boys, five years apart and born on three different continents! I was born in Africa, Michel in Europe (Paris) and Jonathan in Jacksonville, Florida. My brothers, along with my Mom, now live in Be'er Sheva, Israel. I have not been back to Morocco, but it's definitely on my list. I don't speak Spanish, but Mom does, learning it from her parents and grandparents in Morocco. Now she watches Spanish soap operas on Israeli TV!"

Jeff is married to his "childhood sweetheart, Cindy. We dated for eight



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years and just now celebrated our thirty-fourth anniversary. Cindy is a preschool teacher and she falls in love with a new batch of four year olds every year. Her Mom lives close to us. We have two children, Eric (this generation's music man!) and our daughter, Cara, a CPA; she has been married for two years."

The home furnishings industry has been and is a welcoming environment for Jeff and his family. "While I don't think I have a vision per se, I will tell you that one of the things I loved about the music industry was the absolute joy that music brought to people. The ability to introduce a new artist to someone, a new song by an artist that they already love, brought me an incredible amount of satisfaction. The furniture industry allows me the opportunity to do that again. From the time a person walks in, 'just looking', to when we deliver a room that is going

to bring them the same kind of joy, and they forever associate that room and how awesome it is to Leather by Design is priceless."

What might happen next? Said Jeff, "I'm not smart enough to predict the future of the industry but as you know I entered the industry at the worst time in history. I have seen it slowly climb out and, hopefully now, to an extended period of prosperity. We know everything is a cycle and it won't always be down (although I was questioning that one!) and won't always be good. I try to operate always as if times are bad, even when they're good. Good times tend to make us too relaxed and not watch costs as much as we should. If you always act like business is bad, it will carry you through the hard times.

"Leather by Design? If I were younger, I might be more ambitious but, for now, I see a second location

in Jacksonville with a warehouse located between St. Augustine and Jacksonville. Jacksonville is a natural for us."

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# MAXIMIZE RETURN ON YOUR *Training* INVESTMENT

Select, Design and Deliver Learning Opportunities with Lasting Impact

by Rene' Johnston-Gingrich

Successful retail furniture organizations understand the importance of investing in training and learning opportunities. It's an investment that strengthens team members' skills and motivates them to do better. In my experience as an adult educator and industry consultant, learning organizations tend to be the most effective and profitable.

If you want to improve the way your company does business, it is critical to understand how to best select, design and deliver education programming that will have a significant and lasting impact. There are tremendous benefits to adopting a mission and philosophy of continuous improvement. This is true if you decide to develop an in-store training program yourself or work with an outside consultant.

Regardless of HOW you are leading your learning organization, you want to be certain to have an understanding of the best processes, practices, and procedures for selecting, developing, and delivering educational programming and training to your employees.

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## Definition of a Learning Organization

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"A learning organization is the term

given to a company that facilitates the learning of its members and continuously transforms itself" (*Burgogyne and Boydell, 1997*). Learning organizations develop as a result of the pressures facing modern organizations and enables them to remain competitive in the business environment" (*O'Keefe, T., 2002*)

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## Understand and Embrace the Value of Ongoing and Continuous Improvement

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Success begins with your organizational culture, philosophy, values, and mindset. Ultimately retailers have to decide that a dedication to ongoing learning and growth is a priority. An ideal to aspire and work toward, is to become an authentic "learning organization". It isn't about hopping on a bandwagon or being able to check a box. There are sound business and financial reasons related to motivation and productivity for developing and embracing a learning culture. The many benefits are outlined in scholarly works on the subject. Hang in there, the information gets a little academic but it will provide a depth of understanding that you will find incredibly valuable.

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# "Adults need to know the reason

for learning something: Designing a curriculum for adult learners that makes explicitly clear the reason, purpose, and usefulness of the subject matter."

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## Six Core Competencies

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An article in the *Harvard Business Review* provides six core competencies needed to create a solid foundation for your learning organization.

**1. Future, external orientation:** Learning organizations develop understanding of their environment; senior teams take time out to think about the future. Widespread use of external sources and advisors e.g. customers on planning teams.

**2. Free exchange and flow of information:** They have systems in place to ensure that expertise is available where it is needed; individuals network extensively, crossing organizational boundaries to develop their knowledge and expertise.

**3. Commitment to learning, personal development:** They get support from top management; people at all levels encouraged to learn regularly; learning is rewarded. Time to think and learn (understanding, exploring, reflecting, developing).

**4. Valuing people:** Ideas, creativity and "imaginative capabilities" are stimulated, made use of and developed. Diversity is recognized as a strength. Views can be challenged.

**5. Climate of openness and trust:** Individuals are encouraged to develop ideas, to speak out, to challenge actions.

**6. Learning from experience:** Learning from mistakes is often more powerful than learning from

success. Failure is tolerated, provided lessons are learnt ("learning from fast failure" - Peters).

(David A. Garvin, Amy C. Edmondson, Francesca Gino, *Harvard Business Review*, March 2008)

When you lead your organization to embrace these competencies, your team, and your customers will benefit. These benefits will improve your organization in many ways.

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## Benefits Of A Learning Culture

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Karmen Blackwood of Business Vancouver lists the benefits of a learning culture.

There are many benefits to creating a strong organizational learning culture, including:

- Efficiency gains.
- Increased productivity.
- Increased profit
- Decreased employee turnover, as employee satisfaction levels rise and loyalty and commitment is increased.
- Raising the bar by creating a continuous improvement mindset, shared ownership for projects and shared accountability for results.
- Developing leaders at all levels, which helps with succession planning.
- Creating a culture of inquiry, adaptive capacity, and knowledge sharing (vs. knowledge hoarding).

- Enhanced ability for individuals and teams to embrace and adapt to change.
- Once you have embraced the value on ongoing education and growth, you have to make sure your organization is prepared for positive transformation.

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## Be Ready to Receive and Weather Change

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Change is never easy and preparing for it ahead of time will help make transitions much smoother. Develop programming in a way that reflects your vision, goals, and mission.

There is always something to gain from an educational experience, seminar, or workshop, but in order to position yourself for the best possible results, you want to take thoughtful appropriate steps to prepare. Think

"Prepare to make the philosophical and operational shift from having only managers to having coaches."

of it as going into an important meeting prepared, engaged, excited and having a solid idea that something interesting and useful will come of it.

**Engage:** Be sure to fully engage leadership. Make sure leadership is invested in the programs being on-boarded. Leadership needs to demonstrate their commitment by attending training and playing an active role in reinforcing that training. When you demonstrate the importance and communicate the value ahead of time, participants will be in a better frame of mind to engage and absorb.

**Separate:** If you don't have a separate training room, carefully choose

a place where learning can happen away from distractions. Provide refreshments. In other words, demonstrate that it is an important undertaking.

**Shift:** Prepare to make the philosophical and operational shift from having only managers to having coaches. Organizations committed to ongoing improvement allocate resources (human, in this case) to focus their time and energy helping sales professionals and other employees progress.

**Influence:** Make an effort to get key players on board and consider an incentive or rewards program. In every organization there is an infor-

# Training INVESTMENT

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# "Leadership needs to demonstrate their commitment by attending training and playing an active role in reinforcing that training."

mal power structure. People carry differing levels of influence even when they are working in lateral positions. A top performing sales professional may hold considerable influence over other members of the team. Enlisting the support of internal influencers is critical.

## Understanding Adult Learners

Once you have embraced the value, and prepared for change, it's time to make sure you understand the complexities of your team. Structuring learning for adults can be an intimidating process. When you take some

time to understand the mindset of the adult learner, you are better prepared to meet their needs and introduce programs that will resonate with them. This allows for long-term comprehension and productive application.

Stephanie Reyes, describes, The Nature of Adult Learners via an article in *Tribe HR*.

She says that the most important thing to consider when creating training experiences for adults is the fundamental nature of adult learners expressed in the following six characteristics, identified by Malcolm Knowles, an American professor in the field of adult education.

**1 Adults perceive themselves as self-directed:** Adult learners are not only defined by their role as a student. It is more common for an adult to have other roles in their life, roles that may take precedence over their identities as students.

**2 Adults bring a wealth of experience to the learning process:** Adult learners bring prior educational, professional, and life experience to the classroom.

**3 Adults come to the learning process ready to learn:** Adult learners are typically eager to acquire new information that is relevant and directly beneficial to their professional lives.

**4 Adults are oriented toward immediate application of learned knowledge:** Typically, adults learn from a performance-oriented or problem-oriented mind-set. They want information they can immediately apply to life tasks, enhance their professional performance, and use to solve problems.

**5 Adults need to know the reason for learning something:** Designing a curriculum for adult learners that makes explicitly clear the reason, purpose, and usefulness of the subject matter is a necessary component of effectively reaching adult learners.

**6 Adults are driven by an intrinsic motivation to learn:** Adult learners juggle multiple responsibilities, and take ownership of their education, with the goal of improving their knowledge base and career opportunities.

Workplace training programs, whether they are developed in-house or by an external resource, will be much more effective if the following principles, drawn from the discoveries of Kolb, Fleming and Knowles, are incorporated into the training materials and delivery (as applicable) so that training works with, and not against, the basic nature of the adult learner:

- *Respect for the knowledge and experience that participants bring to the table.*
- *A format or facilitation process that encourages participants to share their knowledge and experience freely.*
- *Content that focuses on real life situations, addresses immediate problems, and offers direct appli-*

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# Training INVESTMENT

ability to their professional roles.

- A student-centric approach to program delivery that incorporates active involvement by participants in the learning experience, with instructors serving as facilitators and technological tools functioning as enablers and resources.
- A conscious effort on the part of facilitators and/or course developers to meet the needs of participants with varying learning styles.

One of the biggest challenges that employers face when it comes to employee development is ensuring that their investment delivers results. Understanding how adults learn, and then building that knowledge into your workplace education initiatives will greatly increase participant engagement, as well as improving skills/knowledge retention and application on the job.

Stephanie's observations provide further evidence that understanding the nature of the adult learner, how to best engage them and the benefits of buy-in/empowerment is vital to leading a learning organization.

**"Designing a curriculum for adult learners that makes explicitly clear the reason, purpose, and usefulness of the subject matter is a necessary component."**

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## Partner with the Right Resources

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When working with outside firms, trainers and consultants, make sure they understand the working values of your organization. Implement programs that reflect those values. You want to be sure to properly vet potential partners. The relationship between consultants and retailers is delicate. It should be one of mutual respect and common goals.

Be leery of outside individuals wanting to jump in and "train" without fully understanding your operation. Certainly, some training more easily lends itself to a wider variety of retailer scenarios, but the best partner understands your operation fully before making recommendations and providing services.

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## Commit to Reinforcement

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Understand that when the training is complete, the real work begins. In order to maximize value, the information needs to be constantly reinforced (activities, exercises, discussions). Have a follow up/through plan in place from the onset. You must ensure that the information learned is implemented. We have all been a victim of short-term enthusiasm, only to watch it fizzle.

A good consulting partner will leave you with information on how to reinforce the programs that have been implemented. Learning programs are a dynamic force for continuous improvement that need to be altered, amended and upgraded. Part of investing in training and consulting is investing in follow up.

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## What We Have Learned About Learning

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There are many variables in the wider economic and competitive environment that retailers cannot control. However, retail organizations that are dedicated to the values of continuous improvement and growth show results that are well above the average. When adapted, these values positively permeate every aspect of an organization. Embracing the value of ongoing learning, preparing for and embracing change, understanding your employees as learners, partnering with the right resources, and committing to reinforcing the process is the formula for maximizing your training investment.

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

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

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# FIRST EXCHANGE

*at retail*

Prospects have invested their time. What are you giving them in return?

by Jeff Giagnocavo

**M**ost stores can do a much better job of turning a 'first exchange' into a sale. Here's how to do better at turning prospects into buyers.

**W**hen do your customers think that they have made their first exchange or encounter with your store?

Before answering this question, let's define the three kinds of people who

encounter your store and should be on your sales "radar".

- **Leads** - People who have shown an interest in your business. They have yet to visit or call you but have taken the time to learn more about what you do and offer.
- **Prospects** - People who have visited or made a lengthy phone call but, have yet to purchase.
- **Customers** - Those who have completed a purchase.

Of these, prospects are truly those people who have made the first exchange with your business. They've either spent time on the phone inquiring about products, or have made a store visit. Either way, they have invested their most valuable asset with you, their time.

The word exchange implies engagement from both sides of a transaction, yet many furniture retailers don't respect or complete their part of the exchange. They may provide great advice, and information, but fail to take their responsibilities to the next level.

Closing percentages being what they are on a first visit, let's say that today is simply not the day your prospect feels comfortable making a decision. So what do you do?

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## Complete The Exchange

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You need to complete your part of the exchange.

Put all of your prospects onto a pathway, or as I call it, a system for follow up. When done right this increases the possibility of increasing business by as much as 40-50%!

If you close at 40%, there ARE 60% of prospects that invested their time interacting with your business. Did you get the payoff?

What happens when a prospect does any of the following things?

- *Completes an interactive chat via your website?*
- *Calls your business?*
- *Leaves without buying?*

All of the above prospects have made their first exchange with you at this point. If you want to get maximum return on your investment in these people, you must have a system that moves prospects to customers quickly, efficiently, and respectfully. This system must deliver timely, relevant, and most importantly, personalized communications.

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## Your Follow Up System

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True success requires more than just



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# FIRST *at retail* EXCHANGE

email follow up. When you combine email, direct mail, phone – outbound and voice broadcast, you create a knock out punch combination that will increase sales and put more money into your pocket.

Once Leads become Prospects, they are no longer a faceless name on a list, a Click, an Impression, or a Like. Why not treat them with the respect and investment they deserve so you can get them to come back? Prospects are likely more than 50% of your available traffic and lead flow

Would you be pleased if your direct mail media company told you that, they tossed out 50% of your inserts, because you weren't going to sell to those homes anyway? Not a chance!

So why do you continue to toss out perfectly good prospects who have made that first exchange. These are people your staff should know by name, and already understand their needs.

Nothing new is needed in order to close more of these people. You just need the will and apply some technology to make it happen.

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## Technology To Consider

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There are endless options for technology that will help to do a better job of following up with prospects. What's needed is customer relationship management (CRM) software. Ideally it should be automated so communications are sent as soon as you input a new prospect. Any CRM you consider should include the following:

- *Capture and use of email, address, phone.*
- *Ability to look up a prospect using any piece of contact information you have.*

- *Ability to track offers, discounts, and specials by prospect. Tagging or marking of prospects based on what communications have been sent to them, and which ones they've engaged with.*
- *Ability to move a prospect from one part of the system to the next based on their level of engagement with your communications.*
- *Metrics of how many leads, prospects, and customers you have at any given time, able to be reported on demand, without calling customer support or entering a service ticket.*
- *Real time "dashboard or snapshot" of how leads, prospects and customers are moving through your various systems.*

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## Where to Start?

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While this may seem like a daunting task it isn't. Simply get in front of a whiteboard and map out how your current follow-up system functions. What happens once Prospects leave and when? How can you make your system better by adding a postcard, email, or thank you phone call. In a couple of days, send another email asking for feedback that includes a gift with purchase offer if their order is placed within a week of the email being sent. Then make a phone call, to see if there are any other questions that they need answered, or insights you can offer.

The possibilities are endless.

Just remember, that you are not being pushy. Your Prospects have invested their time and energy in you. How much are you willing to re-invest in them?

**Offer:** Jeff will be glad to speak with Furniture World readers about doing better follow-up. Schedule your call by visiting [www.infotail.com/request-call](http://www.infotail.com/request-call).

**About Jeff Giagnocavo:** 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 harness the power of information based selling and drive more ready to buy now customers through the front door of their businesses.

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

Questions can also be directed to Jeff care of [editor@furninfo.com](mailto:editor@furninfo.com).

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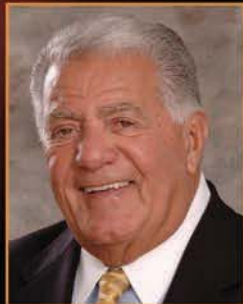
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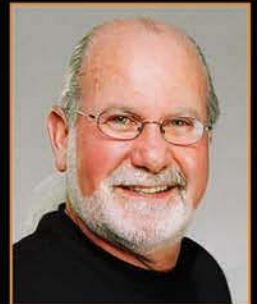
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Accent Décor	800-385-5114	maddie@accentdecor.com	43	Leather Italia USA	910-794-7904	jhuene@leatheritaliausa.com	43
Agio	800-416-3511	alicia@obrienetal.com	31	Leggett & Platt	800-876-2641	joy.thompson@leggett.com	51
All American Furn Expo	717-393-6466	allamericanfurniture@comcast.net	63	Loloi Rugs	972-503-5656	hdamavandi@loloirugs.com	35, 37
Ashley Furniture	608-323-3377	www.ashleyfurniture.com	3, 5	Manhattan Comfort	888-230-2225	cham-cham@manhattancomfort.com	46
Big Noise Marketing	888-762-5477	mwinicki@yahoo.com	66	Mastercraft	909-256-6687	rhalsten@hotmail.com	27
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