In Store Mobile Device Engagement Enterprise Thinking & Retail Leadership Better Bedding & Mattress Sales: Qualifying Questions Powerful Lean Sales Force Tools Natail Success: Furniture Mall of Kansas

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VOLUME 145 NO. 5 SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER 2015

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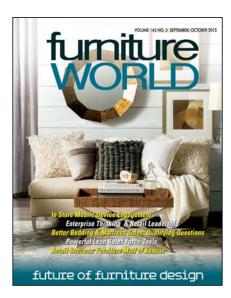
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Cover: Pictured are accessories from Surya exhibiting crisp neutrals and burnished metallic accents that bring a sense of understated sophistication to living spaces. Shown is the Aberdine rug, Nitro pillow, Solid Pleated pillow, Olivia pillow, Quilted pillow, Tucker throw, a Mirror, and Art. For more information, see page one and seven in this issue or visit www.surya.com.

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Editor's Corner

You want a tiny... what?

y daughter and her husband recently decided to buy a tiny house. Theirs will be on wheels; all told about 215 square feet. For those of you who haven't heard, there's a (big) tiny home movement brewing. To find out more, just google "Tiny House" or tune into A&E's series Tiny House Nation.

The interest in homes under 500 sq. ft. isn't surprising. The ones I've seen typically run \$35,000 to \$100,000, are cheap to heat, environmentally friendly, mobile to varying degrees, and low maintenance. Tiny homes make it impossible to collect a lot of personal stuff. They can accommodate a queen or king mattress, a few accessory items and perhaps some outdoor furniture. Everything else is multi-functional and built in.

It's enough to give furniture retailers nightmares! Even worse, this movement is part of a larger consumer trend to spend more on experiences, technology, sporting goods and items that support lifestyles. It is not good news for our industry.

Not every millennial will aspire to live in shoebox size accommodations, but the trend is worth noting. What will it do to your business if 10 years from now the average new home is substantially smaller? Will you be able to meet the needs of customers looking for smaller scale products and multi functional designs? Please let me know your thoughts.

Rossell Bienenstock Editorial Director



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2 HUMAN

How mobile marketing and post-click engagement can modernize your retail furniture stores.

by John Lim

"Retailers

should engage and activate consumers to do something (other than showrooming) with mobile devices while visiting their stores." onsumers have changed and it's not just due to economics or demographics. The rise of the smartphone, mobility and always-on accessibility have made them more aggressive and less patient. They demand quick and easy access to information, deals, and content along with the ability to react to it in an instant. Most of all, consumers want to understand the value a product or service will bring to their lives.

With this consumer evolution comes a new way to think about how to engage them online and off. We call it Human², the theory is that as consumers spend more time on their devices, they actually become two selves -- one physical and one digital. This notion suggests that each of us exists in the real world and the digital world at the same time.

This duality has become a real challenge for furniture retailers that previously delved into mobile marketing by focusing solely on the type and functionality of devices. But today, using the theory of Human², it is clear that marketers must do more. They must market to both the physical self that interacts with the environment, as well as the digital self that is connected to the Internet at all times via multiple devices.

With this challenge comes a huge opportunity for furniture retailers because they are well suited to take advantage of and maximize the power of Human².

Mobilizing The Store

When shoppers visit your store to check out the features, service and pricing of your bedroom and dining furniture, they concurrently use mobile devices to try to learn more about products, find better prices at other retail stores or share their in store

"Are you willing to empower salespeople to text or email in-store only deals and coupons, check inventory and conduct price comparisons?"

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is by offering free wifi. This allows you to not only provide a great value added service, but also to directly deliver in-store promos and coupons."

experiences with friends and family. The popular term for this is "showrooming" which many retailers fear is driving business away from their retail locations.

But this doesn't have to be the case. Furniture retailers should engage and activate consumers to do something else with their mobile devices while visiting their stores. This means mobilizing the entire store by doing some of the following:

- Add QR codes to every furniture hang tag to direct shoppers' attention to information you WANT them to see.
- Post "text-in" codes on select pieces for exclusive content or deals.

Control the Message

By mobilizing the store, you can control the message and information.

Salespeople are probably the most important asset in retail furniture environments and are key to mastering the theory of Human². That's because they can see what shoppers are looking at in real time. They can talk to shoppers about what they like, and most importantly, see when consumers are using their mobile devices in-store.

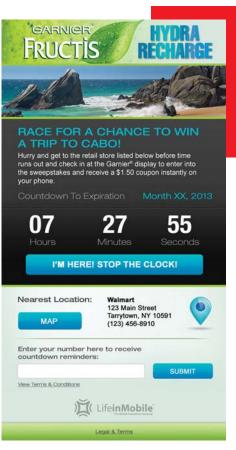
This is the point of contact where you can empower your salespeople to increase sales. To do this, however, you must be willing to provide them with their own, corporate mobile devices so they can text or email in-store only deals and coupons, check inventory and conduct price comparisons. Even more important, that device should serve as a "register" where shoppers can purchase their furniture. In today's digital age, a shopper should never have to visit a sales counter. The time a shopper spends walking to the sales counter is more time they have to think about not making that purchase.

As your sales teams become more "Mobilized" and engaged in the showrooming process, it's equally important that furniture retailers be as transparent as possible when it comes to pricing. We know consumers check their mobile devices for better prices while in your store, so why not control that process. Offer them the price comparison, show them your price and tell them why buying from your store is their best option. Make the decision for them.

"Mobilize" Your Marketing

As you are "Mobilizing" your store, also consider how you will take advantage of Human² to get more traffic in the door.

Most retailers already learn a lot about their customers from digital metrics, including information about who is activating ads (when, where and how often) in a pre-click environment.



This Garnier "Race to Retail" program focused on driving consumers to retail by delivering a mobile coupon that had to be redeemed within a certain amount of time.

But this data is limited in its ability to help retailers maximize and optimize the ROI of their ad spends.

In a Human² world, the action taken by a consumer and the data provided to a retailer following clicking on an ad or link is the difference between

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marketing success and failure. For furniture retailers, taking advantage of this post-click world means leveraging a new strategy called post-engagement conversion optimization.

Post-Engagement Conversion Optimization

Post-engagement conversion optimization is the process of tailoring the post-click user path a consumer takes after an initial click on an ad or marketing link. This customized journey needs to be based on what's affecting a shopper at the moment of engagement, taking into account their environment as well as factoring in information about how that consumer has interacted with your brand in the past."

So how does a retailer optimize their advertising and marketing campaigns to maximize the post engagement conversion opportunity?

Location, Location, Location

First you must engage a location based service or application to ensure you know as much about the consumer's' environment as possible as you attempt to engage. These services give a view where a person is, as well as what's happening where they are, with one relevant aspect being the weather. This can be important for retailers who service large trading areas. To know if it's raining, snowing or unseasonably cold can help you deliver the most relevant and impactful message in real time. This is essentially the same tactic as a store leaving its doors open on a hot day to allow the cold air out onto the street or Cinnabon strategically placing all their locations so the sweet smell of sticky buns permeates an entire mall.

Better yet, you can use location for more than the weather. Understanding where a consumer is at any given moment allows you to use that loca-



tion to anticipate where he or she will go or to direct them to a particular retail location. A unique way to connect with an in-store consumer is by offering free wifi. This allows you to provide a great value added service, and directly deliver in-store promos and coupons.

Time of Day

Next, always consider the time of day. Sounds obvious, but you can't control when a consumer will click on an ad, but you can control the experience based on the time of day when they do. Provide in-store coupons and deals during the times when consumers are most likely to visit

"This customized postclick journey needs to be based on what's affecting a consumer at the moment of engagement, taking into account their environment and factoring in information about how that consumer has previously interacted with your brand."

The Search Is Over

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"Grupo Famsa has expanded its retail operations from 100 to 400 locations after implementing STORIS. We have achieved consistency in store execution and excelled in inventory management. The STORIS Point of Sale process has been proficient in overseeing millions of customers."

Manuel Rodriguez - CIO



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"Don't force a consumer to visit six different landing pages or take six steps to access a coupon, deal, product information or store information."

your store. It may make more sense to deliver an email with a \$100 off coupon at 11pm on a Sunday night in order to drive foot-traffic on a typically slow Monday, rather than 11am on a Saturday, as the weekend will likely be busy anyway.

Relevant & Immediate

Finally, make sure your message is relevant and immediate. Don't force a consumer to visit six different landing pages or take six steps to access a coupon, deal, product information or store information. The less clicks and the more rapidly a shopper can engage with your brand, the better.

Conclusion

In the end, furniture retailers and brands need to recognize that consumers are smarter than ever before and more digital than any of us could have imagined. This means in order to not just compete, but to win the battle for consumer mindshare and dollars, we must factor in everything that makes up the physical and digital



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consumer - the Human² - no matter where they are.

About John Lim: John Lim, Founder & CEO of Life in Mobile. John assumes many roles as CEO of Life in Mobile; but of all the tasks that he may face in a single day, the number one challenge on Lim's mind, is how to empower others, and make great ideas come to life.

He left college at 19 to found his first company, Global Telcom, which rapidly rose to be the fifth-largest mobile phone distributor in New York City. At 24, Lim created On Site Marketing, a full-service marketing agency which pioneered the use of Short Message Service (SMS) to drive engagement in marketing campaigns for clients including Anheuser-Busch.

After experiencing the possibilities of the mobile market, Lim launched Life in Mobile, a dedicated mobile agency that developed and launched Mobile Real Estate and Win Local[®], two platforms that help realtors earn new business and compete with emerging online real estate mega-sites.

Lim attributes his success to his Human² theory – recognizing the human behind the device, and not the device itself – and applies this thinking to all of his work. LifeInMobile's soon to be released linknexus[™] solution will take the Human² theory to a new level by giving companies the ability to create one-on-one experiences on a massive scale.

Following his passion for empowering others, Lim, an accomplished speaker, has presented at over 50 events and travels the world inspiring audiences on how to best embrace the future of mobile. Questions about post click conversion optimization can be directed to him at info@lifeinmobile. com or call 914.909.6701. Timeless Design for the Modern Age

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Anticipation IT'S MAKING YOU MONEY!

"Many enter your store with common needs, which may hinder the pathway to completing a sale. Ignore those needs and you will lose the shopper and the sale!" by Gordon Hecht

ith apologies to Carly Simon who sang the theme song to "The Spy Who Loved Me", Anticipation doesn't have to make me wait. Work it right and Anticipation can make you MONEY!

I recently saw a photo from inside an Uber Driver's car. You've heard of Uber, the online service for ride-sharing that cuts out the worst part of taking taxis. Like waiting, unknown cost, and tipping. Uber Drivers are self-employed and use their own cars and gas. The passenger of this Uber car posted a picture showing both Android and iPhone charging cords connected in the back seat of his driver's car, ready to recharge mobile devices.

It wasn't really hard for the driver to figure out that Uber passengers use mobile devices all of the time. Mobile devices need to be charged. Cars have plugs available for recharging. Different devises need different cords. This was a lesson in anticipating the customer's need and satisfy it BEFORE the customer asks.

Anticipating shoppers' needs, rather than simply reacting to those needs, is the hallmark of LEGENDARY

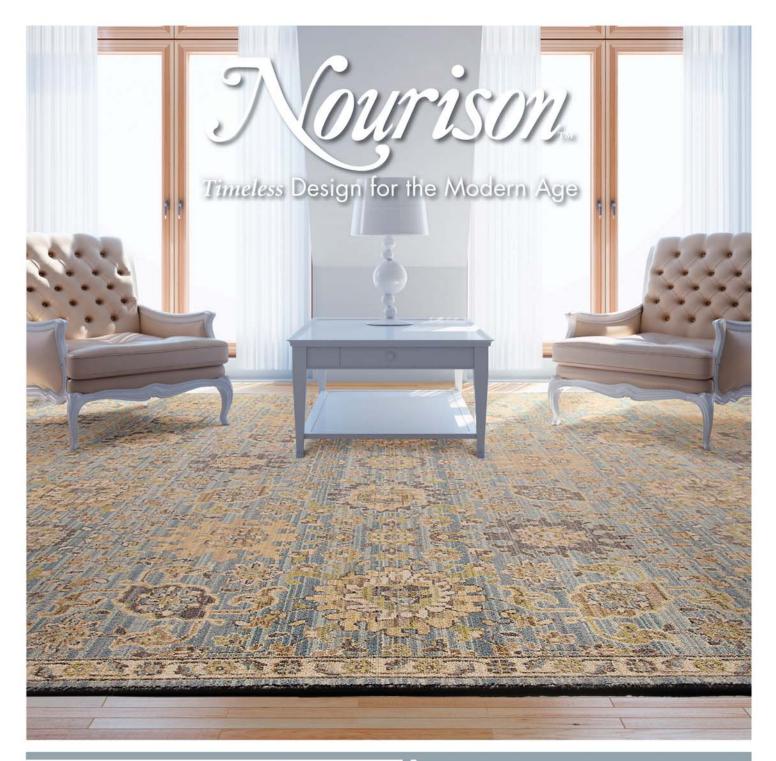
SERVICE.

Think about the shoppers who visit your store. Many enter your store with common needs, which may hinder the pathway to completing a sale. Ignore those needs and you will lose the shopper and the sale. Figure a way to solve those needs and you have cleared the pathway.

Some common issues that you may have encountered

One-Leggers. That's what they call shoppers in the North East who share a home with a partner, but only one partner comes into your store to shop. How often have you lost a sale when you hear "I have to bring in my (spouse/partner) before I buy."

Anticipate that need. How about creating a "missing persons report"; a short questionnaire for your shopper. For mattress shoppers, include simple questions like what side of the bed does your partner use, what position do they sleep in, any health/snoring issues, and ask if they are larger or smaller than the shopper. The bottom





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304.736.7283 conniepost@conniepost.com line question has to be, "What would you change about your partner's sleeping habits".

For sofa shoppers, questions could include what is your partner's favorite color, do they like to take a nap on the couch, are they more likely to sit on a sofa or a chair.

When you review those questions, you will have the answers needed to select items that would satisfy both partners.

Mini-Skirts are BACK! | am not a fashion expert, so don't ask me what hemline is in fashion. But I do know that some shoppers will enter your store wearing clothes that render them unprepared to comfortably test rest mattresses or recliners. The cool thing is that most people sleep with a blanket of some sort. Why not have a TEST REST BLANKET on hand for those occasions when your shopper comes up short. Hand it to them, just like a test pillow. I suggest a light washable neutral colored "throw", kept in a plastic bag or wrap for cleanliness. Those run \$10-14 on sale, so invest in a half dozen, and wash them often. Be sure that they don't "leave pills" or you can anticipate disappointing a shopper. Be a real HERO and let your shopper take the blanket home when they make a purchase!

The Time-Space Continuum. I heard that term once on The Big Bang Theory. Since I only went to UNLV, I am not quite sure what it means. But, I am very sure that you lose sales every week because "Be Back" shoppers don't want to drive back to your store because of time or distance. Or, your store hours don't match their free time hours. Imagine having your store open 24/7 and located no further than the distance from your shoppers' kitchen to their living room.

As they used to say on the TV show the 6 Million Dollar Man, "We have the Technology". It's called your ONLINE STORE, and if you have a website, it's easy to convert it to an online store. While you may picture that online store being an option for out-of-towners, it really is an option for your local shoppers to place their orders ANYTIME-after they shop your store.

Anticipate that shopper who has to talk or think it over, or wants to shop

"For One Leggers... How about creating a missing persons report.

It's is a short questionnaire for your shopper who comes in without their partner."

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Along with that, anticipate that your sales staff may have an ego issue with online orders, so devise a system, like prospect cards-or copies of the online order form to ensure they get paid for the presentation they make.

We have weather today. It seems that weather is unavoidable. Make it work to your advantage. For COLD WEATHER-have a coat rack in your store. Shoppers may want to test rest a bed wearing heavy coats. That adds 1-2" of padding and give a false feel to the mattress. Offer to hang their coat and hat.

For WET WEATHER-keep a clean

dry floor mat in your store, and on your truck. Your shopper will appreciate the chance to wipe their shoes, and will love the fact that your delivery team is concerned about their home. Have a large gold umbrella at your store door to walk your shopper to their car free from rain drops.

For HOT WEATHER-anticipate thirsty shoppers with a cool bottle of water, or a spring water dispenser at the front door. Anticipate the outcome of water drinking with a clean well



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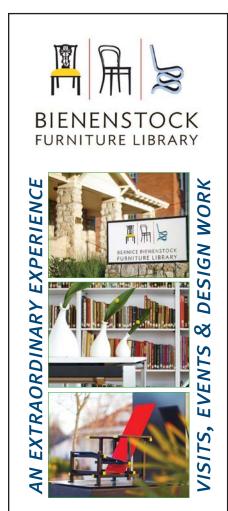
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I am anticipating that you may want to get started today. If you are not tech savvy, get an outside supplier to help you set up your website. You'll find some fine companies advertising in this month's issue. Get your team to create the "Missing Person's Report," and then rehearse it a few times. You'll find that rehearsing is less frightening to your staff compared to Role Playing!

Get ready for next season's weather, it's coming soon. Invest a few bucks in a universal charger, and locate it in a secure area.

After that, look for the next service that you can offer to give your shopper a richer buying experience, offer it, and anticipate your success!

About Gordon Hecht: Gordon Hecht is a Growth and Development Manager for National Bedding Company's America's Mattress stores, over 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.

"Your staff

may have an ego issue with online orders, so devise a system, like prospect cards or copies of the online order form to ensure they get paid for the presentation they make."

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WELCOME MAT Marketing

by Jeff Giagnocavo

orward thinking furniture & mattress stores should use "welcome mat marketing" to help new customers realize you're different, and to make them feel special.

It's just like having a welcome mat that greets visitors to your home. In this age where every new customer is extremely valuable to your business, nobody can afford to be complacent when it comes to marketing. That's especially true when it comes to extending a "welcome mat" to new customers. It's been said that most stores get a customer to make a sale, but the store owner or salesman makes a sale to get a customer! It's a saying that emphasizes the lifetime value, in terms of retention, incremental sales and referrals, of a good customer. Your welcome mat marketing is the beginning of this important process.

A welcome mat marketing campaign is a focused MULTI-STEP, NEW CUSTOMER campaign designed with specific goals in mind. It should consist of both online and offline communications for maximum results. I estimate that 95% of store owners don't even think about welcome mat marketing. That's a mistake since it confers a HUGE competitive advantage.

Example of a Smart Welcome Mat Campaign

Recently my wife purchased a new

Acura. Long gone are the days where all you had was a speedometer, gas gauge and push button radio. Today's new cars seem to require a Ph.D to figure out how to use them, and the Acura MDX is no different.

Acura realizes few new customers will read the owner's manual, so they created a 30 day campaign where my wife received a short written tutorial right on her navigation system that appeared when she turned the car on. She could either take 20 seconds to read it, or save for future reading. This is smart for several reasons. Acura takes the most important features for new car owners, chunks them into short concise tutorials, and "feeds" them this information right when they know customers are most likely to be attentive.

The furniture business is no different. I challenge you to develop a well thought out welcome mat for new customers. The goal is to make them feel welcomed, appreciated, and address any new customer questions. It will also show them that your business is different from all the other competitive choices simply because you care 100% about helping them with your policies and store services.

One big benefit of using a welcome mat campaign is consistency and compliance. When you set up a



m W





"If all this is new to you, this framework is a great start! The best thing to do is map out the campaign and figure out your goal at each contact point."

system like the six-step system outlined below, you don't have to worry about whether you told Mr. Jones the same thing you told Mrs. Smith. The system is consistent with every new customer and, if the need ever arose, you have evidence of what information was shared with the customer. As you begin to craft your campaign, keep these important steps in mind:

Step 1

Your first goal is to figure out why you want to create this campaign. What do you want to convey? What do you want to have happen? What information is important for a new customer to have?

Step 2

The second goal is to reduce any buyer's remorse and create customers-for-life. You can go a long way by creating a well-thought out welcome mat campaign that reassures and validates their investment in your company.

Step 3

Create a specific time-frame where new customers will hear from you on a scheduled basis over a period of time. Consider a 30 day campaign with multiple online and offline touchpoints. The use of an automated marketing solution will greatly enhance this process.

Step 4

Figure out the number of touchpoints and what media you will use during the welcome mat campaign. I suggest you consider this welcome mat architecture for your store:

- Day 0 New customer start.
- Day 1 Personalized thank you email with photo of you and your staff holding up a thank you sign or possibly a link to a generic video from you thanking them for their business. Introduce the rest of your staff and how they can be of service.
- Day 2 Send a personalized, handwritten thank you card to your new customer. Consider including "how to refer" information in this mailing.
- Day 5 Personalized email outlin-

ing important after purchase care and maintenance, comfort or use issues, etc.

- Day 10 Create a personalized, "just checking in" email. Consider including other product and service information and benefits.
- Day 15 Personalized direct mail with unexpected gift (food product, something fun, etc.). Thank them again for their business and remind them about the importance of referrals for your business.
- Day 20 Personalized email "Hope you like the gift I sent."
- Day 25 Personalized email "Do you have any questions I can answer for you?"
- Day 30 Personal "just checking in" phone call from store owner or salesman.

Step 5

Get your campaign in place with some type of automated marketing platform. For optimum results, your welcome mat marketing should be systematized and automated, which gives you peace-of-mind, knowing everything is happening 100% of the time you get a new customer.

Step 6

Set it and forget it (for the time

WELCOME MAT Marketing

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being). I'm never a fan of simply forgetting about a campaign after it has been loaded into your automated marketing platform. All owners should revisit ALL their marketing from time to time to see if tweaks are necessary.

If this were my business, I would have an even more complex, behavioral-based campaign in place that works based on each individual's interaction with your campaign, but if all this is new to you, the above framework is a great start. The best thing to do is

"Day 5: Personalized email outlining important after purchase care and maintenance, comfort or use issues, etc." map out the campaign and figure out your goal at each contact point. Graphically lay out the campaign on paper or in some type of layout program so you can see everything you want to do and need to create.

Here are a few touchpoint ideas you can include in your welcome mat campaign:

- Thank them for becoming a customer and reaffirm their wise decision to become a customer.
- Spell out ways they can contact you with questions/concerns/support issues.
- Introduce your staff and their areas of specialty.
- Offer other product/service opportunities and give them a "new customer reason" to take action now.
- Share customer success stories (and invite them to be your next one).
- Discuss your referral program and

how they can benefit from it.

- If you have a customer newsletter, send them a first issue.
- Give them an unexpected gift.
- Allow them to self-identify as a customer wanting more from you (e.g. other products, higher levels of service, etc.).

If all the above has made you go cross-eyed, don't fret. You can still reap the benefits of welcome mat marketing by sending out a few personalized direct mail letters and getting on the phone. The point is to treat every new customer like they're a beloved grandmother. Thank them, appreciate them, help them, wow them and watch your business soar!

About Jeff Giagnocvo: Jeff is the Chief Sales Officer of Infotail Systems, Inc., a profit automation company empowering retailers to get 100% of the profits they deserve, 100% of the time, automatically! For more information visit www.Infotail.com

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by David McMahon, CMA, EA

n the last issue, the concept of LEAN was introduced. This time we start to look at how to use LEAN techniques to empower various areas of your business; starting with your sales force. Consider two stores: Store A and Store B. They are in the same region and belong to the same corporation. They have the same store layout, share the same marketing program, and have the same number of salespeople. They are separated by 15 miles on the outer ring road of a mid-sized US city. You would think their performance would be similar, right?

lestorce

Store B however, always, without fail, outperforms Store A in terms of revenue and gross margin percent. Furthermore, Store B always has fewer customer service issues. How is this possible?

Could it be that Store B is just getting better customer traffic and Store A is getting a bunch of "tire-kickers"? Not likely. Maybe Store B is located in a better market area? Not in this case.

The likely answer for the performance difference is basic: Store B is LEANER than Store A.

In the case of Store A vs. Store B, B is LEANER because it is more efficient. LEAN is the process of continually improving efficiency and effectiveness. It is not about making broad cuts. If that were the case, Store B would be leaner because it had less expenses or fewer people. LEAN is about identifying and trimming weakness, as well as building upon strengths. That is why Store B outperforms Store A. Store B has a sales force that is better at Engaging, Communicating, and Delivering what their customers need. They are more professional.

Even though Store B is LEANER than Store A, there may be competitive stores in the same trading area that are even leaner. That's why Store B can't rest on its laurels. A LEAN sales force continues to improve itself. If it doesn't, it will stop growing sales.

Every furniture store needs a strategy for implementing LEAN and applying it to their sales teams. Here are the steps to take to implement LEAN sales

"80/20 thinking is at the core of implementing a LEAN sales force. It says the majority of results are produced by the minority of sources." Furniture Plaza 2ND FLOOR - #215

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"One thing I like about Legends Furniture is their market introductions. They're always valid, innovative and ready to ship as soon as they're introduced." Marty Darvin, Darvin Furniture

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FURNITURE

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"Legends Furniture has a major advantage in the market place. With their US manufacturering facility they're able to take on special projects for us with incredible speed"

Grover Geiselman, Living Spaces



"Legends has always given us a great value with extremely reliable delivery." Brett Hiatt, RC Willey

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RCWilley.

"Speed wins in the current business environemnt. Nobody delivers product with quality and speed like Legends."

"Coming from a family owned

business, it's nice to see someone

stand by their commintments."

William Daughtrey, W.S. Badcock

&more.

LEGENDS

0

Jim McIngvale, Gallery Furniture

GALLERY FURNITURE

"Sales Volume produced...

is a critical metric to track, but doesn't tell the story about how you got there."

force management:

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

Sales metrics rate a salesperson's effectiveness. Sales volume produced is a crucial metric to track, but it does not tell the story about how you got there. Sales metrics should be established around the sales production equation: Average sale x close rate x number of customers.

I recommend picking a primary metric that your sales force will focus on improving. For this article, I'll suggest you choose Revenue per Guest (RPG). This is the value of each customer visit in terms of sales dollars. RPG is easy to calculate providing

Suppose you have achieved your strategy of reaching a minimum RPU of \$400, now what? you have good systems in place to track your numbers. With RPG, you divide sales revenue by the number of customers. You should do this for each salesperson. This will allow you to know your average and set a benchmark for improvement.

Measure Performance Using 80/20 Thinking

After you have a core metric in place, it is time to use it to improve. There is no value in just tracking a metric without taking further action. The first action to take is measurement using the 80/20 principle. 80/20 thinking is at the core of implementing a LEAN sales force. It says the majority of results are produced by the minority of sources. So, in the example of the metric RPG, the principle dictates that the minority of salespeople are probably producing the majority of revenue per quest. You may find that in our operation the number isn't exactly 20% of the people producing 80% of sales per quest. The important thing is to know who is producing a consistently high RPG and who is pulling the averages down. Once you have this information, you have the power to develop a plan to improve.

Find Solutions

Now that you have your metric (RPG in this case) established and you are tracking results, you implement LEAN by defining solutions to improve the metric. Consider the results shown in the chart below for sales associates in one store over a 3-month period:

Salesperson	RPG
John	\$620
Judy	\$600
Fred	\$450
Jane	\$300
Jack	\$275

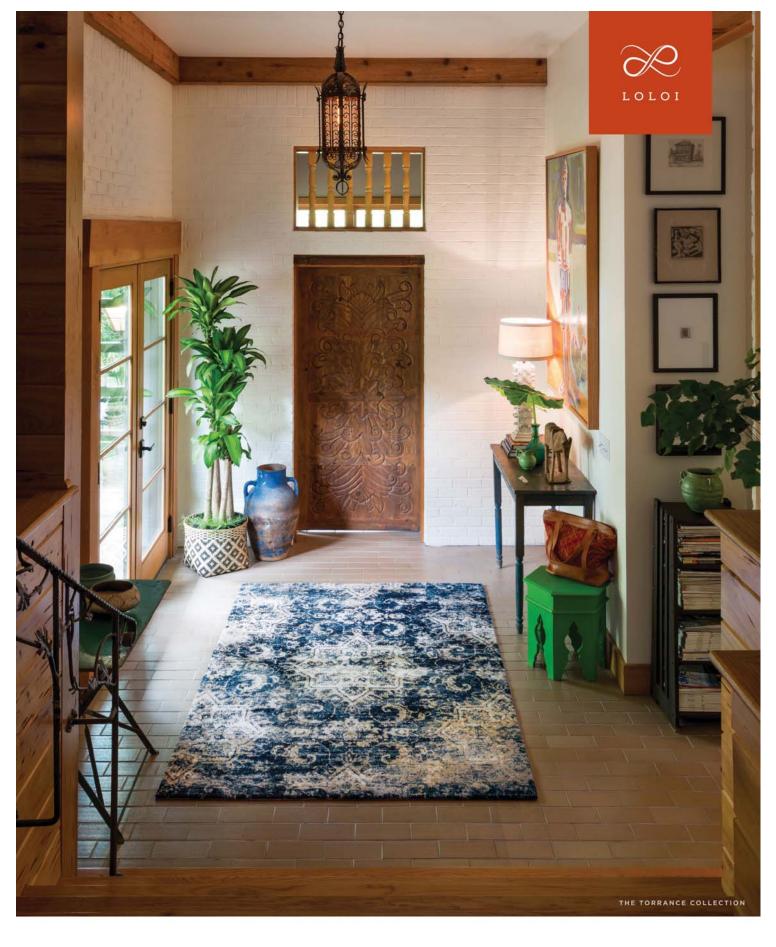
In this example, John and Judy produce the majority of results for this performance metric. Fred is average, and Jane and Jack are pulling the team down. John and Judy together would in fact produce over 100% more sales dollars than Jane and Jack for every customer they deal with. Knowing this, you can learn from what John and Judy are doing better than the rest of the team.

Making small improvements in the right areas can have sizable impact. For example, from this information you may set an overall strategy on improving the minimum RPG standard to \$400. From there, specific tactical actions can be put into play.

Examples include:

Re-train in the custom-order selling process

- Improve the customer qualifying process
- 3 Work on the customer solution close





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Execute to Conclusion

Once you put your LEAN strategy in motion, follow through. Consistent action gets results. Repetition of the right actions leads to the right results. Managers should demonstrate proven best practices over and over again until they are adopted by the sales force. If positive results are not realized in a specific time frame, the actions taken, the manager's ability to execute, or the salespersons ability to progress should be guestioned. More often than not, a solid plan combined with people who have the right attitudes and commitment will produce results.

Continue Improving

Congratulations! You've improved your metric and your business. You have become more competitive in your marketplace. This is not the end of the LEAN process, however, because LEAN never ends. It is continuous. From a sales force perspective, suppose you have achieved your strategy of reaching a minimum RPU of \$400 - now what? The answer is simple, keep on improving that metric, or look for a new metric to improve.

Here are 10 other examples of worthy sales metrics to focus on to begin a LEAN strategy:

Average gross margin

dollars/ sale.

- Percent of house calls or design sales.
- Average sale.
- Close rate on new customers.
- Percent of repeat customer visits (be-backs).
- Percent of sales with add-ons.
- Warranty as a percent of total sales.
- Percent of sales with customer issues.
- Sales to goal achievement.
- Quotes converted/ quotes written/ month.

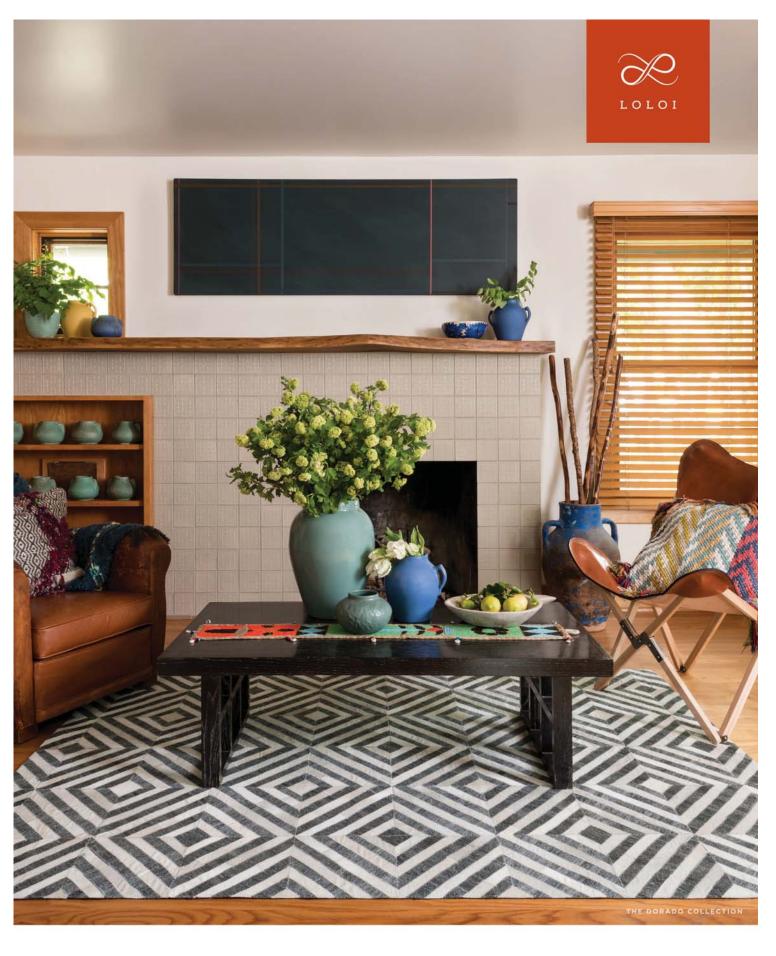
Caution: these metrics are all good in their own right, but don't focus on them all equally at the same time. Focus your LEAN strategy on one, or at the most three metrics at a time. There will be less distraction and confusion, and you will have a greater chance of success.

Whatever you decide to do, the path to success is to keep your focus on what matters. Keep tweaking the strategy and follow the never-ending road toward maximizing sales using LEAN.

About David McMahon: David McMahon, CMA, is a Management Consultant and VP of Performance Groups for PROFITsystems, a HighJump Product. He can be reached at david.mcmahon@highjump.com.









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Best Selling DFSIGN



Nourison

All the beauty of a reflecting pool is captured in this luminous abstract design. Shapes shift and ripple across the plush, velvety, handcrafted pile.This rug is Contemporary yet timeless in a shimmering palette of silvery grey and gleaming obsidian.

Contact information on page 128.



Jaipur Rugs

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, soft and is designed to last.

Contact information on page 128.



Flash Furniture

Allure Series 3 contemporary theater set features a plush back and two cup holder wedges with a storage compartment. The middle seat reclines with a quick pull on the handle.



Donco

Kids can sleep, study, and store in this modular low loft twin bed in white finish. It is also available in Dark Cappuccino finish. Includes twin low loft bed, 3-drawer chest, 2-drawer chest/shelf, and bookcase. Suggested retail \$559.

Contact information on page 128.



Four Hands

This classic, shield backed Bergere is made modern with solid Oak and a bohemian print. Soft, 100% cotton batik upholstery offers a youthful, twist on tradition.

Contact information on page 128.





Kas Rugs From the Shelby collection of hand tufted trendy plush rugs for teens made of 100% polyester chenille.

Contact information on page 128.

Fashion Bed

This transitionally designed snap bed snaps together for quick and easy assembly. It boasts flowing curves set off by bold castings in the center of the headboard and footboard. The warm, coffee finish enhances the subtle, yet stately design. Approximate retail \$399 in queen.

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Best Selling DESIGN



Pelican Reef

Key Biscayne is made of high quality woven fiber called Viro® with powder coated finish resistant to corroding and scratching. Shown here in Antique brown finish. Cushions included are available in a choice of Sunbrella® premium 100% solution-dyed acrylic fabrics.

Contact information on page 128.



Feizy Rugs

The Katari Collection incorporates warm palettes and traditional patterns making use of a new polypropylene yarn that offers the resilience of traditional polypropylene but mimics the ultra-soft hand and rich luster of viscose. These power loomed designs use soft spa-like blues, greens and a range of greys.

Contact information on page 128.



Craft + Main

The Paradore Dining Table is made of solid Ash with premium Ash veneers. Features include hand applied multi-stepped finish with antique distressing, cast aluminum classic columns with a water base multi-step finish and an extendable table top.



Christopher Guy

This striking mirror frame in beaten copper is crafted in overlapping sword-like pointed rays. A truly unique piece.

Contact information on page 128.



Capel

The new Phantom collection is a hand knotted collection in soothing colors crafted from New Zealand Semi-Worsted wool. Made in India, this collection comes in three calming colors: multi, blue haze and mist. Sizes include: 5'x8', 7'x9', 8'x11', 9'x13', and 18"x18" samples. A 5'x8' may retail for \$1,799.

Contact information on page 128.

Elran

The Hunter collection features contemporary design with a detailed track arm, complete foam back with a simulated head rest for support, lounge seat and inside pull handle. Shown here with optional power recliners. Also available with manual recliners.



Best Selling DESIGN



Twin Star

This expandable bar cabinet is available in Espresso or Walnut finish. Features include dark Pewter hardware, doors that open and fold out, storage space for spirits, glassware, and other bar items twelve bottle X wine rack, storage and built-in sound bar with Bluetooth capabilities and A/V inputs.

Contact information on page 128.



Loloi

Fable, Inspired by the Bohemian lifestyle, is a new flat weave shag by Justina Blakeney. Made in India from a viscose and cotton blend, Fable features rich colors and bright abstract designs.

Contact information on page 128



Tayse Rugs

This Persian-inspired empirical design with detailed pattern in gold, seafoam, currant red, vanilla ivory, and mocha, is framed by a spice border. It is machine-made with quality construction from polypropylene yarn, to be soft and durable. MSRP is \$329 for 8'x11'.



Chromcraft

Wide assortment of new counter and bar seating in 26" & 30" heights. Over 400 bucket and base options available.

Contact information on page 128.



Manhattan Comfort

The Cabrini Theater Panel hosts a 70" TV screen using the built-in TV mount. The 3 cubbyholes and 3 drawers allow access to store DVD's, TV remote, magazines, and other objects. Other features include LED lights and telescopic slides.

Contact information on page 128.



Furniture of America

"Colette" features a slab of stone insert on a beautiful, split-wood textured table top with natural cracks. Underneath are metal accents giving it industrial flair. With every crack unique in shape and size, this dining collection is one of a kind.

Contact information on page 128.

Surya

The Gavin lamp pairs a crisp linen drum shade with a metal base in antique silvertone finish to impart a modern, clean-lined look to living spaces. Overall dimensions are 15"W x 29"H.



Best Selling DESIGN



Rizzy Home

From the new Marianna Fields collection, this rug is handmade of 100% wool. Available in 2.5' x 8', 5x8', 8'x10', and 9'x12'.

Contact information on page 128.

Horizon Home

The new Mandalay Collection with solid wood bench made construction in a light reclaimed finish. Lightly distressed

Contact information on page 128.



Ashley

the "Barinteen-Granite" upholstery collection has sleek track arm design along with reversible coil seating and plush boxed back cushions. The deep tones of the comfortable upholstery fabric accent the dark finish of the feet and sophisticated nail head accents.

Contact information on page 128.





Maxwood Furniture

A new take on the popular Newport style by removing the tufting and adding a chrome leg to create the Sunset. Clean, comfortable and sophisticated creating two looks within one setting.



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ENTERPRISE THINKING

The key to superlative leadership!

by Larry Mullins

"Many retail decision makers

are still trying to drive their companies at 200 mph using the skills, knowledge and tools of a 65 mph driver." ach week I have the privilege of talking with one or two furniture entrepreneurs. What I admire most about these accomplished individuals is how they manage to wear so many hats. They are required to be visionaries as well as pragmatists. They must be managers, buyers, display experts, sales managers, public relations experts, marketing geniuses, psychologists, operations experts, and on and on.

Not all home furnishings entrepreneurs are equal.

Very few furniture retailers are playing chess, while the vast majority are playing checkers. It is not due to a lack of intelligence. Many brilliant merchants run stores that are performing well below their potentials. Nor are these performance issues related to the size of their businesses. Big Box franchises usually operate in corporate silos and are leaving a great deal on the table. So, what is missing?

We all learned many things in school and in life, but the vast majority of business owners were never taught HOW to think. Most of us, therefore, lack a "kit of tools" to easily manage and solve our everyday problems. In his 700 page opus, "Paid to Think", David Goldsmith states that too many decision makers are still trying to drive their companies at 200 mph using the skills, knowledge and tools of a 65 mph driver. In Paid to Think... A Leader's Toolkit for Defining Your Future, Goldsmith explains what you need to do to become a world-class thinker, and suggests the tools needed to achieve this goal. That is, if you are interested in playing chess instead of checkers. Jay Abraham (who wrote the foreword to Goldsmith's book) says of it: "What Peter Drucker did for current management theory and practice, David Goldsmith has done for modern-day leadership in Paid to Think."

Thinking is the key to superlative leadership. I probably would not be writing this article if Goldsmith was not a man of action as well as a thinker. When David's book arrived from Amazon I realized it would be challenging to review in depth. After several hours of reading, I did recognize the book's profundity and value, so I gave it a brief but laudatory review. To my surprise I got an immediate "Thank You" email from David. This inspired me to engage the book with greater thoroughness and write a more comprehensive, but admittedly still incomplete, review of Paid to Think. A few

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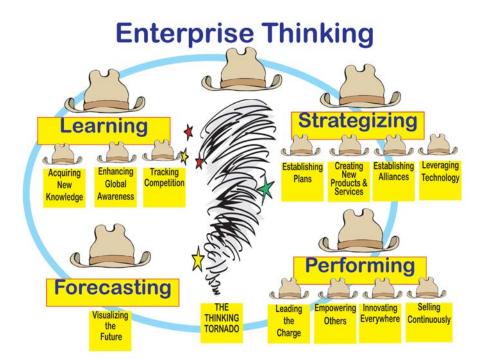
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"David Goldsmith defines the many hats an entrepreneur must wear... and provides the basic tools retail leaders need to use to achieve superlative performance."

days later I got a telephone call from David! It was an engaging, if brief, conversation. I became a fan. Want prospects who become lifetime customers? Treat them as though they are valued as clients. Call them personally to see if they are pleased with their purchase. Impossible? Before you

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give up on this article, please read the following true story. I have told it before, but it is worth retelling. Lifetime customers are worth their weight in gold. This story tells how one furniture entrepreneur acquires a few lifetime customers each week.

Hello Mrs. Smith

A year or so ago I entered into the office of the owner of one of the more successful furniture franchises in America. Paul requested that I sit down. He had a couple of calls to make before he could spend time with me planning a furniture promotion. I had worked with Paul Barbaro for several years, but I was about to learn about the secret sauce that, more than any other factor, had lifted him to world class franchise status. What I heard in his phone conversation in those brief moments astounded me:

"Hello, Mrs. Smith. My name is Paul Barbaro. I am the owner of the Slumberland store here in Willmar. Is this a good time for you? I am calling because I see you made a purchase of a living room group at our store. I want to check to see if you were pleased with your shopping experience with us ... Good, I am delighted that you love your new furnishings ... I have just one more question. On a scale of

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Never let a prospect leave your store empty-handed. An effective hand-out is a "silent salesperson" who will tell your story in the most compelling way possible.

one to ten, how likely would you be to recommend Slumberland to your friends and neighbors?"

That is about the gist of Paul's message to his clients. Do not underestimate the power of this message to add value to the shopping experience. Britt Beemer has made the point that people are honored when the owner of a store engages them in a meaningful conversation. And the worth of a customer over a lifetime cannot be exaggerated. In addition, Paul asks indirectly but clearly for the likelihood of a testimonial. There is absolutely no more powerful marketing than word of

"The GPP, or Godsmith Productivity Principle states that, 80% of an organization's ability to compete and perform is driven by its systems and structures, and only 20% by its people." mouth from a trusted friend. The basic principles of marketing are still valid, but capturing the attention of prospects is becoming more and more difficult. The internet, social media, relationship selling, and word of mouth recommendations are all part of the media mix now. Ignore these activities at your own peril.

Something to hold

Turning prospects into customers on the first visit has never been more difficult. Prospects are more educated, web and social media savvy, and cautious. This is especially true of better stores. Jeff Cohen noticed in his higher end leather furniture store in St. Augustine that, contrary to conventional wisdom, prospects bought on the first visit only 15% or 20% of the time. However, it is not uncommon for his prospects to return three or four times (or even more) before they buy. Jeff discovered early on that giving a prospect something to carry out of the store would areatly increase the likelihood of a return visit. At first he relied upon a leather sample or a factory brochure. Then he discovered that a custom three-fold handout was much more effective. (See the

exhibit above.) The idea is to create a best-selling story about your store; commit it to print and make sure each prospect leaves the store with your "silent sales consultant" in their hand. Operations Manager Steve Lent (who works the floor when needed) says: "Our first task is to show sincere interest in the customer. Relationship is a key ingredient to serving effectively. When we moved to our new location, many old customers dropped in just to say 'hello' and congratulate us on our success. These friendships and connections are precious."

We need thinkers, innovators and doers

The furniture industry needs mature, thinking leaders today as never before. The demands on retail leaders are more stressful than they have ever been. David Goldsmith tells us that his ET system (Enterprise Thinking) will transform your entire organization into an "unsiloed," smooth-operating reality. Unsiloed is the operative word. Just as I.T. pros use technology to integrate all the activities of an organization to achieve better outcomes, Enterprise Thinking uses a new mental arsenal to achieve the same thing. This is



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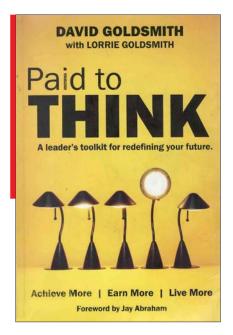
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possible because all four activities of ET and their companion tools make for better outcomes. (See exhibit on page 48.)

If this appears complicated, remember you are already wearing all four hats now. You are already a Learner, a Strategist, a Forecaster and a Performer. But you are most likely still playing checkers. David will show you how to play chess. Enterprise Thinking is a turbo-charged way of getting your organization up to speed fast. The exhibit in this article shows how the four essential hats break down into twelve activities. Of course, the retail mind does not work in a linear, insulated way. It swirls like a cyclone and darts from activity to activity. David recognizes this, and incorporates this core creative chaos as part of his ET process. Unfortunately, too often furniture entrepreneurs zap around from decision to decision, with too little time spent on thinking about the decision before committing to it.

Don't have time to just think? Here is how to do it

As a specialist in marketing, I have a simpler set of tasks than you. But I also need time to think, and to learn.

"Many Leaders have substandard organizational systems and

have substandard organizational systems and structures that inhibit the creativity of good people and put a lid on their motivation and achievement."

Innovative ideas are born from isolated thinking time without interruption. As Goldsmith noted, Henry Ford once said: "Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is probably the reason so few engage in it." Over the years I have developed my own system of daily planning, and very likely you have too. But David has added important ingredients to planning.

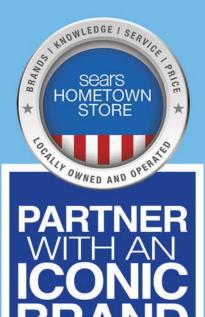
For example, you know the traditional drill... set your to-do list, timeframe activities, set priorities, and go for it! Priorities are critically important. You are also aware of the Pareto Principle: "80% of output comes from 20% of input, not only in the business world, but also in virtually every aspect of life." [Richard Koch] In retail we learn that 80% of the sales come from 20% of the sales people. 80% of the profit comes from 20% of the floor. And on and on. Goldsmith buys into the Pareto idea.

But, it is not surprising that David Goldsmith would have a new spin on this idea. He calls it the GPP, or Goldsmith Productivity Principle: "80% of an organization's ability to compete and perform is driven by its systems and structures, and only 20% by its people." You may wonder what happened to the concept that our most valuable asset is our people. Setting aside the exact hypothetical percentage, David persuasively suggests that many leaders have substandard organizational systems and structures that inhibit the creativity of good people and put a lid on their motivation and achievement. Potential chess playing entrepreneurs get the idea of the importance of systems and structures immediately and start seeing GPP everywhere... "at work, at home, during civic and religious services, at social events" etc. David's point is that great associates emerge from good systems, and could be repressed by weak ones.

Goldsmith also reminds us of an often neglected supplement to the planning process that has helped me considerably: Plan your day the night before. It only takes 20 minutes or so at first, and later half that. And, as David says, "every second is worth it." Even so, for maximum benefit do this at the end of the day, and in a place where you can have complete, uninterrupted privacy. You will actually sleep better and be prepared to hit the ground running in the morning with increasing clarity and confidence.

Rethink your assumptions

Goldsmith will challenge many assumptions that you may have accepted, and he suggests that you revisit. If you are willing to learn, his book will, without question, make you a more effective leader and manager. Stop right there and consider a key assumption as to whether your role is mostly leading or managing. In these modern times, if you are a key decision maker, you are most likely both a manager and a leader. But even the smartest person in the room sometimes has assumptions about these roles that encumber his or her performance.



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You will elevate your game when you appropriately combine the best features of leading and managing.

For example, many modern executives consider themselves purely leaders, and imagine that they are exclusively responsible for corporate strategy. Once a strategy is decided upon, they retire to their offices and leave the execution to managers. This lack of direct involvement and follow-through can be fatal to the effectiveness of a business. Consider if a modern professional football coach operated this way. The great coaches in the NFL develop a strategic game plan, and then follow-through in the game with hands-on tactical execution in concert with their middle managers. They know the ultimate game plan can go out the window if the quarterback or another key player is hurt. Emergencies come up constantly and must be handled. So, they both lead and manage. You must do this as well. The Japanese call this "Gemba" or workplace management. Go to http://furninfo.com/Authors/Larry%20 Mullins/9 and check out the threepart series, "Management by Walking Around Revisited."

Teach others to THINK

Without question, America is in dire need of new leaders. For most furniture stores, most leaders are created through on the job training. You likely believe you are getting fewer and fewer applicants who are qualified for leadership. Goldsmith suggests that teaching by example is important, but consider that instructing how you think is of even greater importance. Associates observe your decisions, but they are not usually privy to how you arrived at them. Sometimes what appeared to be a snap decision was really one that took weeks, if not months, perhaps years of consideration. If you fail to explain the rationale behind what you do, the future generation of leaders will come to the mistaken conclusion that leadership is mastering the art of making quick spontaneous decisions. In reality, good executive decisions are born of patient thinking.

Before you decide that there is no adequate training material available for leadership, consider the military. Years ago the late Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, and Jack Welch, the notable CEO of GE, agreed the United States Military did the best job of training leaders. Even today, a weakened military has performed virtual miracles in the past few years. They do it by the consistent, patient efforts of the collective leadership in uniform. The military still has a colossal job. The ranks of the military come from volunteers. Leaders must be developed from within. The military can't hire a headhunter to find a new General. For more information on how they take ordinary volunteers and teach them leadership, go to http://furninfo.com/Authors/Larry%20 Mullins/9 and check out the three-part series, "Every Associate A Leader".

The take home message from David Goldsmith's book embraces a way to empower yourself to live your best life. David does not insist that you need to master all the hats you have to wear to see important changes for your organization and your life. Just remember you are paid to think. Try to rope out 30 uninterrupted minutes a day devoted purely to thinking. In a year that will equal over three solid 40-hour weeks of uninterrupted thinking. "Now is the time to build your tomorrow," says David. And he follows through with game-changing advice.

About Larry Mullins: Larry Mullins, a contributing editor for Furniture World has acquired 30 + years of experience on the front lines of furniture marketing. Larry's mainstream executive experience, his creative work with promotion specialists, and mastery of timeless advertising principles have established him as one of the foremost experts in furniture marketing. Larry's turnkey Mega-Impact programs produce results for everything from cash raising events to profitable exit strategies. His newest, innovative Internet Leverage Strategies have produced exceptional increases in sales and profits in recent months. Larry is founder and CEO of UltraSales, Inc. Call for a free, no-obligation consultation. He can be reached directly at 904.794.9212.

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Part 6: Steps Of The Sale - Qualifying Questions To Ask

by David Benbow

"RSAs should never run out of qualifying questions. They are the keys that unlock the door to the sale."

n the July/August issue, we discussed the Qualifying Step of the Sale. This time our discussion continues with a close look at ways the Retail Sales Associate (RSA) can use Qualifying to discover the needs and wants of an UP ("UP" being defined as a would-be customer.)

One more point before we proceed. A very important function of qualifying questions, beyond probing the customer's needs and wants, is to keep the conversation flowing. Silence is deadly in a sales presentation. Long pauses lose the customer's attention, lose control and lose the sale.

You might ask, "How many qualifying questions can there be?" I've never counted them, but there are an awful lot. This article and the next will discuss many of the common ones, but a thorough, skilled RSA should not have a problem developing new, unique qualifying questions on the fly, depending on the situation.

Even though our discussion will center on qualifying questions for mattress and bedding shoppers, this article should be of interest to all furniture RSAs. That's because virtually every furniture store RSA is called upon to serve bedding shoppers, try as they might to avoid them.

Again, to repeat my constant theme from every article, we strongly recommend that the RSA be fully versed and fluent in all of his store's (1) products (2) inventory (3) policies (4) advertising and (5) financing options. Fluency in all of these topics will make the qualifying step more spontaneous, useful and fun, for both RSA and UP.

As we discussed previously, the term "qualifying", means asking and probing to find out what is on prospects' minds. Why did they come in to the store? What is their home furnishings problem? What goals do they have for their home, short-term and long-term? The UP will not usually volunteer this information. Quite often, they would prefer to be left alone. Unfortunately, leaving them alone does not solve their problem, nor does it advance the prospect of making a sale. The RSA has to get involved in the process, and I mean deeply involved. Otherwise, the UP will walk in the front door "looking for ideas," and will probably walk out the

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front door a few minutes later, more confused, still "looking for ideas".

In the following paragraphs we will list and discuss a series of questions that should start right after the Meet and Greet. We will talk about the right time to ask them, what to do with the answers, and present some follow-up questions.

Open And Closed Questions

In a lot of training manuals, authors like to talk about Open Questions and Closed Questions. To me, this drifts off a bit into the theoretical, and

"Four basic

qualifying questions that MUST be asked of every bedding up. They are not optional." in all my years of selling bedding, I cannot remember a single time that I stopped before posing a question, and asked myself, "Am I asking an open question or a closed question?"

A Closed question normally requires a very short answer, and gives brief and specific information. An example of this is, "What size bed are you looking for?" An Open question invites a more lengthy, conversational type answer. An example of this might be, "How did you find out about our store?" If you like to dissect your qualifying questions in this way, no problem, go right ahead. Just don't forget, the purpose of qualifying questions, open or closed, is to get answers, whether specific or general, that will help solve the customer's problems and get the sale.

Questions For The Bedding Customer

There are four basic qualifying questions that MUST be asked of every bedding UP. They may be asked in any order, but these questions are not optional. They should be asked very shortly AFTER the greeting, and BEFORE showing any beds.

] What size are you looking for?

Now, they don't always buy the same size they came in to see. Sometimes, they change their mind, and if they change their mind, it usually is because the RSA reminds them of something they had not previously thought about. That being said, however, the RSA must know the size they are thinking about.

#2Will this be for the master bedroom or for a guest room?

Notice the wording here. I phrase it this way on purpose. The RSA should never assume the shopper or shoppers will be using the bed, either singly or together. I've seen RSAs offend a shopping couple by asking, "Is this for y'all to sleep on?"

Their indignant response, "No, this is my aunt!," and they huffily turn to the other person and say, "Let's look somewhere else!" The phrasing I use is tactful and inoffensive. It shouldn't anger anyone. I often get a response something like; "I guess it's for the master, we don't even have a guest room."

Sometimes, the customer will tell you "guest room" when he really means "master bed room." Why do they do this? They probably don't want to spend much money, but they don't want to look cheap, either. One hint to look for is when the customer is VERY interested in how the quest room mattress feels. The smart RSA will suggest, "Have you thought about retiring your old master mattress to the guest room and buying a new mattress for the master bedroom?" This tactic avoids embarrassing the customer when it becomes apparent that he was attempting to deceive the RSA.

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RSA STEPS OF THE SALE

3 Do you prefer a harder feel or a softer feel?

Instead of asking question number three, a lot of sales trainers and professional sales associates prefer to show the customer two top-of-the-line beds with significantly different feels, one being hard and one being soft. The customer frequently does not know what he wants, and sometimes does not know what a soft bed should feel like. Testing the first two beds also provides an easy opportunity to "start at the top", as so many mattress reps suggest. This technique is pretty much the same as asking question number three, and the RSA should explain to the new UP why he is showing these two beds right at the get-go. It is to be hoped that this demo will settle the question of hard or soft for the RSA and the customer

I prefer to use the word "hard" instead of "firm." All premium beds should give firm support. Even soft beds have interior firmness to provide proper spinal alignment and back support. When we say hard or soft, we mean the exterior, surface feel.

The problem with the two-bed trial, instead of asking question 3 is that not every customer is interested in being educated about hard and soft. A lot of customers, especially single men, are in a hurry; they want to take it with them, and they don't really care all that much how it feels, which brings us to our next question.

4 How soon will you need your new mattress?

One of the hardcore principles of

the bedding business is the importance of urgency in bed buyers. Some buyers are willing to wait, but some must have a bed tonight, or right now. These are the ones that look for the headline in your ad, "Buy it today and sleep on it tonight!!"

The customer walking in your store may not tell you, unless you ask, that he absolutely must have the bed tonight. That is why you ask the question. If he or she brought their pickup truck with the intention of taking home a mattress, then the RSA better show them ONLY what he has in stock. There is nothing quite as frustrating for buyer and seller than to spend thirty minutes on a great presentation, and then inform the would-be buyer that he'll only have to wait seven to ten days for his new bed, and the wouldbe buyer suddenly blurts out, "I can't wait! I need this bed tonight!"

Ask the question, save yourself and your customer some grief. If he needs it tonight, only show what you KNOW you have in stock.

Interpreting The Answers

Now that we have listed the first four of what will be many qualifying questions, lets pause a moment and discuss the many ways customers can answer qualifying questions.

First, we hope the customers will give clear, intelligent and honest answers to the RSAs questions; questions that are easily interpreted and followed up on by a skillful RSA.

But, unfortunately, customers may

decide to answer your questions deceptively or even dishonestly. Why would they do this? I don't know why, but some will. Some may just not answer your questions at all, remaining silent while the RSA chatters on. When this happens, the perceptive RSA must pay greater attention to other signals, such as body language, facial expressions, eye contact, and especially, interactions between couples, if two people are shopping. This is really subject matter for a separate article, but must be an integral part of any qualifying procedure. Learn to read and interpret all signals from the customer.

"The RSA must have a ready arsenal of qualifying questions."

More Qualifying Questions

There are a lot more questions than just the first four. This does not mean that the RSA poses every one of these other questions to every customer. There is a correct time and place for each question, and sometimes it takes years of experience to know when and how to ask them, and on the flip side, when not to ask them.

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"Why should the RSA ask health-related questions, if he is not going to diagnose

health-related questions, it he is not going to diagnose and make a recommendation?"

The following paragraphs list a number of qualifying questions organized by subject matter, such as medical issues, comfort issues, etc. No narrative or sales situation where various questions can be used will accompany them since there are so many different paths any given sale can take. Consider this a smorgasbord of qualifying questions for the RSA to pick and choose from as needed. Until the RSA is intimately familiar with a vast arsenal of multi-faceted qualifying question, and has them ready for all occasions, I might suggest that this list be carried while working on the showroom floor.

Health & Medical Related Questions

Before we start, remember that RSAs are not health professionals. I have seen RSAs ask a few health-related questions, then based on the answers they receive, recommend which mattress a shopper should buy. DON'T DO THIS! The average RSA is not qualified to make recommendations, especially health-related ones. Even chiropractors and M.D.s should probably stay out of the bed-recommending business.

So, why should the RSA ask health-related questions, if he is not going to diagnose and make a recommendation? The answer is, you ask the questions for the same reason you ask all other qualifying questions; to search out everything that will help the customer make a sensible buying decision, and in doing so, show to the buyer that you are a professional sales person who cares about the customer's well being.

] Do you have any back problems?

It is a rare individual that does not have an occasional back problem. Back problems vary in severity, as everyone knows.

Note: I have heard RSAs ask the follow-up question, "Is it skeletal or is it muscular?" There is nothing wrong with the question as it is, as long as you don't use the answer to make a mattress recommendation.

#2Are your back problems severe, chronic or sporadic?

You ask this mostly as a lead-in to question #3.

3 Are you currently being treated by a physician or a chiropractor for back problems?

The answer to this question can be very helpful to the RSA. You now can have a clear pathway to making the sale by asking the next question.

4 Has your physician made a recommendation for a type of mattress?

If the physician has made a recommendation or even written a prescription, show beds that meet that recommendation. If the doctor has selected the bed she wants them to buy, all the RSA has to do is find it on the showroom floor.

Other health-related questions can include:

#5 Does your back ever hurt (morning backache) when you get out of bed?

This is also a "sleep and comfort question." If the shopper gives you a "yes," a good response by the RSA is, "Some studies have shown that morning backache is frequently caused by a mattress that is not giving proper back support and spinal alignment. Do you think it is possible that your mattress might be causing your morning backache?" This, of course, leads to a discussion of their old mattress, involving a different series of questions.

Are you aware of the importance of R.E.M. (rapid eye movement) sleep?

There are volumes of information

"The real heart of selling bedding is to find out why they aren't sleeping well, and to find them a bed that will improve their sleep and comfort."



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regarding the sleep cycle and the different levels of sleep. I suggest that the RSA go online and find out as much as possible about the phenomenon of sleep. R.E.M. sleep is essential to your customers' health and well-being, and mattress comfort has a great effect on sleep quality. While you do not want to use this to make a recommendation to the buyer, imparting this information makes you look more professional and will alert the buyer to the need to buy a better mattress.

Do you have any allergy problems?

Medical science, according to what I read, is only beginning to scratch the surface on the study of allergic reactions and conditions. As far as the RSA is concerned, however, the old bed, old sheets and the old pillow may be virulent sources of nasty allergens such as dead skin, dust mite waste, and body fluids. This is why you ask the allergy question. Keep reminding the customer how bad their old bedding may be for them.

Sleep & Comfort Questions

There are so many possible comfort-related qualifying questions, that I probably don't have enough space left to discuss them all. Why should the RSA ask comfort-related questions? Because that is what we are selling! Comfort and sleep, via better bedding, are our products.

Do you prefer a hard or soft feel? (One of the first four, already discussed.)

What do you NOT like about your old bed?

The real heart of selling bedding is to find out why they aren't sleeping well, and to find them a bed that will improve their sleep and comfort. It helps to find out what they don't like. This question will probably prompt a series of answers which will not only

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give the RSA useful information, but will also prompt even more comfort questions.

3 How well are you sleeping now on your old bed?

Usually not well. That's why they are in your store.

Do you have trouble going to sleep and staying asleep?

Of course, there are many causes of poor sleep, unrelated to bedding, but while the RSA needs to know these things, our concern is good quality bedding.

"Comfort

and sleep, via better bedding are our products. That's why RSAs ask comfort related questions."



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5 Do you sleep better or worse now than you did one year ago?

If worse, their old mattress is deteriorating.

How long have you been sleeping uncomfortably?

Amazing as it seems, a lot of people will put up with an old, bad mattress for five years before finally straggling in to look at a new mattress, (and even longer with pillows!)

7 If you have a morning back-ache, does it go away after you've been up for a while?

If so, this is usually the sign of an old mattress. Make their life better. Sell them a new, better mattress. They will thank you.

Do you sleep on your back, side, or stomach?

I hate to generalize, but I have noticed that stomach sleepers usually prefer harder beds, while side sleepers more often prefer softer beds. Only use this information to show beds for their consideration. Do not recommend a bed. Let them make the decision.

Do you sleep better in a recliner than in your own bed?

If yes, this might be a hint to show the benefits of adjustable beds. Of course, you should show adjustable beds to every customer, if the opportunity presents itself.

1 O Is a hard bed more comfortable; or is it that you've heard a hard bed is better for your back?

Be careful with the customer who says he wants a hard bed. There are some people who like hard beds, but some customers come in with the idea that the hard bed will improve their back conditions. I have years of anecdotal evidence to suggest that hard beds are not better for your back. For

"Be Careful with the customer who says he wants a hard bed."

an amusing story on this subject, go to page 94 in my book, How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual.

Does your arm, leg, hip, shoulder, etc. "go to sleep" during the night?

This is a sign of excessive pressure points in the mattress.

2 Do you toss and turn while sleeping?



Again, this is a sign of pressure points causing discomfort.

13 When was the last time you awoke fully refreshed and rested?

This question should build on the already growing dissatisfaction with the old mattress (and maybe pillow.)

To Summarize

This article has just begun to scratch the surface of qualifying questions. We covered two general topics. In our next Better Bedding Sales article, we will cover the next installment on the same subject; more qualifying questions. The RSA should never run out of qualifying questions. They are the keys that unlock the door to the sale!

About David Benbow: David Benbow, a twenty-three year veteran of the mattress and bedding industry, is owner of Mattress Retail Training Company offering retailers retail guidance; from small store management to training retail sales associates. His years of hands-on experience as a retail sales associate, store manager, sales manager/trainer and store owner in six different metropolitan areas qualifies him as an expert in selling bedding. David is the author of the recently published book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual", a complete, text book for mattress and bedding retail sales associates, beginner and experienced professional alike. The book

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

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





by Janet Holt-Johnstone

t's true that dreams really can and do come true if you look (and work!) hard enough and long enough. But maybe it happens a bit more often in Kansas.

In 1900, Frank Baum's whimsy discovered the Land of Oz. It was thirty-three years later that Ben and Eva Winter envisioned their own magic at Emporia, Kansas. "A furniture store, along with a gas station, a dog kennel and a restaurant called Howdy Come In," their son, Jeff, told us. "They pretty much did whatever they could to make ends meet during the Depression. Furniture was the only thing that lasted past the Depression. Except for the home-made frozen custard they served which became a part of almost every family or work family gathering I can remember!"

Now, take a lion's leap to the summer of 2015, an over-the-rainbow sighting of the Furniture Mall of Kansas, 150,000 square feet of fantasy in the city of Olathe, once long ago, a stop on the Oregon Trail. It's within shouting distance of Topeka, the capital city and center of government, seven universities, commerce and bustling industry. Noted, too, in song and story, for its railway, the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe!

Inside the more than three-footballfield space of the Mall there are five individual stores, Discovery Furniture, RoomMakers, Marling's Furniture, Mattress Headquarters and Abbey Flooring Headquarters.

Imagine you are a guest, just arrived, and as design Wizard-in-Chief Martin Roberts exclaims, "The stage is set for performance! First, the Café creates a social grouping area where the customer can linger longer and discuss their purchases (or prospective purchases) in the company of other family members with plenty of natural light to encourage them to stop for refreshments."

Curved Walkways

Within the Mall, "The (enticingly!) curved walkways are intended to direct customers to high traffic areas in the back of the store. As guests walk down them, their eyes travel from side to side, seeing the furniture displays along the way. Bedrooms need higher wall space so they work well in the rear of the store. Dining rooms are usually located in the center so the customer will walk past them on their way to strong destination areas like bedrooms and recliners. The customer service area needs to be centrally located but also within view of the

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The NIWA is an association consisting of quality furniture builders located in the heart of Amish country in Northeast Indiana. All products are american made and built locally. The NIWA Furniture Expo is an important opportunity for more than 80 exhibitors and the hundreds of buyers, dealers and guests to discuss ideas, identify customer trends, and reveal new possibilities for future strength, sales and momentum.

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The two-day 2016 Expo extravaganza at the Michiana Event Center (February 29 and March 1) will include picturesque furniture displays, diverse products and innovative designs. The event offers attendees practical and inspiring ideas to help show and explain to customers how handcrafted hardwood furniture is one of the best investments for a home or office.

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front door so customers can easily get the help they need."

Martin Roberts is a veteran of more than five decades of diverse high profile design. A student of the internationally renowned Sir Terence Conran, their association eventually led to a Habitat Retail Stores partnership. His award winning team, now focused on the home furnishings industry, last year alone was responsible for the "look" of more than a million square feet of home and appliance stores in six countries. "I've designed everything from potato peelers to cars to global airport terminals and duty-free luxury shops as well as creating the iconic look and feel of Barnes & Nobles

(Martin inspired the placement of coffee outlets in book stores!) and the popular Sheetz café-grocerygas stations. I've worked on every continent of the world, and my work is definitely influenced by my past travels and experiences. I continue to build on it."

Easy Navigation

But back to your tour! Large, color-coded rings hang above various sections of the Mall, "They identify the furnishings under them and create destinations for the customer to travel to while experiencing the other furnishings along the way," continues Martin. "It also makes it less confusing to navigate the complex geometric mazes in the store. The ring colors coordinate with the color flags outside, representing both the multiple offerings in





Amish Headquarters The Amish Headquarters features the framework of an authentic Amish barn built by Amish furniture makers along with Amish bedroom and dining furniture.

Congratulation Station

A fascinating display of vintage photos that reflect the Winter's family foundation of history, security and trust. The Station was designed to congratulate the customer for making their purchase.

Marlings Ring

The Marlings Ring invites customers to the Marlings department and is just one example of the five store brands found at the Furniture Mall of Kansas. The others are RoomMakers Furniture, Discovery Furniture, Abbey Flooring Headquarters and the Mattress Headquarters. DON'T MISS THESE HIGH POINT MARKET SPECIALS.

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the store and the color square in the corporate logo."

You're suddenly aware of a structure within the structure. Martin explains, "Sixty percent of Americans prefer solid wood furniture that's well constructed like the Amish make. So we named one area 'Amish Barn' and actually constructed a barn with posts and planks and with the help of Amish artisans, created the 'theater' to display our solid wood line of furniture." (Featured furniture line is 'Amish Impressions', by Fusion Designs.) "The barn also makes the area easily seen from across the store."

Jeff added, "We have no actual Amish connection other than a passion for well made furniture. And what better way to showcase Amish made furniture than feature an Amish made solid cherry timber barn?! We are always looking for ways to add interest and excitement to our stores that, in turn, add fun and excitement to the shopping experience. The experience



can't be boring, or people can just shop on the Internet!"

Use of Technology

More surprises ahead! You've entered a realm of enveloping serenity, surrounded by many mattresses and anchored by... an enormous, two-story fish tank! Said Martin, "I originally came up with the idea of placing a fish tank in the mattress department to create a calming, restful environment and to add a source of entertainment. Since an actual fish tank with real water and real fish wouldn't work, Jamie Winter (an electrical engineer and brother to Jeff) came up with the virtual tank idea. He designed three curved plexiglas projection screens with a projector on the inside. It can show colorful Caribbean fish or be changed to show sharks. It entertains the kids while Mom and Dad are shopping for mattresses!

"Retail is all about providing a rewarding emotional experience for the customer, so it's like setting the stage for a performance. An example, the recliner department in the Mall is deliberately set up like an amphithe-



The newest Furniture Mall of Kansas store in Olathe, Kansas is housed in the former Benchmark Home Furnishings building encompasses 150,000 square feet and five individual store brands.

ater with wall projectors to show and educate the customer about the 75 recliners on display. The same can be said for the virtual aquarium."

An additional enhancement, there are four different "music zones" within the Mall, one each for RoomMakers, Discovery, Marling's and Mattress Headquarters, each chosen for the guests most likely to be shopping in those stores.

Also marked by a hanging color coded ring near the front of the store is the Congratulation Station. Here there is a fascinating display of vintage photos that reflect the Winter's family foundation of history, security and trust. Martin said, "The Station was designed to congratulate the customer for making their purchase. And it's also surrounded by impulse-buy items to increase the sale." Clever!

Managed Growth

The interactive Winter's/Roberts connection was a happening of a decade ago when they met through Furniture First, the national buying group. "I began working with the Winters on an old 35,000 square foot grocery store building in Lawrence, Kansas, that they needed revamped into a furniture store. We created three door fronts for their Mattress, Discovery and Ashley brands that all led to a central location and the first Congratulations Station check out.

"Then, several years later, they contacted me to work on another location for them. This was an old, two-story Macy's store space that anchored a mall. The 150,000 square foot space with five entrances was a huge undertaking with more than its share of challenges, but after six months of hard work it all came together.

"The recliner department in the Mall

is deliberately set up like an amphitheater with wall projectors to show and educate the customer about the 75 recliners on display."



Pictured above, The Mattress Headquarters has a stunning, two-story-tall, virtual aquarium that sits in the center of the Mattress department in the center of the store. Requiring 10 computers and 10 projectors, the aquarium was designed by co-owner Jamie Winter, an electrical engineer by trade. Fully interactive, customers can actually "feed" the fish. The design of the mattress department allows for tremendous selections (there are some 100 beds), as well as privacy. The gentle movement of the fish and the beautiful projections of fish on the digital screens makes the space incredibly effective.

After two stores under our belt, they approached me about the third one." A natural progression.

Flashing back, the Winter's quintessential American dream began in the late 1870s with Jeff and Jamie's great great grandparents. (The Winter's and the Baum family, by the way, share an affinity with the philosophy of the Brothers Grimm through their Saxon/ German ancestry. It's reasonably safe to say they all carried a potent mix of determination, persistence, practicality, optimism and love of life in their portmanteau...along with, in the Winter's case, their secret family weapon!)

The Winters settled first in Iowa, then in western Kansas. "But this is a family business, not a dynasty!" insists Jeff. Right now, circa 2015, "Both our mother and father as well as our wives are involved, my wife, June, full time. When you have a passion for what you do, it creeps into almost every area of your life, so even though our kids are not actively involved in the business... they have been involved all their lives!

"The furniture store opened by our grandfather in 1933 was called Winter Furniture. I don't know how big it was, only that it was in a converted dairy barn. Our folks, Bob and Joyce, bought out our grand-

"We believe our guests want big selection, but not the big box feel, so by dividing a big space into three furniture stores, a mattress store and a flooring store, we'd make it easier for them to shop and keep some of the small store feel."

"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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Recliner Ring The Recliner Ring is approximately 50 ft. wide x 6 ft. high and acts as a giant signpost inviting customers to the recliner department.

small store feel our guests have come to appreciate. The addition of Flooring Headquarters was to further help our guests to find more of what they need to have, an exceptionally beautiful and comfortable home, all in one convenient store."

In 2013, the Winters established their first mall in Topeka, 193,000 square feet. "Although the concept was the same... Big Selection~Local Connection, one destination broken into five smaller, easier to shop stores... obviously the layout is different. The Topeka Mall is on two floors and the new Olathe Mall, all on one floor. And I hope we improved the look and flow from what we've learned as there is always a better way! Martin is one of the best retail thinkers I know and we have had a great partnership, using him for the design of both the Topeka and Olathe Furniture Malls. We always come away from a meeting with new ideas and thoughts to improve.

"It was in Lawrence that we structured our first version of our Mall concept in about 45,000 square feet that included Discovery Furniture, RoomMakers and Mattress Headquarters. This location was not large enough to include Marling's Furniture and Flooring Headquarters stores, and is located about halfway between the Topeka Mall and the Olathe Mall. It just made sense to close this location which we did at the end of March. Our Lawrence work family became the first members of our Olathe family. We opened the Olathe Mall in June with 109 employees."

The configuration now includes the Topeka Furniture Mall of Kansas and the Olathe Furniture Mall of Kansas retail locations, and the Distribution Center and Clearance Center in Topeka that serve both locations.

"We are always looking for ways to add interest and excitement to our stores that, in turn, add fun and excitement to the shopping experience. The experience can't be boring, or people can just shop on the Internet!"

father's partner in 1967 and ran Winter Furniture with our uncle until they sold to him in 1995. And, when we opened in 2000, the name of the store changed to Discovery Furniture.

"After that opening in Topeka, we were all talking about how to speed up our growth, and we

decided that the best way to do that in the Topeka market was to open a competing store with a different model. So, in 2003, we opened RoomMakers as an all Ashley store. As the mattress category remained strong after 2007, it became more important to our business. Stand alone mattress stores were stealing market share, so we developed our own mattress concept called Mattress Headquarters with the help of Knorr Marketing. Doug Knorr has become a friend and continues to be instrumental in shaping our strateay of how to market our changing and somewhat complicated five store brand.

The Mall Concept

"As we were planning our Topeka Mall concept in 2011-2012, Marling's Furniture, one of the long standing (75 years) furniture stores in Topeka, was looking to sell their building and close. Marling's had an excellent reputation and a higher market share in the good to upper end than we did, so it just made sense to keep their name alive as well as extend our offerings in better goods. So, our Mall concept would include three furniture brands covering three distinct price ranges from good to better and best.

"We believe our guests want big selections, but not the big box feel, so by dividing a big space into three furniture stores, a mattress store and a flooring store, we'd make it easier for them to shop and keep some of the





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"Our simplified business philosophy

of 'Happy Family. Happy Guests. Happy Business' done in that order, drives the right decisions and behaviors that can make a positive difference in peoples' lives."

Good, Better, Best

The "good, better, best" concept came about "When we were developing our Topeka Mall in 2011-2012. It was really driven by trying to find a solution for the paradox of our guests. They want a big selection to choose from, but they don't want to spend a lot of time narrowing down their selection. That's what we like about the Internet, it takes almost unlimited selections and allows us to sort it down to what we really want to look at very quickly."

The Winter's enormous buying power of "more than \$1 billion annually" has to do with their membership in "Furniture First, a great group of progressive retailers that work together to bring the best product values and retail experience to our customers. We have developed great friendships and are always learning from many of these savvy furniture retailers. Being part of a Furniture First performance group is one of our most valuable investments in time outside our business."

The Furniture Malls of Kansas share an innovative website, "Designed by MicroD with direction from our team and our marketing partner Knorr Marketing. We may sell online as a convenience to our guests. However, our main focus is on providing an exciting in-store shopping experience because we believe guests that have this in-store experience are much happier with their selection."

Customer Service Cliché

And the Winter's Customer Service ethos? "We believe our simplified business philosophy of 'Happy Family. Happy Guests. Happy Business,' done in that order, drives the right decisions and behaviors that can make a positive difference in peoples' lives, be it family or guest.

"Customer service is such an overused cliché, it isn't a list of things you do or don't do, it is more how you do what you do and why you do it in the first place. Or more important, how we make a guest feel. Who wouldn't agree that in retail, guest experience is one of the most sought after differentiators? The funny part is almost every retailer believes they have the 'best' customer service in their area of expertise. However, if you ask shoppers to give you specific examples of when they received what they felt was great customer experience... you won't get very many examples. It's easy to make the list of what needs to happen, but a very different thing to consistently deliver on it. We spend a lot of time as most retailers do, focusing on developing and growing our people. Because the business we are really in is the people business.

Howdy Come In

"Our strategy? First, we have to believe the right things, do the hard work of earning trust by doing the right things, and keep our focus on serving others. We have the opportunity of turning the ordinary into something special.

"We do a few unique things for a furniture store, like our fully furnished café called the Howdy Come In, a direct salute to our grandparents, that makes home-made frozen custard, cookies, coffee, etc., that we mostly give away to our family and guests.

"And we operate our own delivery service so we can continue to own the experience of our guests, and because



Ceiling Rings

Martin Roberts designed the new Furniture Mall of Kansas with a series of large information ceiling rings, like this welcome ring, that are visible throughout the store, easily guiding the customers to the various shopping departments.

Upholstery Flooring

"Martin thinks differently from most designers," says Jeff Winter, co-owner. "To him, it's not just about aesthetics and how things look, but how things flow and how they will be received by guests in the store." Shown below are selections leading to the flooring department.





Retail Intimacy

The solution to achieving a sense of intimacy in a retail format of this size was to have no straight lines. Everything is curved and the walkways flow through the store in a way that allows customers to actually see all the furniture because everywhere they turn they encounter another focal point.

we believe they will be happier with our service.

"Both our Malls have an in-home design team that help our guests with space planning, selection and projects. We have been doing design classes for several years and have around 150 to 200 women attending each class day in Topeka. We've not started these events in Olathe yet, but are planning to roll out a new format in the fall. We have several design areas in each Mall with fabrics and large screen TVs that we use to show product as well as space planning."

Many Interesting Stories

Over the years, as might be expected, many "interesting stories" have evolved. The brothers, Jeff and Jamie, "Had no clue we would ever end up working in furniture, even though we grew up in it. Our folks have always loved this business, most all of our family vacations I can remember as a kid had at least one stop at a furniture store that they wanted to learn from. And they were not the most popular stops on the trip from the kids' perspective!"

Came a time when, "Our folks had been without a store for almost five years. They were 65 and we thought they were retiring. I received a 'phone call from my dad and he said, 'Your mom and I are thinking about opening a furniture store in Topeka.' Surprised, I asked, 'Why do you want to do that?' He replied, 'Because we think we can do it better. I'll send you an article.' A few days later I received a package that had a Wall Street Journal in it with an article that basically said something like, 'Whatever You Do, Don't Invest in Retail' because it's done so poorly'. I called him and said I got the article, but it didn't seem to be supporting his position. He said, 'If it's being done so poorly, it should be pretty easy for us to shine above the rest!'

"All of us kids tried to talk them out of it but soon switched gears to support them when it became clear that they were passionate about doing it. A few weeks later, we were all at Jamie and Jeanne's house in New Braunfels, Texas, for Thanksgiving, and the main topic of conversation was helping our folks with ideas and plans for the new store. On the way home, I told my dad that it was exciting that he was doing this. He quickly said, 'Well, what would make it exciting for you?' To which I replied, 'You know I like making things, not necessarily selling things', and that was all that was said at that time. You have to understand that I had never given any thought to ever being in the furniture business. I loved what I was doing at Maytag, I went to work there straight out of college, and I loved the people I was

working with. I had the great fortune to learn and grow in a lot of different manufacturing and engineering roles. I'd invested 16 years there, and considered it my home." (Jeff has a degree in mechanical engineering from Kansas State.)

"But the idea of starting a business from scratch was exciting. Being closer to family was appealing. Going into business with my dad, well, I would probably never have that opportunity again. After a few weeks of thinking and praying about this with June, we decided to go for it. We moved our family to Topeka and opened

What about those fish tanks? "We have found the most important aspect of any mattress department is to ensure it draws guests into the department. The tank draws guests from clear across the store."



Discovery Furniture in 2000. What fun it continues to be!

"Jamie's story follows a similar path. He went to work for Motorola out of college with an electrical engineering degree and an MBA. Jamie had many fun roles in auto electronics manufacturing, including moving his family to China to start a plant from scratch. In 2009, after 16 years in manufacturing, he felt the call to come join us in the furniture business. Our mom likes to call this one of the most exciting surprises we've ever had, and I agree!"

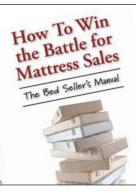
We asked Jamie for his input! "I grew up in the furniture business and spent much time as a teenager delivering furniture and doing whatever odd jobs my dad could come up with. My first job at the store, assigned by my Dad, was to clean out the bottom of the freight elevator pit in the basement. Dad was nice enough to raise the elevator up a foot so I could slip between the elevator and the floor to get to the bottom of the pit and he told me he would stay there to help pull me out and ensure nobody lowered the elevator on me which was comforting, I guess. Yes, there was trash to clean up in the pit, but the job really involved shoveling black slop more than anything. I finished the job and was ready to crawl out of the pit when I had my real introduction to retail! Customers always come first, and Dad was nowhere to be found!

"From the time I was a kid, I've always enjoyed figuring out how things work. Electricity was fascinating to me as it ran practically everything, but I had no idea how it worked. I could take apart electronics and put them back together to see them work again, but I had no understanding of how they worked. The only way to understand electricity was to go to school. I enjoyed college (Kansas State University) and had a great time in the engineering field.

"I came back to the business in 2009 after enjoying 16 years with Motorola in electronics manufacturing. I was thrilled to come home and be close to family. Running a small business is challenging and a blast!"

What about those fish tanks? "We have found the most important aspect of any mattress department is to ensure it draws guests into the department. We spent considerable time brainstorming on creating some type of attraction to draw guests into the department. We wanted something unique and fun,

"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."



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"We have the opportunity of turning the ordinary into something special."

yet calming for a sleep department. A digital fish tank was the result. The tank draws guests from clear across the store.

"The first digital fish tank was implemented in Topeka. That tank is 14' in diameter, 10' tall and consists of four projectors to create the tank. The tank also has an interactive feature where you can use arm movements that are captured by a camera to 'feed' the fish. Once the food is dropped, the fish will eat just like in a real tank.

"We improved on the first version with the new Olathe store. The new tank is 16' in diameter, 16' tall and consists of 10 projectors to create the tank. An additional four projectors round out the department to create the total environment." Just a touch of Oz!

As you might expect, the Winters and their work family are very active in their local communities. Jeff especially talked about the Topeka Rescue Mission and also the City Union Mission in Kansas City. "We've also worked with (celebrity designer) Angelo Surmelis on a room makeover for a Habitat for Humanity family in Kansas City."

We wondered if the Mall's winding "yellow brick roads" had ever welcomed a spectral Toto, but were told "no". Although maybe occasionally the resident Wizards permit Jamie's boxer, Hammer, and Jeff's German shorthair, Abbey, to stroll the precincts!

Family Secret Weapon

We talked before about the Winter's

family secret weapon, their homemade frozen custard. Jeff recounts the legend. "At almost every Winter family gathering, there was homemade frozen custard from a recipe that Grandma Kate brought with her from Germany. It used to be the kids' job to take turns cranking the handle on the freezer unless you were too small, then it was your job to sit on top of the bucket to help hold it in place. This tradition carried on to gatherings with our work family and, when we opened our Olathe Mall, we thought it was time to share the tradition with all our guests. So now we make and serve Grandma's Frozen Custard to all our quests. I think we can safely say we are the only furniture store in the world that makes and serves home-made frozen custard. I think our quests like it... we make about 30 gallons a week.

"My folks found a story about our great great grandmother Kate, then living in western Kansas. Kate used to cut blocks of ice from the Pawnee River during the winter, kept it frozen underground covered with straw and dirt, and used it in the summer to make her special recipe. People would come from miles around to have a bowl of her 'famous' frozen custard." Tradition!

Future of Furniture

Jeff sees, "The future of furniture as filled with change and opportunities to better use technology for customizing the shopping experience, delivering





Above, Angelo Surmelis presenting a room makeover for a Habitat for Humanity family in Kansas City. Also, the fully furnished café called the "Howdy Come In".

more exciting product presentations from almost unlimited selection, making products uniquely fitting the style and look of our guests' homes, and to deliver faster. However, I'm pretty sure our future success will still be dependent on people... the quality of each individual that serves, and the quality of their leaders."

Design & DESIGNER

Three generations of furniture designers at Otto & Moore reflect on where furniture design has been, and where it is going.

by Russell Bienenstock

ow we think as a society about furniture design has shifted along with the ways in which designs are conceptualized, merchandised and executed. Many Furniture World readers remember seeing furniture styles like Chippendale, Sheraton and Early American on retail selling floors. Empire and it's various new and old world incarnations were there too.

No longer do legions of consumers shop for formal Queen Ann dining rooms with their signature cabriole legs, wide flaring seats, high polish, and cockle shell motifs, crafted in solid Cherry.

Some things, however, haven't changed all that much. There is still a lot of sameness at retail, and some say a lack of imagination. At the same time, possibilities have opened up for furniture retailers to be more creative in choosing furniture designs that differentiate their brands.

John Gloag in his excellent book, A Social History of Furniture Design from B.C. 1300 to A.D. 1960, noted that, "Furniture reveals many confidential things about the social life of the past and present; like architecture, it illuminates the story of civilization in nearly every country, and provides an intimate, personal record of habits, postures, manners, fashions and follies."

At a basic level it's the professional furniture designer's job to create furniture that meets certain criteria specified by manufacturers. But the finished products must do more than that. They must address the furniture buyer's beliefs, physical needs, style sensibilities and budget. As Golag noted, furniture must reflect intimate, habits, postures, manners, fashions and follies.

This issue contains the first in a series of articles that discuss the social, artistic and economic forces that have propelled furniture design to its present state. We will ask what furniture says about our society today, and how it might look in the future.

To do this, Furniture World will speak to leading furniture designers who will share their views about furniture design, it's form, function, and purpose.

Three Generations

What follows are the thoughts of three generations in the same

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"Stores like Jordan's, RC Willey,

Mathis Brothers, City Furniture and Baer's have to compete with this new generation of retail style leaders. It is an interesting game for them to play."

family of furniture designers at the High Point-based, multiple Pinnacle award-winning furniture design firm Otto and Moore. The generations are represented by William Dudley Moore, Sr., Chairman of the Board/ CEO; his son William Dudley Moore, Jr., President of Otto and Moore; daughter Carolyn Shaw, furniture designer and Vice President; and grandchildren Liz Moore, and William (Will) Dudley Moore, III, also furniture designers.

The History

The Moore's, have deep roots in the furniture industry. "Around the turn of the 20th century," Says, Dudley Moore, Jr., "my great grandfather owned a successful chair manufacturing business, Home Chair Company, located in the mountains of North Carolina along with two of his three sons. The company was sold to Burlington industries in the early '70s. There wasn't a job in the business for my father, the youngest son."

"I went to NC State for two years," Dudley Moore, Sr., continues. "When the Korean War came along, I went into the Air Force, for five and a half years serving as an Aircraft Observer Bombardier. After that, I worked for furniture designer J. Gordon Perlmutter of Plainfield New Jersey. He was quite a famous designer at the time.

"Other well-known designers who worked for Perlmutter early on were Dick Barrow, Irving Sabo, and Marty Lyman. Leonard Eisen was a competitor of ours at that point in time. In 1960, Mr. Hubert Rockwell,

er5

who designed furniture back in the 1930s,'40s and '50s approached me about coming to work with him and another designer Walter Otto. We established an office, called Rockwell, Otto, and Moore. Walter Otto and I did design work for everybody in the business. Of course, some of these manufacturers are long gone. These were mostly manufacturers we called 'car-load Charleys', mid and low priced, such as Bassett and Kemp. We had very little exposure to the upper end at that time, but over the years, our business has grown and Dudley Jr. has been responsible for our success at the high end."

"In the early '70s, Mr. Moore left the business," adds Dudley Jr., "and the firm became Otto and Moore. We purchased Walter's interest in the business in the 1980s but kept the

The three generations at Otto and Moore represented by William Dudley Moore, Sr., Chairman of the Board/ CEO (center); his son, William Dudley Moore, Jr., President of Otto and Moore (top left); daughter Carolyn Shaw, furniture designer and Vice President (bottom left); and grandchildren Liz Moore (bottom right), and William (Will) Dudley Moore, III (top right), also furniture designers.

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"Our generation wants

furniture that's, organic and comfortable. We don't see as much separation between formal dining and casual dining. It's every day dining, and that casual trend applies throughout the house as well."

name because it was well-known in the industry by that time."

He notes that he, like many second generation members of family furniture businesses started working early, "as the janitor when I was 12 years old, working my way up to do drafting, studied engineering, then came to work here in 1981.

"I did consider going to design

school but wanted to get a broader education so I attended North Carolina State University in Raleigh, that at that time had a curriculum called Furniture Manufacturing and Management. I've found what I learned there to be useful for my design work because I know what can be manufactured efficiently, and how to take advantage of machinery

& DESIGNER





Salon (above) and Jet Set (right), designed by Dudley Moore, Jr., Lenny Chapman and Laura Niece of Otto & Moore for Bernhardt in October 2013 and October 2014, respectfully. Ushered in a new trend of glamorous, tasteful modern design.



that our various clients are using. This allows them to provide more value to their retail customers."

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Carolyn Shaw took a different route, apparently skipping the janitorial work. She's studied at UNC Chapel Hill. "After graduating with a Studio Art degree," she says, "I illustrated architecture in Texas for seven years. I had worked at Otto & Moore in high school as an illustrator but didn't have a furniture design background. In the early 1990s my dad lured me back to the family business where I thought that I would head up the art side of our office that employed five illustrators. In those days we did freehand sketching for the most part, and a small level of engineering on computers. But since that time the business of design has changed drastically. Most of our clients are confident enough in their product direction that they don't require the illustrations we used to put out. Today we use freelance illustrators and I've sequed into the design world."

Liz Moore, at 25 years old, had a more formal design education. She told us, "I always had an interest in art and dabbled in furniture design, fashion design, and graphic design." After attending summer intensive programs at Virginia Commonwealth University and Savannah College of Art and Design she made the decision to study furniture design at Kendall College of Art and Design. Post graduation in 2013, she joined Otto & Moore. "Of course we grew up around furniture design, she explained, "Our grandfathers on both sides of the family were involved in the industry in some way, so it was always on my radar."

Will Moore adds that his father (Dudley Moore, Jr.) "Really encouraged both Liz and I to make sure we really wanted to go into the furniture business. I started by interning for Outlook International, a case goods quality-control sourcing company in Vietnam. That's where I became immersed in product development and decided to focus on the merchandising side of the furniture business. After graduating from NC State I worked for Lane Furniture in sales, then moved to the upholstery side with a smaller promotional company. Last year I joined Otto & Moore and have spent that time focusing on the wood portion of the business with an emphasis on the technical side,

"There's a trend toward buying disposable furniture, but it's not clear if it's a solely income-based behavior. These customers pay a lot less, but don't want to sacrifice how it looks or how it works."

Design & DESIGNER

mechanical, plus chemistry-based. I'm a little bit more technical than Liz, she's a much better artist than I am, but we make a good team."

Furniture Design Changes

As noted above, a lot has changed in the business of furniture design since Otto and Moore was founded. Furniture World asked each of the generations to offer their perspectives.

"In my dad's heyday," relates Dudley Jr., "furniture designers were more of an instrument. By that I mean that clients came to us saying, 'We need an 18th century collection, or a Victorian collection,' or whatever. Clients pretty much understood what the trends were, gave the designer his assignment, and he fulfilled it. Of course, the designer had to have the skill set, the imagination, and the artistic ability to see that vision through."

"When I came to work here," agrees Carolyn Shaw, "Otto & Moore designed more lower price point goods. A lot of it was very brassy, and by that I mean we did polyester finishes and furniture with extrusions. These are items that fortunately are not found at retail anymore. At that time manufacturers would come to us with specific, stylistic assignments; such as a request for an 18th century Queen Anne or a Duncan Phyfe group."

Dudley Sr., has a slightly different take on how the furniture design business has changed. "Back then, if we were instructed to design in a particular direction, we would say to the client, 'well these folks over here, who are style leaders, have gone in a good direction, and they are being successful, so I think we might go in that same direction.' That doesn't mean that we would knock 'em off." He observes that the process is not much different than what Otto and More does today with it's story (mood) boards described later in this article. It's still a matter of identifying trends in the market to find design directions that will resonate with customers.





National Geographic collection, designed by Dudley Moore, Jr., Matt Hurley and Lesli Chastain of Otto & Moore for Lane. This Pinnacle award winner in 2004, was one of the most successful British Colonial styled collections of all time.

The biggest change Otto and Moore's founder sees is, "Well for one thing, today it's a hell of a long way to get to the factory! This business of

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runnin' back and forth to China is a burden for furniture designers. When I designed for Dixie, which is now Lexington, I just got in the car and drove the 15 miles over there to meet with Henry Link and Smith Young, the guys who were running that company. We decided what we were going to do, and did it. It was a happy time."

Manufacturers Lose "Design Leader" Status

"Yes, There have been huge changes in the furniture industry since I came into the business," Dudley Moore, Jr. continues. "Much of that has to do with globalization and the departure of

"Just about any designer out there today should be using 1stdibs.com in some manner, and retailers too if they're smart. Pinterest, retail store websites and Tumblr are fantastic resources for finding images and ideas as well." most of the case goods industry from the Southeast. Once furniture started being produced offshore, it changed a lot of design parameters, but the untold bigger effect this has had on our industry is that a lot of the style leaders have passed by the wayside. When I began designing furniture, our industry, like many others, was organized with style leaders selling at higher price points. Lower priced lines took their styling cues from the leaders. From there the trends just tricked down the food chain to the low end.

"Furniture designers who worked at mid-price points often looked to companies like Henredon, Drexel and Thomasville for their design inspirations. For example, Henredon did a group called Scene One. That influenced a Lexington group and then a Stanley group, working its way down. Retailers also utilized style leaders as a road map for what they needed to show on their floors. "Because of this trickle down design effect from high to low end, in those days," Dudley Jr. observes, "a store like Havertys would show multiple Queen Anne-type 18th century-styled collections at different price points. The style was so popular that the purchase decision for consumers was often based mostly on what they could afford to put into their homes."

Retailers As The New Style Leaders

"The industry doesn't have that kind of style leadership any more, at least not from the manufacturing side," Dudley Jr. continues. What's happened is manufacturing leadership has been replaced to some extent by vertically oriented retailers such as Restoration Hardware that serve as style beacons for others in the industry."

"The manufacturers we do most



Paula Deen River House Collection, Designed by Dudley Moore, Lenny Chapman and Laura Niece of Otto & Moore for Universal: First introduced October 2008. It is one of the biggest selling licensed collections of the last ten years, and still a big seller for Universal.



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Mood Board used for "Modern Vintage" project



"A Mood Board,

also called a storyboard, tells the story of the design rather than just focusing on the design itself."

of our design work for sell to majors such as Jordan's, RC Willey, Mathis Brothers, City Furniture and Baer's. And these guys have to compete with this new generation of retail style leaders. It is an interesting game for them to play. Often they haven't created the kind of cohesive, style strategy and presentation that allows them to compete directly with operations like Restoration Hardware group."

Current Furniture Design Trends

When asked what trends they see at retail, Moore family members identify the following currents in the sea of furniture design choices.

More Lifestyle Driven:

"Pure traditional has gone out of fashion," says Dudley Jr. "Our job would be much easier if those style trends would cycle around like they used to. French would come in for a while, then it would go out, replaced by 18th century. That's not happening today.

"Furniture design right now is partly driven by lifestyle. The way people live today is so much different than it was, say, 30 years ago. That's why our industry has seen the decline of the formal dining room category. People want to live much more casually. They want to be comfortable in their homes. They aren't really trying to make an impression on guests by showing off heirloom looking furnishings. What they really want to own is furniture that their friends are going to think is cool. Also, the fragmentation I mentioned previously at the top of our industry has prevented the kind of leadership on the manufacturing level that consumers can rely on."

Practical Furniture Designs:

Carolyn Shaw tells Furniture World readers, "Younger customers coming along these days are practical. They're looking for value and for something they can afford, not always for great design. I don't think that most of them buy furniture thinking that they're going to own it 30 years down the road. My parents' generation bought furniture for their lifetime. My father still owns the furniture he bought as a young adult. But, I think that my nephew will be turning his furniture over every 10 years if he can. That type of thinking impacts the guality of the furniture consumers buy today."

"On the other hand," Liz Moore, adds, "at the high end, there are still plenty of wealthy people who are going to buy Bernhardt, but just because it's so beautiful. And they may keep it their lifetime and not turn it over."

Sustainable Casual Designs:

"Today the focus of our age group is on buzzwords like sustainable, organic, natural and casual," Will Moore tells us, "These are the words that marketers use to describe their designs.

"Instead of traditional versus modern, We are seeing a blend that incorporates low-sheen finishes, and lots of cleaner-looking, casual designs."

"Most people nowadays prefer a more casual, livable tone," Liz agrees. "And if we think back to our grandparent's house, they had formal dining room, formal living room, everything had high-sheen finishes in Mahogany and Walnut. Our generation wants furniture that's, organic and comfortable. We don't see as much separation between formal and casual dining. It's every day dining, and that casual trend applies throughout the house as well."

Wood Finish Trend:

Dudley Moore Jr. says, "The biggest trend we see by far, has more to do with finish than style. Dry finishes, which are almost no-finish, finishes are very strong."

Wood Species Less Important:

"When our grandfather designed furni-



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April, 2013 and a Pinnacle Finalist, it was designed in collaboration with the famed children's wear designer.

ture," Liz Moore tells us, "The mindset manufacturers and retailers had was, 'Oh, it's mahogany, it's beautiful, it's quality, people will want to buy that."" Adds Will Moore, "A big trend we are seeing, is less concern about wood species now, especially in the modern genres. Sometimes it's almost impossible to tell what type of wood a manufacturer is using."

Relaxed European Styles:

Says Dudley Jr., "There's a major trend moving toward very relaxed, casual European-styles featuring dry finishes on, designs that might have French or Italian influences."

Disposable & Smaller Scale:

"I think younger buyers are looking for multi-functional, smaller scale, apartment style furniture," Will Moore, suggests. "That's especially true at the lower-end. There's a trend we are seeing toward buying disposable furniture, but it's not clear if it's a solely income-based behavior. These customers pay a lot less for something, plan to keep it for a couple years and then get rid of it. Even so, they are not going to sacrifice how it looks or how

it works. They still want something that they like, think is pretty, and fits well in their living spaces."

"Also," adds Liz Moore, "there is a gap in the industry's understanding of what might be called disposal furniture, that could be addressed a little bit better. I feel like IKEA has it down in their style category. It's not really guality furniture, but that doesn't matter to some people. It's something that the regional chains could really address."

More Item Buying:

"The furniture design business has changed to reflect how our world has changed. Consumers don't go into retail stores and buy whole groups of furniture anymore. They buy by single items. That's why Otto and Moore's groups tend to be more eclectic, and

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The Moore's have deep roots in the North Carolina furniture business. James Dudley Moore, founder of Home Chair Company is pictured above at far right. The man immediately to his left is his son, Roy Ivey Moore (William Dudley Moore Senior's father). They stand with some of their factory workers in front of Home Chair Company in 1938. The factory was destroyed when the Yadkin River flooded in 1940, and rebuilt in Ronda, NC.

driven more by function and aesthetics instead of style," says Carolyn Shaw.

Contemporary & Modern:

"I think contemporary is coming on, and that Mid-Century modern has really been trying to make it back into the mainstream," Liz tells us. "A lot of people are afraid of Mid-Century Modern because it's so specific, but I have a feeling that that's the trend coming on." Her father isn't so sure. "Modern style is definitely having its moment, which is refreshing. Although we're having a lot of success designing upscale, modern looks, this isn't the Mid-Century Modern that's currently very popular with the hipster set and millennials. So far, this group has been buying antiques and flea market-type finds, versus reproductions from typical manufacturers. Several companies have taken a crack at mid-century with limited success."

Interior Designer Influence:

Dudley Moore Jr. sees the growing influence of interior designers. "That's the result," he says, "of a changing retail landscape at the higher end.

"Major manufacturers at the higher end, used to sell, in the Atlanta Metro area, for example, Levitz, Rhodes, Roberds, Dillard's, Farmer's Furniture, and on and on. All these retailers are gone. Now a lot of the business has gone to retailers like IKEA, Pottery Barn, Rooms To Go, Restoration Hardware, Crate & Barrel, Room & Board, etc. So, whom are these manufacturers going to sell to in Atlanta? In a lot of cases, the interior design trade has helped to fill this gap."

He says that many of these interior designers have a definite design point of view. "I'm finding that we're spending more time looking for trends by following interior designers on Instagram and Twitter."

Coastal Design Trend:

"Certainly coastal and cottage are still very popular." Dudley Jr., explains that this has to do with a larger percentage of the US population living within close proximity to a waterfront.

Todays Furniture Designers

When asked how the creative pro-

"Younger customers coming along these days are practical. They're looking for value and for something they can afford, not always for great design."

cess looks today, Will Moore says that some in the industry are doing an excellent job designing for their target demographics. "But, from a broader design perspective," he says, "and especially with some lower-end manufacturing clients, the process is the same as it's always been. "These manufacturers generally identify a design that's selling well from another manufacturer to a specific demographic group and ask for a design variation on that theme."

Given changes in style leadership, Dudley Jr. observes, "There's so much more confusion in terms of trends. We find that our clients are asking us for help in guiding their style directions, which is in one way liberating, and

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in another way intimidating. That's because in a confusing landscape, we can make mistakes too, in terms of trends. We, therefore, have to be more collaborative with our clients, and it puts the onus on us to go to more closed showings and international trade shows than ever before, so we are as up to date as possible."

"Our clients are much more reliant on us for trendspotting than they were in the past," he adds.

Liz interjects, "Today, rather than being given an assignment to design an 18th century group, manufacturers ask us to create designs that reflect, for example, a mood such as Rustic Modern or Coastal Cottage. So, instead of starting to design right away, we create a Mood Board for almost everything we do."

She agrees with her father that design work isn't as specific as it used to be. "Furniture designers have a little bit more freedom to design in different ways. We don't have to stick to creating Queen Anne, Chippendale or Art Deco styled groups. Our clients often give us vague terms, such as Modern or Rustic, or Casual Contemporary. They tell us the age group they want to target. Then it's up to us to come up with ideas for original, beautiful designs that people will enjoy being around at the right price point."

Mood Boards As Design Tools

"The next step for us" Liz says, "after we find out, for instance, that we are going to design a casual contemporary group is to research what's out there, find out what other furniture companies are doing. We also look at fashion and architectural influences, consider finishes, and get as much information as we can to update that genre, make it better and salable."

"Then," Will adds, "We create a mood board that includes information we've gathered from anywhere." Will says the mood board serves as a focus for generating additional ideas.

Dudley Jr. explains that mood boards are a system of sliding panels that display relevant images. "When we get an assignment from a client, before we ever put pencil to paper, we work to create a story about a collection that fully represents our vision of what it should be, and the way it should feel." "Instead of traditional versus modern, We are seeing a blend that incorporates low-sheen finishes, and lots of cleaner-looking, casual designs."

Says Carolyn, "A mood board, also called a storyboard, tells the story of the design rather than just focusing on the design itself. A typical mood board will deal with color, pattern, texture and other concepts. The result is very much like an advertising presentation. To create it, we pull tear sheets from magazines, and do online research to come up with ideas that reflect the mood we are going after. I use a lot of different tools. One of my favorites is www.1stdibs, an online antique marketplace that thousands of antique stores use. I use it to find clues and

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Mood Board used for "Rustic & Relaxed" project



ideas which might just be a carving, or an under tight molding, or a piece of hardware." Carolyn suggests, "Just about any designer out there today should be using 1stdibs.com in some manner, and retailers too if they're smart. Pinterest, retail store websites and Tumblr are fantastic resources for finding images and ideas." She also suggests that furniture retailers use mood boards to create design direc-

"Non traditional retailers are doing a better job and growing like crazy. There's definitely a bigger market out there than I think a lot of regional players realize." tions for their stores.

Liz says that mood boards "function to get all our ideas together in one place. They serve as a springboard to start the actual design work. Once we get something on paper, we go back and forth with our client, revise sketches, and produce a nice collection."

"Plus," Will concludes, "Since many manufacturing executives who make product design decisions are middle-aged white males, "Liz and I, are often asked to give design opinions as members of a younger target demographic." He says that Liz's opinion seems to be especially valued for its point of view on style, features and price points.

Next Generation Furniture Designers

Otto and Moore has over the years been a place for young furniture designers to learn their craft.

Dudley Jr., tells us, "It used to be that there were two or three pathways into becoming a successful independent or staff designer.

"The fundamental first step was to work for a big manufacturer like a Henredon or a Thomasville that employed staff designers, to learn the fundamentals. To use a basketball analogy, you would learn how to dribble and defend before learning how to shoot. They would literally throw you out in the factory to learn exactly how a sofa was built and upholstered before they'd ever let you think about designing something.

"Or you could go to work for an independent firm like ours and get the same education. We would, have them start out drafting rudimentary things and then proceed in steps to impart the information needed to become a successful designer.

"That system is gone, and most manufacturers don't have staff designers anymore. My opinion is that as an industry, the education process for furniture designers is much poorer than it was in years past. There are still excellent schools like Kendall, SCAD, Appalachian and now High Point University, but the young designers we're seeing do not have the fundamental skills that they might have had 20 years ago. Now, on a more positive note, this has opened up options for us to be more creative in terms of how we find design talent. And, we are finding



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"Consumers don't buy whole groups of furniture anymore. They buy by single items. That's why Otto and Moore's groups tend to be more eclectic, and driven more by function and aesthetics instead of style."

people who are much more aware of style trends than their predecessors might have been. Since our clients are looking for trendspotting skills, this skill set has been getting more valuable to Otto and Moore over the years."

When asked if she is optimistic about the future of furniture design, Carolyn Shaw explains, "I'd like to be optimistic and say I'm seeing a lot of improvement in furniture design. There is a lot of great creativity in product design out in the world, but the furniture industry lags behind, and I don't really know why that is. But I suspect it has to do with furniture designers not having enough time to do the kind of creative work we'd like to do. We are so deadline driven in this industry. There's always a new introduction that has to be designed and manufactured by High Point Market time. And I think if you ask any furniture designer in this town, they would probably say the same thing.

"I wish that the manufacturers, and importers could slow down enough to let their products run, instead of trying to replace them immediately. They're always replacing, replacing, and replacing again, designs that aren't necessarily an improvement."

She adds that, "As designers we are always trying to improve how furniture functions. Sometimes we get it right and sometimes wrong. When consumers or clients say they are looking for something such as space saving features or specialized areas for storage, we listen. For example, until recently there was evidence that consumers wanted to buy furniture that incorporates features to support technology such as charging stations for hand-held devices in end tables. Then we found out that consumers really weren't using them. They just kept plugging their devices in right next to the light switches on their countertops."

Advice for Furniture Retailers

What advice does this group have for Furniture World's readers?

Dudley Moore, Jr. suggests that retailers could, in general, do a much better job of understanding desian. That, he says, is especially true for retail floor sales associates who really don't understand trends in design like they should. "It is a missed opportunity in terms of sales, because furniture shoppers are much better educated than they used to be. A consumer who comes in because she's keeping up with trends through social media, print media or broadcast media, knows what she likes, what the trends are, and not only that, has an understanding that's far beyond the consumer of 20 or 30 years ago concerning what's hot and what's not. So, it leaves furniture shoppers cold when they visit a retail floor and have a salesperson tell them, 'Well, this bedroom is casual contemporary and it's \$999, and this over here is one that's a coastal design at \$1,299, and this one here is rustic and it's \$999.'"

He says this is a problem for many retailers, because their customers are also shopping at the retail style leaders mentioned previously. "At those stores," he emphasizes, "associates have been trained beautifully to understand a retail culture that focuses on design. That's not to say there aren't some who do a great job, but there are many more who could do better."

"I don't think traditional retailers are really addressing this trend like they probably could," Will Moore agrees. "Non traditional retailers like West Elm, Home Goods and IKEA are doing a better job and growing like crazy. There's definitely a bigger market out there than I think a lot of regional players realize."

The Final Word

The final word, as is appropriate, comes from William Dudley Moore, Sr. "I watch Antiques Roadshow every week, and I hope that one of these days one of my pieces of furniture will be on that show." When asked if he thought that one of his designs for Kemp, Lexington or Bassett would someday be a big money find on Antiques Roadshow, he replies, "Well, I didn't say that. I said, I hope so."



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by Michael Winicki

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Then you selected the name of the event which wasn't too hard, because you simply took the same name of the event you ran the same weekend last year. You looked at the old ad materials and instructed your graphics person to add in a line of text about long-term financing, popped in a disclaimer and slam, bam, you were done!

When the daily paper that includes your ad is dropped off, you quickly find your ad on page 11 of the front section.

As you flip through the pages of the paper, you pass by a competitor's ad on page seven and a furniture store insert on page 11. Then after going back to check your own ad, you hear another competitor's machine-gunning spots on a local radio station and TV commercials for a store across town on local cable.

That's a lot of advertising dollars chasing the same furniture buyers!

So while everyone is chasing prospects who are already in the market to buy furniture, my question is, what are they doing to attract the non-furniture buying customer?

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You spent a lot of time putting the ad together, with hot pricing, hot terms and you spent a good buck for a good sized ad– and the ad appears in your local newspaper.

Let's say you also have your "I'm a consumer too hat on." This time while flipping through the newspaper you notice a big (and expensive) ad for hot water tanks.

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"All the competitors

are chasing the same customers using the same tools such as low prices, extended financing, free delivery and set up."

you notice? It's because you don't need a new hot-water tank!

It wouldn't matter if they were offering "Buy One Get One Free" on hot-water tanks. It wouldn't matter if they were offering five year free financing on hot-water tanks. You're still not interested.

That's the way it is with a great many products. We, as consumers, aren't interested until our old hot-water tank springs a leak and we find ourselves taking cold showers.

Furniture Retail Isn't Exactly Like That

Thankfully, furniture retail isn't exactly like the hot-water tank business.

Sure, sometimes a consumer will wait until all the legs are busted off the sofa, it's covered with large holes and smells like 30-day old cat litter before they replace it.

But many times they'll step up and replace that recliner or sofa or mattress just because they've been "coaxed" into replacing it.

2% Are Ready To Buy

Only about 2% of the population are ready, willing and able to buy new furniture right now.

The other 98% are sitting on the sidelines. They may be able to buy new furniture this weekend, but they're not ready and certainly not willing.

That leaves a measly 2% of the market to be divvied up amongst you and your competitors. Kind of gloomy sounding isn't it?

And to make it even worse all the competitors are chasing the same customers using the same "tools" such as low prices, extended financing, free delivery and set up. The list of "carrots" most retailers use is pretty short.

The Other Ugly Aspect

The other ugly aspect of this is that if you're the #2 or #3 furniture retailer in market, your chances of growing the business by leaps and bounds in the scenario just described is pretty low. That's because everyone is using the same events and same enticements to attract customers to their stores.

Unless you greatly increase your ad spend, you're not likely to grow the business by a large percentage. And yes, by increasing your ad spend you will probably claim more new customers, however, the flip-side is that your cost of sale is most likely going to climb. Hopefully everyone reading this knows what

"Sure, sometimes a consumer will wait until all the legs are busted off the sofa, it's covered with large holes and smells like 30-day old cat litter before they replace it."

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their cost of sale figure is, it's one of the most important numbers for any retailer.

Free Agency

And here's how this situation can get even worse.

Do you follow any of the major sports? NFL, NBA, NHL or Major League Baseball?

For those that don't, let me give you a very brief description of what is known as "free agency".

In all four sports, individual players are allowed under certain conditions to become a "free agent". The biggest benefit of becoming a free agent is that the player can offer themselves to any team in the market. Typically the high-bidder will end up winning the services of the player.

The new furniture customer is like

"The new furniture customer is like a free agent in the major sports, but instead of winning them by being the high-bidder, most furniture stores win the customer by being the biggest giver." a free agent in the major sports, but instead of winning them (and their wallet) by being the high-bidder, most furniture stores "win" the customer by being the "biggest giver".

Big Givers Lose

Big Givers give up profit margin. They give up revenue when they finance purchases for 2 years. They give up profit by offering free delivery, setup and removal.

Wouldn't it be great if you didn't have to compete this way? You have to admit that battling for the attention of prospects and then having to give away profit to actually turn them into customers is downright depressing.

Another Way

There's another way to maintain healthy margins. Another way to take market share from your competitors by playing the retail game by different rules. Just turn your focus to the 98% of the market that isn't ready, willing and able to buy new furniture at this moment.

One thing to keep in mind is that not every person is likely to use a piece of furniture until it's beat to dust and then in desperate need of replacement. No, many times people will take a look at their sofa and think, "You know that really doesn't go with the rest of my furniture anymore" or they will start thinking about a new mattress because they wake up with a morning back ache.

The chain of events leading to the purchase of a new piece of furniture may take days, weeks or even months before a thought starts fermenting in the mind of a potential furniture buyer. So if traditional event advertising won't get this customer to buy, what will?

Social marketing presents a huge opportunity to talk to consumers who may not be ready to buy today, but who could still be influenced to buy nicer, newer furniture from you.

Notice I emphasized the word influenced? One thing you don't want to do, or shouldn't do on social networking sites like Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter and Instagram is overt selling. It's frowned upon in the best light, and considered invasive and annoying in the worst.

Overt selling on the social networking sites is bad form, BUT influencing is fair game.

So, how do you influence using social media? You influence by talking about either "gain points" or "pain points". Here are just a few examples.

Potential "Gain Points"

Make your living room the envy of all your fiends

2 Imagine sitting down with your family during Thanksgiving at your new dining room set

3 The perfect nap-taking recliner for the large man

Potential "Pain Points"

- Does your back feel like a "pretzel" when you first get up?
- Tired of those dining room chairs falling apart?

3 Sick of those mismatched living room pieces?

Don't highlight brands or prices or financing terms. Feature what a consumer can gain or what pain they can eliminate from their lives by getting nicer, newer furniture.

To make a marketing tool like this work, it takes a plan and persistence. It's a lot harder than simply taking last year's newspaper ad and rerunning it this year. Someone at your store needs to be responsible for staying on top of this or hire a marketing company that can do this for you.

The potential payoff of doing this is getting that prospect thinking about doing business with you as opposed to all the other choices available to them in the market. It takes time to build credibility, but once you have it, you'll gain an advantage that you can't get by purchasing an ad in the Thursday edition of your local paper.

About Mike Winicki: Mike Winicki is president of Big Noise Marketing. His goal is to make the business life of every furniture store owner as easy as PIE: Profitable, Interesting and Enjoyable. To get a free Marketing Opportunity Report for your business simply call his toll free number 1-800-495-8308 anytime, 24 hours a day, and leave your contact information. Or email your request to info@bignoisemarketing.com. "So, how do you influence using social media? You influence by talking about either "gain points" or "pain points."



American Made

DESIGN



The new Disney Inside Childrens Furniture Collection features a hardwood frame, bright colorful fabric and unique styling. Chair shown here is from the movie Frozen.

Contact information on page 128.

Kidz World



American Heartland

The Tall Oak Curve TV stand features curved top design, three fixed wood shelves, two raised panel doors, glass panel door, sound bar opening, and arched base. Available in Poplar wood with 25 finish options.

Contact information on page 128.

Lancer

The Homespun Collection blends traditional design elements with exposed wood and multiple fabrics. This collection includes recliners, chairs, settees, and sofas. Elegant high wing backs make each piece stand out.

Contact information on page 128.



Country View Woodworking

Dining group with 48" solid top, single pedestal table and side chairs. The table top is available with optional planking. Seats are shown in oak finish while pedestal, apron and chair frames are shown in Brown Maple. All are slightly distressed.



Mississippi Farm Tables

Furniture is built with solid hardwoods in Alder, Walnut, Maple, Cherry, Mahogany, Oak etc. A variety of finishing techniques including distressing and age are used according to customized specifications. **Contact information on page 128**.



Arthur W. Brown

A wide variety of standard wall unit configurations as well as creative customized options allow customers to create personalized wall systems in quality real wood.

Contact information on page 128.



Omnia

The Sunset group is available in two styles. One with a tufted back and wooden legs. The other without tufting and a chrome leg. Both are available in a huge selection of leathers and colors so retailers can personalize comfort for customers.

American Made DESI(i)



Borkholder

Sunset Hills is a fresh approach to Arts and Craft/Greene style, resulting in a soft contemporary transitional look. The finish is a rich warm mid-tone on cherry. Some pieces feature a complementary ebony finish to add depth and options. Simple brushed nickel hardware modernizes the collection.

Contact information on page 128.



Fireside Log Furniture

This rustic furniture is available in Pine, Cedar, and Aspen. Each piece is unique. Standard heat treated process assures clean logs with no surprises. All cabinets are available in choice of "live" edge or cut edge with round-over.

Contact information on page 128.

Schwartz Woodworking

The new Francine Collection is shown here in Brown Maple with rich tobacco stain. Features include one inch solid tops, five piece drawer fronts and doors with applied molding, soft close drawers, and tufted fabric headboard with buttons.



Crystal Valley Hardwoods Brady Occasional Tables and Brayfort TV

Brady Occasional Tables and Brayfort TV Cabinet shown in Cherry with Maluania stain and burnishings. Features include CD/DVD accessible, dovetail maple drawer boxes, smoked glass in doors, and one adjustable shelf for each door.

Contact information on page 128.





J&R Woodworking

The new Finland is shown here in Brown Maple with rich tobacco stain. Features include one inch solid beveled tops, arched bases, and flush doors and drawers.

Contact information on page 128.

River Woodworking

The Classic Saturn Collection with LED lighting is available in Oak, quarter-sawn white Oak, Cherry, Walnut and Brown Maple.

The Decision TO BUY NEW FURNITURE

How long does it take?

by Joe Capillo

his article is for those of you in traditional relationships who are running things in the retail Furniture Business. Hey guys, have you ever come home from work and found that your spouse or significant other purchased and positioned something new and different in your home? Maybe it was a small table-top accessory, or a new picture on a wall. Or, some really neat blue decorative bottles placed on the counter-top in your bathroom. Maybe it took you a week to notice this little thing, but once you did see them you had to admit they made the room look and feel different – and better.

This happened to me when I came home to find a new mirror hanging where another hung before. I'm not sure how long it took me to notice, but my first reaction was why? The old mirror had a perfectly fine reflection.

The old one reflected my image perfectly, but what it didn't reflect, was my partner's sense of style, of design, of beauty.

Why did I tell you this little story? It's to illustrate that people can be a little slow in noticing what can and should be improved. Sometimes we look at our reflection in a mirror and are so focused on the gray hair, or small winkle, that we totally miss the fact that someone has replaced the mirror! And this phenomenon is especially true in the furniture business. Retail managers often focus so hard on closing sales today (which is like a gray hair or wrinkle) that they totally miss a greater truth. More about this later.

The other point of the story is that not only did it take time for me to notice that the mirror had been changed, It is likely that my wife had been unhappy with the old mirror for some time before she decided to buy

"The process of achieving higher close rates starts with the knowledge that most customers simply cannot be closed on a first visit."



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"Close Ratio

in our business is not the same as the general retail conversion rate because of the nature of our selling process."

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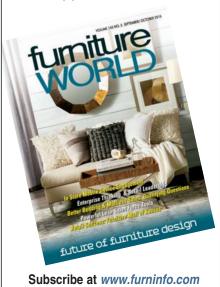
Think About All Those Buyers

Now, think about all those potential buyers out there, mostly women, who seldom shop for furniture. Face it, our stores are not on everyone's weekly shopping list. Unless, of course, there arises a need in her mind. Again, no emergency exists as is the case when a refrigerator or stove stops working.

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Over a decade ago, I stumbled upon a consumer research study that laid out the thought/action processes women go through to make a major furniture purchase decision (and to her, they're all major). The steps are Dreaming, Exploring, Planning, Selection, and Enjoyment. Of course that final process of enjoyment is the reason why all the others matter. In this study, there was no indication of the timing of any of these processes, but you should know from carefully monitoring your shoppers' behaviors, that each can be separated by long intervals. Of course you do monitor this, right?

Critical Sales Metrics

For over 40 years I've tracked the critical sales metrics in our business, the most important of which are Close Ratio and Average Sale. Close ratio in our business is not the same as the general retail "conversion rate" because of the nature of our selling process. It's not off-the-shelf stuff. There's a lot going on in our customers' minds, and the consequences of making a bad decision are costly both financially, emotionally, and can be long-lasting. We measure close ratio by-the-visit because we have to personally interact with a shopper each time she comes in. And when she leaves, we cannot be sure we'll ever see her again. Unless, of course, we do right things, right!

The point of all this is that we're dealing with deep-rooted issues that

include far more than the pricing, selection and the availability of merchandise. If the focus of your sales training and of your sales staff is primarily on pricing, selection and availability, you are missing a lot of sales. There are personal issues as well, such as style, design, and the desire to create a beautiful, comfortable, affordable home. Shoppers see oceans of goods, about which most of them know little. In many cases a lack of help at the point of contact with sales associates is a weak link, due to a lack of focus about what most customer are trying to achieve.

She's not trying to achieve the purchase of a new item. Shoppers are trying to figure out how a purchase will affect the look and feel of their homes, their rooms, and make them better for themselves and their families.

On the other hand, you and your sales associates may be trying to close

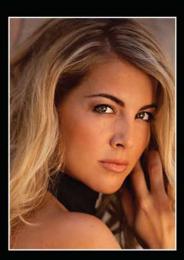
"Your opportunity for growth is not among the 10% who buy today. You cannot grow that segment through closing skills."

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Decision TO BUY

sales today. Based on long-term studies of retail furniture store traffic, this one aspect of our business stands out in stark relief: When a woman in the early stages of the decision-making process visits your store for the first

"The danger for you and your business is to see achieving a close on the first visit, as being the norm against which everyone is measured. To change that mindset takes training and coaching." time on this project, there is a 10% chance she'll buy today. If you can get her to return a second time on that same project, there's a 75% or higher chance she'll buy. Your 20% close ratio is made up of some first-time shoppers and some "be-backs" (whom I define as returning again on the same project).

The Immediacy Paradox

Therefore, for 90% of your shoppers, the real goal of that first visit for you and for your salespeople, should be to get a second visit – not to close a sale today! This idea makes many retailers feel uncomfortable. There's a focus in our industry on closing customers today so they don't walk and buy somewhere else. It's human nature. But to achieve better close rates, experience has shown that a change of mindset can be transformative for your business. To do this though, you have to do things right, and, more importantly, do the right things.

Keep up to date with the latest industry news, retail tips, market information and articles from Furniture World Magazine. Renew or add a new print subscription at the same time!



Higher Close Rates

The danger for you and your business is to see achieving a close today, on the first visit, as being the norm against which everyone is measured. To change that mindset takes training and coaching.

The process of achieving higher close rates starts with the knowledge that most customers simply cannot be closed on a first visit. For the many shoppers who have not yet progressed far through steps of Dreaming, Exploring, Planning and Selection, patience and follow up skills to get a second visit are key.

Your opportunity for growth is not among the 10% who buy today. You cannot grow that segment through closing skills. Your opportunity lies in the rest of your customers through better engagement skills, better connecting-to-the-projects skills, and better customer relationship management skills – meaning following up to make sure that the next visit happens – the one you'll close 75% to 90% of the time.

About Joe Capillo: Joe Capillo is a 40 year career veteran, experienced in managing and consulting with furniture retail operations. He is an expert in sales management and sales systems. He is also a contributing editor for Furniture World Magazine. Questions on any aspect of this article or retail sales management in general, can be directed to Joe Capillo at joefcap@ gmail.com. See all of his articles on Furniture World's website at furninfo. com/ Authors/Joe%20Capillo/21.

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