

VOLUME 146 NO. 4 JULY/ AUGUST 2016

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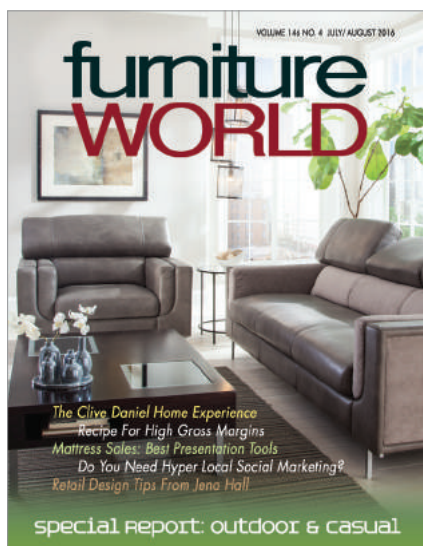
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Furniture World Magazine
1333A North Ave. #437
New Rochelle, NY 10804
Tel: 914-235-3095

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

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

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Should You Hire A VP of Trust?

Trust is the bedrock of relationships with our families, employees and customers. The speaker, writer and consultant Simon Synek says, "Until we feel that we can rely completely on the person to the left of us or the person to the right of us, we can't really achieve anything great." He also suggests that trust is a uniquely human feeling and one that can't easily be quantified.

Synek is the author of *"Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't."* If you don't have time to read the book, check out an interview on the NPR Ted Radio Hour by just googling "Trust-And-Consequences". Then listen a bit longer to hear Rachel Botsman speak about the digital trust economy that has as well, deep implications for retail furniture businesses.

Customers give themselves permission to buy more (and more often) from companies that relieve them from the need to worry about being overcharged, left alone to solve problems, or have to deal with employees/systems that threaten to make their lives needlessly difficult. I'm sure you can think of a number of companies who, when the going gets tough, just don't seem to have your back.

Employees perform better when they trust management to do the right thing for them, their customers and their communities. They must feel safe, says Synek.

Trust is hard to measure, takes time and effort to cultivate and is easy to lose. Yet cultivating it is the bedrock of your long term success. My suggestion is to look at how you and your company create trust at every touch point, and from every angle. Do some research, and maybe take trust building on as a goal and a practice.

Russell Bienenstock
Editorial Director/CEO

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FURNITURE GODFATHER

PART II

by Gordon Hecht

The Furniture Godfather once again answers your tough questions about life in the home furnishings industry...

The Furniture Godfather has been in the Witness Protection Program, residing in an undisclosed location in Central Wisconsin after helping to convict an RSA who tried to pass off veneer as solid wood. Here are some of the letters that he has received over the past few months from Furniture World readers.

Dear Furniture Godfather: I try to maintain a decent mark-up, but all of my customers ask for a lower price. They are either saying that they saw my furniture for less at the big Furniture House down the street or on that World Wide Web. I think my prices are fair, but I either have to cave in and give a schneid or else I have to starve. What can I do? Signed Discounting in Detroit.

Dear Detroit: The Godfather believes that you keep your friends close and your enemies closer. Sometimes you have to leave your store, climb into your car and pay a visit to your competitors. Walk around and see what they have, keeping an eye on their prices, but also what they charge for delivery or any extra charges. That internet is not going away. It will get bigger. I have my "family" sign up for

every furniture website so they know what is going on in cyberspace.

Always remember-and never forget; if the other stores are giving such a good deal, why are people shopping in your store? They are looking to buy from you. Just give them a reason to do it.

Dear Mobili Padrino: After some unfortunate and unexpected departures I need to build my sales team. I advertise in the local rag but hardly

"At the end of the work day do you come home and complain about how hard life and business is, or do you talk about how you make peoples' lives better?"

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Dear

FURNITURE GODFATHER

ever get a response. And when someone does come in, they are either some goombah or giamokey. How do I get good people to apply? Yours, Lonely in Lodi.

Dear LL: Perhaps you are the goombah and not the people applying! No one looks in the newspaper classified ads for a job anymore. If you want to go fishing (and not sleeping with the fish) go to where they are biting. Websites like LinkedIn and Facebook give you the opportunity to reach out for little or no cost and let people know you are hiring. Or use services like Monster.com. Sure they'll want to get their beak wet for promoting you, but they'll bring in a lot of good candidates too. If you planned ahead and have a customer e-mail list or mailing address list, you can also recruit from your customer base.

When you do have candidates, keep an open mind. Hire for attitude and train for aptitude. Younger people are not going to look, dress, or speak like your team's old-timers. But, your customers are younger too! Hire someone that speaks their language, even if you don't understand it.

Dear FG: I had a successful business in my town for over 40 years. In the last couple of years three big guys have muscled in on my territory and my daily traffic count is in single digits. What can I do to bring more shoppers in as I would like to give my competitors a single digit. Regards, Overwhelmed in Orlando.

Dear Double O: The Godfather never

gets angry, he gets even. For years you gave shoppers what they wanted, a New, Clean, Exciting Place to Shop. But if you haven't invested a dime in your store in the last few years, it's probably looking old and tired. Meanwhile, the places down the street look and feel great. Chances are good that they have the latest colors and clean new carpet. Their windows are washed on a regular basis and their RSAs have shiny shoes and pressed slacks, shirts, and blouses.

Those new guys reach out to shoppers where the shoppers like to hang out. That means a great website that works with their fancy smartphones, on Facebook, Twitter and more! You're only as good as people say you are, so they get a lot of online reviews.

You don't always have to beat them, you just have to copy them, and do what they're doing—just a little bit better.

Dear Capo di tutt'i capi: You tell us to get our store on that web thing and to chirp or tweet, or something. I don't know the Facebook from the phone

book! How am I supposed to do this, for crying out loud! Sincerely, Tearful in Tucson.

Dear Tearful: Stop your crying or I'll give you something to cry about, like having the GOB boys circling your store! The Godfather doesn't know how to toss pizza dough, so I call Papa John! Call in an expert, or someone who wants to learn. Get a Consigliere to manage your electronic media and pay them with the money you save by getting out of non-productive advertising. Take this advice too—turn off the news, reruns, and sports on TV for a few hours and learn how the world advertises today... don't land up with dough on your head!

Dear Don Furniture Godfather: I have worked hard and make no apologies. I wanted to make a good life for my family. Now that I am ready to head to the warmth of Boca, none of my children want to take over the business that put them in cars and through those fancy colleges (where they learned God knows what). How can I convince them to keep the shop

"Dear LL ...

Perhaps you are the goombah and not the people applying! No one looks in the newspaper classified ads for a job anymore. If you want to go fishing (and not sleeping with the fish) go to where they are biting."



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"Dear Tearful..."

Turn off the news, reruns, and sports on TV for a few hours and learn how the world advertises today... don't land up with dough on your head!"

open and keep my other 22 employees in a job? Yours Very Truly, Whynot in Minot.

Dear Frozen Goomba: When I first started in the furniture business, I never wanted my children in it. I thought they could be Senator Furniture or Governor Furniture. However, now that I have had a brief stay in an equally frozen environment, I know

that our chosen field is honorable and performs a necessary service.

But children rarely listen to what you say as much as they look at how you act! At the end of the work day do you come home and complain about how hard life and business is, or do you talk about how you make peoples' lives better? Do your children have responsible roles in your business?

Give them a role where they can make decisions, and then live with how they decide. It may not be what you would do, but it just might work. And pay them well; give them an open market salary, plus a little bit more, after all, they are taking care of your grandchildren!

If it's too late for that, consider an Employee Stock Option Plan or ESOP. Let your current employees buy you out. After all, they have been saying how much smarter they are than you are, behind your back of course. Help them choose a reliable leader and let them run with it.

Do you have furniture questions that require the wisdom of the Furniture Godfather? Send them to editor@furninfo.com for a quick and personal response.

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 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.

He is based in Columbus, OH and is married with one adult son. Questions and comments can be directed to him at ghecht@serta.com.



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Imagine!

CLIVE DANIEL HOME

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

"We don't believe we sell anything; we place. Our designers place everything. They place for the customer."

-Clive Lubner

Imagine! Imagine observing an animated father and son driving from Naples to Boca Raton. Excitement's in the air, laughter, the sun's rising in the Florida sky. Something's about to happen, something unique, meaningful, significant. It's springtime, early April 2015.

Almost a year later, February 2016. Clive and Daniel Lubner, proprietors of Clive Daniel Home, reveal that their second store is "now open" with just a small ad in a local newspaper. High-end, 70,000 square feet, two levels, luxury. But the day before, they'd already "hit the ground running, soft but strong". They'd welcomed 150 shopper groups. And that sensational next day, more than 1,000 shopper groups came to the store.

That engaging, tantalizing vehicular introduction had come to life in a clever whiteboard cartoon video on the company's Facebook page! Said Dan, "We wanted to have fun with our announcement and make sure it was communicated in a creative way. We developed the storyboard and sound effects, and had an awesome company produce the whiteboard.

"We don't believe in the archaic model of a phony call to action. Our clients seem to resonate with our creative direction that targets the brand and personalities of CDH. All of our ads are more focused on creating

customer and brand awareness than a call-to-action or promoting fictional discounts surrounding holidays.

"And opening events? Months later we continue to have opening events. These will happen throughout the balance of the year and help to better engage a future customer. And allow the message of CDH to translate seamlessly. Unlike competitors who sell only furniture, we also provide total home services to include flooring, cabinetry, window treatments, home automation and custom art and framing. Another secret to our success is continuously switching out, revising and updating our assortments." And smaller events involving local media, area shelter and design magazines, and community and charity groups, create more intimate environments for quests to really see the space.

The Lubners had opened the first Clive Daniel Home in 2011, 87,000 square feet, in Naples. Since then sales have grown, (totals in 2014 were up about 20 per cent from the previous year), to more than \$25 million. Even during the tough winter storms of 2015, CDH experienced a 70 per cent increase in sales over the previous February. "Growth is both substantial and sustainable. We've adjusted to consumer demand and increased our staff on the floor on the sales and design side."



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Kris Kolar, Vice President of Merchandising and Design, a vital member of the team for many years, said that when "Clive originally secured the Naples store back in 1981, it was 14,000 square feet, a one-story building, now it's 85,000 square feet with two stories. Naples has been added onto many times."

And 1981 proved to be a Lubner landmark. Three years earlier, South African Clive, his wife Sonya, and two

small children (one of them Daniel), emigrated to the United States. He had \$70,000 to invest, the maximum amount of money he was allowed to take out of South Africa at that time. He also had infinite vision, marketing savvy and enormous hope. And lively imaginative powers. They'd left behind a complex personal and corporate history. Sonya's parents, Hymie and Esther Barsel, were anti-apartheid activists, both imprisoned during Nelson Mandela's tumultuous era and, like him, accused of treason. Esther was still under house arrest at the time of Clive and Sunny's wedding.

They also left behind the family furniture business that Clive had helped to build, 116 stores. He planned to use his impressive experience to do something big, something extraordinary. Fate and foresight led him to Fort Myers, Florida. It really was no accident. It was a region, like the Lubners themselves, poised for growth.

Let's go back more years in time to 1915 when the town's population was 349. Two gentlemen, Virgil Robb and W. R. Lee, established a small furniture store there and were joined

Clive Daniel Home Boca. Staff pictured above includes 33 designers and 35 support staff including management, back-room, delivery and office employees.

in the enterprise a couple of years later by Harry Stucky. Their rather amazing customer base included the renowned Ford, Edison and Firestone families. Lee left the company in 1925 and Robb & Stucky came into being, the name engraved into the store's facade. It was purchased by Louis and William Bowles in 1958. They added a Naples outlet in 1967. Eleven years later, a keen, young Clive Lubner arrived on the scene. He partnered with the Mariner Group, developers of South Seas Plantation resort and Yacht Harbour on Captiva Island, and Clive became CEO in 1979.

Then annual sales were two million. The business evolved along with southwestern Florida. Clive's energy, imagination and skills turned a relatively modest local home furnishings store into what became a "Sunbelt

"The Naples store back in 1981 was 14,000 square feet, a one-story building, now it's 85,000 square feet with two stories."

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purveyor of luxury living with locations in Florida, Texas, Arizona, North Carolina, Nevada and Costa Rica. At its peak there were 1,300 employees, four warehouses, 12 interior showrooms and seven patio stores”, all headquartered in Fort Myers. And, in 2005, with the explosion of population in the regions, “revenues were just shy of \$275 million”. And, another stratospheric statistic, “while the industry’s average transaction was \$875, Clive’s was \$6,000!”

How had Clive achieved the miracle? He believed (and continues to believe) that he is selling much more than furniture, he is selling a way of life. And it’s a life that is more refined, more coordinated than customers might have conceptualized by themselves. The key, visual merchandising. He’d employed a group of artisans, carpenters, drapery makers, interior designers and upholsterers and

together their magic wands created a virtual movie set for their clients. And the clients could, if they wished, take the mob home with them to personalize the concepts. “Lifestyles of the rich and famous”!

The experience for the visiting customer was unique. A multi-level welcome. One would be greeted at the door by a smiling staffer, then introduced to a salesperson whose job it was to gather information about tastes, fashion sense, personal preferences and, of course, budget. Then the salesperson, replete with useful data, would perform the next introduction, this to one of the staff interior designers. She/he would discuss/present various product lines, make arrangements for house calls, sit with the client and work up models, drawings and color boards.

Clive knew precise communication was essential, and he developed man-

uals for suppliers. He specified what was and was not acceptable in material and workmanship, hired artisans to inspect and correct any damaged merchandise. For customers who needed more customized service, spraying and dyeing facilities were installed.

Said Clive, “We don’t believe we sell anything, we place. Our designers place everything. They place for the customer.” His inspiration and insightful strategies remain intact.

But a hiatus in the evolving Robb & Stucky story occurred in 2011. Actually only a brief hiatus for the Lubners. It had begun when markets collapsed in 2008 and progressed insidiously as home prices dropped and affluent households diminished dramatically. Clive lowered costs, closed increasingly unprofitable stores, negotiated rents. But in February, 2011, he knew it was time to engage Chapter 11. Many wanted the Lubners to continue their



Pictured left to right is Clive Lubner, Daniel Lubner and Kris Kolar.

success trajectory. But by May, 2011, when the family lost their bid to buy back the property, he knew the time had come to move forward to the era of Clive Daniel Home. The Lubners still endorsed the immutable “Plan to go forward, with a great story to tell!”

November, 2011. Six, roller-coaster-ride months later. They had been able to keep together their core team. Kris Kolar was one of that essential pivotal group. Said Dan, a strong participant in the action since the late ‘90s, “Our management, logistics and merchandising were all from the old company.” The façade carving was quickly changed to Clive Daniel. All speed ahead.

Since that November opening, CDH has won extraordinary Awards. In fact, by May this year, 125 of them from local, regional and national publications as well as building industry organizations for interior design and marketing excellence. Particularly from Gulfshore Life Magazine. Even an Emmy nomination for a television commercial. And “We’re proud of these honors because they provide a testament to our design and merchandising skills from both our customers and professionals from within our industry,” said Dan. CDH has been selected as one of the top 50 furniture businesses in the United States, one of only four from Florida.

Boca Raton hovered in the Lubner’s

sights as the springboard for more expansion. “We had been scouring the East Coast for nearly three years for the perfect location. We built the store from the ground up.” They invested more than \$16 million in

the project, including the purchase of land, building and \$4 million in inventory. There is a cross-over in styles and manufacturing between the two stores, but merchandising covers some specialty items geared toward

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the tastes of Florida's east coast that are not shown in Naples. Kris and her team, guided by Clive and Dan, along with John Roos, Visual Manager at the Naples showroom, created "the overall feeling and design". Said Kris, "The special challenge of laying out the Boca store is also one of the store's best assets, all of the windows and that glorious natural light! We love light; it makes the store so fresh, alive and welcoming. It's always wonderful to bring the outside in. Naples also has many windows.

"However, more windows mean less walls. Thereby less furniture that will fit within the four walls. And that is one of the biggest differentiators of the physical plants between CDH and the more traditional furniture stores that only have windows in the front of their buildings.

"Another challenging element, to figure out how to make the maximum use of that beautiful light in our conference rooms and business offices.

"The Boca and Naples stores are

very distinctive in their physical plants. Naples is larger than Boca as it also holds many of our corporate staff. People like Clive, Daniel, myself plus all our buyers and assistants. And the majority of our Hospitality offices are also there."

The amenities of Boca? A total home concept, a true full service destination for both interior designers and homeowners. Customers are able to work directly with certified design professionals to manage home remodeling or a décor project without having to "contract multiple entities".

Boca's staff includes 33 designers and 35 support staff including management, backroom, delivery and office employees.

In addition to the anticipated luxury home furnishings and a monumental accessory inventory, CDH offers area rugs, cabinetry, custom window treatments, flooring, re-upholstery, trendy home automation (smart homes!), a stunning gift boutique, an art shop, custom closets and kitchens and a

lighting gallery.

"The rug collection is the best in the state, sourced from Feizy, Harounian, Bokara and Ariana."

There's a live demonstration kitchen in the showroom, too, as well as an

"Customers are able to work directly with certified design professionals to manage home remodeling or a décor project without having to contract multiple entities."





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"We wanted to create a hands-on environment, sort of like an Apple store. The demo kitchen is an example of that. Random wine tastings, a guest DJ, an opera singer, it's all a part of the random excitement that can happen on any given day."

accessory shop, a design studio and a resource room. Also The Chat Room, a community room which can hold up to 60 people.

"We wanted to create a hands-on environment, sort of like an Apple store. The demo kitchen is an example of that. Random wine tastings, a guest DJ, an opera singer, it's all a part of the random excitement that can happen on any given day."

Kris has made navigating the showroom easy. She has organized home furnishings by lifestyle concepts, showcasing individual pieces from various designers and arranging them to help make homeowners' visions reality. "And while we welcome and enjoy the retail side of the business, we feel our strength is going to be in our designer-related services. And that tends to be a much higher ticket item."

Kris explained, "The stores are very similar when it comes to the actual

merchandising,". The CDH trend-defying philosophy is to merchandise by lifestyles. She defined the deeply accessorized showroom areas. "The entry/atrium is our space for whatever we feel is fashion forward. Our dressiest area is 'Elegant Home'. Our contemporary area, 'Modern Home'. In between these two, 'Today's Home'. It's relaxed, livable with deeper sofas and chairs to lounge in and cocktail tables to put your feet on. 'Hampton' is our most traditional area, lots of white, rough, distressed finishes and lots of linen and burlap fabrics. We maintain the same sense of visual disciplines in both stores."

There is a gift boutique with a line of tabletop and other "gift-able" items, part of Michael Aram's dynamic Indian and Oriental inspiration. In the same area, the Art Bar offers not only carefully chosen artwork but custom framing. And about 15,000 square feet is

devoted to outdoor furniture.

Also named Corporate Vice President of Interior Design, Kris balances many roles, a dazzling list, her responsibilities and credentials almost as stunning as the lady herself. Interior Design Director, Merchandise Director, Home Fashion Director and TV-Online Expert, known in the industry as the "ultimate Style Maven"! Her work extends beyond the stores to model homes and condo interiors for prestigious builders and developers to complete interior design for the hotel industry for CD's Hospitality Division. She and her energetic team have developed award-winning designs for



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“In-Store ‘Meet the Designer’ events serve as another creative way to reach our customer, rather than the average ad/promotional campaign.”

many locations including the iconic Breakers of Palm Beach, Quail West and Treviso Bay, Naples and many more projects in Florida, the US and the Caribbean. Educated at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, she also earned an MBA from the University of Dayton, studied abroad in both Italy and Paris, and holds the coveted NCIDQ certificate of Professional Interior Design.

Dan said, “We have 36 designers in Naples and 33 in Boca. Although we have 150,000 square feet of combined showroom space, we consider ourselves a full service design firm. In terms of the store’s merchandising team, they are extremely talented and constantly evolving by defining industry trends, not following them. Their intention is to stimulate every sense

each time a customer walks through the front door of our large but really warm and welcoming multiple-sectioned showrooms.

“We are very aggressive with our recruitment of designers and we believe in continuing education. This is done with in-house management, the trades and professional coaches. We believe our remuneration is among the best in the industry. To attract the talent, you need to be willing to give exceptional compensation.

“We do have full benefits and monthly and annual awards. Our designers attend Market. We regularly attend the Atlanta International Gift & Home Furnishings Market, Dallas Total Home & Gift Market, High Point Market, Las Vegas Market and New York.”

He spoke of in-store design happenings. “Last month we had a wonderful event with Michael Aram. He was signing his fantastic ‘giftables’ and conversing and taking pictures with guests as he autographed his pieces.

“The following night, we had an event with Adriana Hoyos, the legendary retro-modernism designer and Good Will Ambassador for Latin America, to benefit UNICEF. These types of in-store ‘Meet the Designer’ events serve as another creative way to reach our customer, rather than the average ad/promotional campaign.

“Our Customer Service? Very easy! We give the clients what they want. And our delivery, bar-none, is the best in the industry.”

Kris talked again of “Hospitality”. An entity within an entity. The Lubner Group is a division of Clive Daniel Home/Hospitality, Daniel Lubner Principal, also award-winners. “A company of seasoned design professionals with lots of new ideas and over 100 years of on-site, on-time and right-on-budget experience in hospitality, commercial and residential interior design.”

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"CDH also offers area rugs, cabinetry, custom window treatments, flooring, re-upholstery, trendy home automation, a stunning gift boutique, an art shop, custom closets and kitchens and a lighting gallery."

Said Dan, "Our Hospitality Division has worked with scores of hoteliers and commercial clients in the renovation or revitalization of country clubs, community centers, banks and public spaces both domestically and internationally. Our heritage has allowed us to continue to grow this side of the business. Most of our projects are multi-phased and completed over several years. Lobbies, clubhouses and restaurants are my personal favorites. It's creating something that will last . . . at least until we renovate it!"

And the novel Real Estate Rewards Program. "Always evolving," said Dan. "It's a great cornerstone to our marketing efforts and in engaging area interior designers. They receive points totaling two per cent of their clients' purchase to be used towards furnishing their own homes."

The welcoming, easy-to-access website is controlled "by a creative team internally, and both our website and our ads are crafted by this particular team". A popular feature is the monthly well-designed e-newsletter with content that ranges from entertaining reports of CDH successes, to announcements of incentivized new properties available in the area. Recently highlighted, "Pointe 100, by Ascend Properties, a country club community in central Boca Raton" with an interesting kicker, "Purchase a WAVE model at Pointe 100 and receive a \$10,000 shopping spree at CDH!" And there's "Market Buzz", an informative gossip column from the Markets about current trends, a fun soap box for the versatile Kris Kolar.

The Lubner family has always been a model of corporate citizenship, causes

from the American Cancer Society to Habitat for Humanity, the Humane Society and Public Broadcasting, with Sonya always involved. "We like to say she is our moral center," said Dan. "We have hosted scores of charitable events. Everyone has his or her passions.

"My personal passions include women's empowerment and local food banks. Most recently we hosted a fundraiser for the Spirit of Giving

"Our Hospitality Division

has worked with scores of hoteliers and commercial clients in the renovation or revitalization of country clubs, community centers, banks and public spaces both domestically and internationally."

Network and the Junior League of Boca Raton. The Spirit of Giving Network's office neighbors our Boca Raton Showroom and they do remarkable work in the community, uniting 60 of southern Palm Beach County's greatest non-profits and helping to share information and resources.

"The Chat Room also is another way for us to give back to the community. The space is made available to non-profits free of charge to hold meetings, luncheons and small scale speaking engagements."

Dan's background, not surprisingly, is in marketing and sales. "While I spent a few summers delivering furniture, I didn't really get involved with the business until the late '90s. I'm married with three boys, 14, 11 and 4. My wife, Cathy, buys for our CDH boutique . . . when she is not being a taxi driver to our kids!

"We've been absolutely thrilled with the response to the Boca Raton showroom. We know what this market is able to do. Boca Raton is a much larger market than Naples and last year

Naples did more than \$35 million.

"Our future is very bright and we will continue to evolve our design offerings and client experience. I don't feel great about the general future of retail. I think we are starting to enter the ice age of retail. Luckily, we do not count on retail to make or break our business."

Danny Kaye must have met the Lubners along the way. He said, "Life is a great big canvas and you should throw all the paint on it you can!" And then let imagination take over.



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✓ Maximize GROSS MARGIN

By David McMahon, CMA, CSCP

There are ten major ingredients in this tasty recipe that you can use to maximize your gross margin.

The Ingredients

1. Belief and Commitment
2. Custom Order Pricing
3. Standard Pricing
4. Exception Pricing
5. Markdown Pricing
6. Add-on Selling
7. Packaging
8. Discount Selling
9. Finance Pricing
10. Upping the bar

Using only one of the above ingredients in the recipe that's outlined in this article may produce a tasty treat, but using ALL the ingredients properly implemented and integrated will produce what furniture store owners desire: A strong top line where the stage is set for profit, stability, and growth. Without strong margins, a greater amount of sales volume and lesser operational expenses are required for similar results. For most businesses with under 20 million in sales per store, it is much more advantageous to follow a high margin strategy. This keeps break-even sales volume low, allows for the necessary

investment to fuel growth, pay people properly, and produce a nice bottom line for stakeholders. With this in mind, here's the 10 part recipe that many retail masters use.

#1 Belief and Commitment

Margin is in your mind. We are not selling commodities here. There are some retailers getting 55% - 60% margins. There are some that get between 45%-50%. And some that are even higher and lower. They are ALL in competitive markets. They ALL

**"Margin is in your mind.
We are not selling
commodities here!**

**There are some retailers
getting 55% - 60%
margins. There are
some that get between
45%-50%."**



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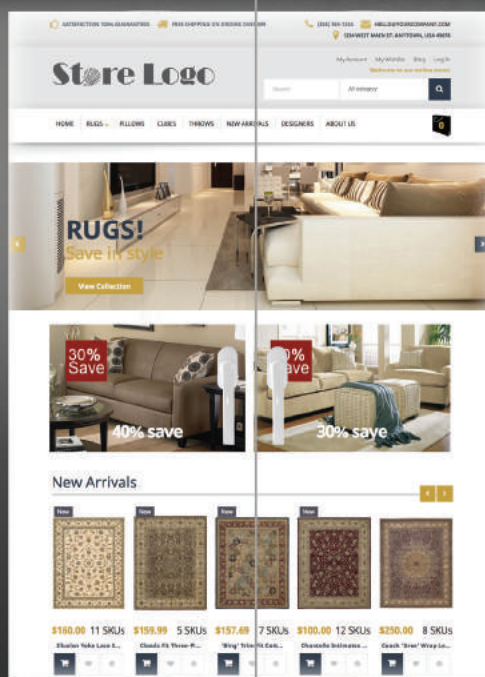


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"All special order vendors

should be marked up at a MINIMUM of 2.2 over landed cost or a greater amount if marking up over raw cost (PO cost)."

have to compete against low-ballers and companies on the internet of questionable profitability. They ALL have dirty-window shops in their area who undercut them. Please DO NOT act like a dirty-window shop!

You must truly believe that you can get the margins you desire. Then you must commit to doing it every day, for the life of your business. Without the captain of your ship on board with this business requirement, it will be impossible to get the crew producing. Believe and commit to what you deserve and what is obtainable.

#2 Custom Order Pricing

Special orders present a big opportunity for justifiably decent margins. Selling custom made products takes much more time for all parties involved – the customer, the retailer and the suppliers, than selling stocking items. The sales process is longer due to selecting all the desired specs. The ordering process is more involved due to having to communicate the information exactly in a manner that the vendors accept. There is required order processing, acknowledgment, customer and vendor follow-up, and increased lead times in most cases. This extra work requires a decent gross margin. In my opinion, all special order vendors should be marked up at a MINIMUM of 2.2 over landed cost or a greater amount if marking up over raw cost (PO cost). It is also a good practice to vary the pricing by vendor. However keep it easy and quick for your sales people to price out orders for their customers. You don't want them to get bogged down with complicated formulas.

#3 Standard Pricing

Standard pricing is defined here as where you start your pricing for new merchandise and for best sellers. From my experience, wherever a retailer starts their pricing they will end up about 5% of margin points lower on their financial statements due to inevitable sales and markdowns. With this in mind, pad your margins by this amount so you are more likely to hit your target. Those retailers with over inventory situations often end up even lower because they are generally forced to take bigger cuts to move slow turning merchandise. So, with standard pricing, decide on a general multiplier either over landed or raw cost. If your goal is to achieve a 52% gross margin on your P&L, you should set your gross margin at 57% for your best sellers. A standard price multiplier calculation can be found in the red box below.

In this example when setting up standard multipliers on your categories, you would use a 2.33 Multiplier over landed cost. (Note: if your software system figures multipliers over raw cost rather than landed, you would set a higher multiplier to account for freight).

#4 Exception Pricing

There are always exceptions! In this recipe for achieving maximum mar-

gins, fine tuning your pricing based on exceptions is an important step. Here are some pointers on how to approach this:

- *Figure out which vendors and categories are different from the standard due to factors such as freight rates, quality of product, exclusivity, contracts, or demand.*
- *Make exception multipliers, either higher or lower, and place them on certain vendors or categories to override the standard.*
- *Track bestselling items and review their price consistently.*
- *Track the retail price points of your new and bestselling SKU's within your line-up.*
- *Ensure the retail price of individual bestsellers and new items makes sense within your line-up and move the price up or down when necessary.*

This pricing by exception ingredient for success is often skipped by average margin retailers as it does take time and effort. Though, from what I have seen, all top margin producers are constantly reviewing and adjusting retail price when the situation dictates. Keep your finger on the pulse.

#5 Markdown Pricing

The reality is that the minority of products produce the majority of mar-

Standard Multiplier Calculation

$\text{Multiplier for desired Margin} = (1 / (100\% - (\text{Desired Margin} + \text{pad } \%)))$

$\text{Margin} = (\text{Retail Selling Price} - \text{Landed Cost}) / \text{Retail Selling Price}$

$\text{Multiplier for Desired Margin} = (1 / 100\% - (52\% + 5\%)) = 1 / 43\% = 2.33$

“Fine tuning your pricing based on exceptions is an important step often skipped by average margin retailers.”

gin dollars. Items that don't produce margin dollars are considered “dog” product. To produce maximal margin for the business overall, an effective markdown plan must be a part of regular business operations. The key is to single-out slow turning SKU's quickly and then take appropriate action. At first, say in 60 days, if an item does not sell, perhaps remerchandise it. Or, if it was merchandised well, start marking down the retail price by say 10%. If it is still not turning in another 60 days, mark it down by a further 10%. Keep repeating this process until the item is gone. This step approach serves to turn merchandise faster and achieve a higher margin while doing so.

The amount and the time of mark down will vary depending on the strategy of the individual retailer. What is true of all good retailers though is that they have systematized and well-managed procedures to cut their losses on dog merchandise. This in turn allows for the faster testing of new merchandise. It increases the odds of producing more best-selling SKU's and high margins.

#6 Add-on Selling

Add-ons produce higher gross margin per ticket. For this reason, I strongly recommend that you track add-on sales. These will be products such as warranty, fabric-protection, accessories, lamps, rugs, adjustable bases, sheets, and pillows. For example, if you can increase the percentage of warranty sales to total sales, your overall margin will increase due to the high margins selling these plans provide. Commit to continual employee training and include the presenting of add-on products and services in your selling system.

#7 Packaging

Packaging is similar to add-on selling in that it produces higher margin per ticket through the pricing out of entire selections of complementary goods – usually a room. A common way to do this is to print the price on the front of the tag, and list what is included. Some retailers also print the per month price for financing on the front, to show affordability. On the back of the tag the individual prices are listed. This has the following advantages:

- *It allows the customer and salesperson to envision a full-solution.*
- *The total price is up front. There is no need for time-wasting addition.*
- *The buying process is top down rather than bottom up. This means that the customer can start with a higher price and then take off items that are not desired. This will end up with a higher gross margin per ticket than starting low and*



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going up.

- Price negotiation can be minimized due to item substitution. If a customer wants to play the "What can you do for me on price?" game, a good salesperson can say, "This is our price for the whole package. What do you like most, and what do you like least? We can find a substitute for what you like least and perhaps get the price down. Sound good?"

#8 Discount Selling

There are two types of retailers out there. Some stick to their guns and sell on value. They have trained their salespeople and their customers not to play this game. The other type of retailer is the discounter. This retailer allows salespeople and managers to drop the price on any items up to

a reasonable amount. A common strategy used is offering to pay for the customer's sales tax. Discount sellers use making a deal as a closing tool and often encourage their customer's to engage in this practice.

I'm not going to argue which way is better here. But due to the large number of retailers in home furnishings that engage in this practice, I am going to give a guideline so that margins can still be maximized. If you are an operation that negotiates, allow salespeople to discount only up to a certain percent on special orders, new items, and best-sellers. Incorporate this discount into your standard pricing multiplier so that at the end of the day you arrive at the same margin that you would have if you never played the negotiation game. On all markdowns, give salespeople extra room to make a deal as the prime objective here is to liquidate the dog product and free up a retail slot.

Now, I will also answer a common question I get in the field: "What if the customer finds a better price online?"

I am a believer that you should officially state that you will match all in market competitor's prices for the same service offered. If it is directly comparable, match it and make the sale. To reduce the occurrence of this, re-brand any heavily shopped or show-roomed items to disguise the vendor and model numbers.

#9 Finance Pricing

Like discount selling, this ingredient of increasing margin may or may not be applicable to your operation. For those that promote long-term financing heavily in their advertising and

encourage customers to take advantage of it, an additional price on the price tag helps. Simply use a higher standard multiplier that includes a component for the cost of financing. If a customer wishes the lowest price, your normal sale price, they must pay with cash, check, credit card or 12 month financing. An alternative to showing a higher price is packaging, mentioned previously. You can show the maximum monthly payment of a certain long term financing arrangement.

#10 Upping the Bar

The final ingredient in this recipe to maximize margin is upping the bar. Many businesses get stuck at a certain level of performance. However, if you go about tackling your margins using all ten ingredients outlined in this article, you will break through. Once you break through a previous barrier it will be even easier to grow further. Continue to review your performance. If you take your eyes off the ball, eventually you will experience margin-drift. Once you have mastered your margin recipe, look at upping the bar. Establish new minimum performance standards. Seek to find your gross margin ceiling – if it exists.

About David McMahon: David McMahon is a management consultant, performance group leader, and event speaker with HighJump, a PROFITsystems product. He is also a certified supply chain professional, enrolled agent, and certified management accountant. He can be reached at david.mcmahon@highjump.com.

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OUTDOOR

A guide to better buying, marketing and selling of outdoor and casual furniture.

by Melody Doering

American consumers have come a long way from wrestling with setting up saggy-bottomed webbed lounge chairs, or burning their backsides on rusty metal seats baking in the sun.

Gone are the days of dragging the dusty lawn furniture out of the garage into the back yard while the splintery picnic table and benches are hosed off before the barbecue.

Fond memories all... but today, as our customers spend more warm-weather leisure time out of doors, they are looking for comfort, style and functionality with their outdoor furnishings. They are looking for seating that encourages conversation. They want to present outdoor meals on elegant, easy-to-maintain dining tables with handsome chairs for those who like to linger after a meal. The chill after sundown no longer signals the end of the evening as the warmth of the company is matched by the glow from the fire pit.

Furniture World interviewed experts in the field of casual furnishings to learn about the trend to outdoor living, the variety of exciting choices for consumers, and how retailers can capitalize on the movement. Rory Rehmert, president of the Summer Winds division of Pride Family Brands responded to our question about trends in the casual industry. "By 2020, outdoor market furniture sales will grow by

19.5% and reach approximately \$5.3 billion. Furniture stores are expected to see 5.3% growth as a vehicle for outdoor furnishings sales."

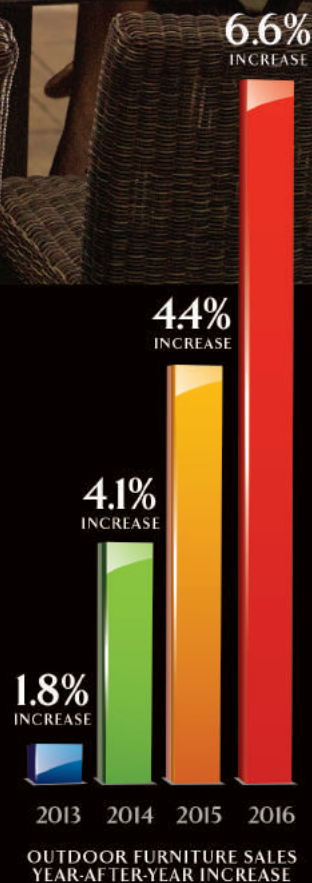
"Recently there's a lot of allure surrounding the outdoor category," said Michael Gaylord, vice president of sales at Agio, USA. The outdoor room is a 'thing' now. It's trending because of television networks like HGTV and others that feature 'build my backyard' shows. Now outdoor spaces qualify as trendy living areas that people want to have."

"I think it's that our lives are more stressful than ever," commented Shelby Sari, Buyer for outdoor and leather at Furnitureland South. "And both new construction and remodels take that into account by creating spaces for relaxation – some even as simple as a screened-in porch. People are looking to find their oasis to take them away from the everyday stresses of life."

Bob Gaylord, president of Agio International reminisced, "Things started changing for outdoor furniture in the 1980s. At that time we started selling fully-welded aluminum sets to mass merchandisers and home centers around the country. Indoor furniture



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Art's Backyard is represented in all stores. It's a store-within-a-store approach to the outdoor category, a clearly designated outdoor area with each vignette completely accessorized with rugs, umbrellas, lanterns to create a fun atmosphere. These images are from Art Van's Warren store location.



retailers, to a great extent, got out of the business then because of competition from mass merchants and home centers that were selling inexpensive imports. Many furniture retailers started looking ridiculous to middle-class customers because of the difference in price points – the \$4000 domestically produced set they carried versus the low-priced outdoor furniture sold at a local home center.”

“That’s right,” agreed Michael Gaylord. “When mass merchants got into the category at the lower end, in large part their sales were driven by price points alone, and they used a limited number of suppliers. We also lost a lot of longstanding specialty stores at that time.”

The pie has gotten bigger,” Bill Howard, vice president of sales at Crosley Brands commented. “There has been rapid growth of people actively looking for more alternatives

in the outdoor space. Outdoor furniture is low-hanging fruit for both manufacturers and retailers. One reason for that is the products’ seasonality hits time frames that have proven to increase traffic flow for furniture retailers.

“There are still a lot of significant specialty players out there – certainly not the number that there once was. The growth of online sales has made it more important for the brick-and-mortar folks to be better merchandisers of categories like outdoor furnishings.”

Marketing to Millennials and Beyond

Rory Rehmert cited a Casual Living 2015 Consumer Buying Trends Survey, published in April, 2106: “Most of the growth in the casual industry in the US is projected in the west, southeast, and

“We are seeing a shift from dining to seating. Today 45% of the business is coming from the seating category – 20% of this is seating with fire pit options.”

-Robin Mack, Art Van

northeast. Even metropolitan locations have a demand for small-scale outdoor furnishings. Broken down by age, 37% of sales in 2014, were to millennial households (aged 19-35), followed closely by the baby boomer households at 34% (aged 51-70). Gen X households (aged 36-50) represented another 23%, with 6% outside those categories.”

“The growth in the category is absolutely impressive,” agreed Agio’s



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"At Furnitureland South we are kind of an anomaly in the casual industry, in that we are totally special order in outdoor furnishings."

-Shelby Sari, Furnitureland South

Bob Gaylord. "When consumers start going outdoors with a furniture purchase, they are spending discretionary income. Today consumers are willing to spend more money outdoors than they are indoors.

"Outdoor living is something that everybody really enjoys. For a lot of lower- and middle-income people, their outdoor space is the best and largest entertaining area they have. Everybody throws a barbecue, but not everybody throws a sit-down dinner for 12 people in their dining room."

Specifically addressing the millennial market, Rory Rehmert commented, "Millennials are a growth area, but it depends on the price point that you're addressing. We recently launched five high-end collections of contemporary designs. Our demographic shows that the people buying it are folks 50 years and older. It doesn't mean that the millennials don't like those designs, but most don't have the money, so we will be launching a mid-priced contemporary collection."

Bob Gaylord cited a similar experience. "People over 45 are more settled with kids growing up. They generally need more than just a place to eat outdoors. Price point's a big factor with millennials who may not want to spend what consumers 45 and older are going to spend."

"For millennials it may be their first outdoor room purchase," Michael Gaylord, interjected, "but they're going to come to stores more prepared and more educated. They've been on Reddit, they've been on Twitter, they've been on Pinterest, and they've seen the prices.

"That's why having a great website and a deep web presence with lots of information and good reviews is really important when you're working with millennial customers. Millennials are never going to buy like the boomers, but the boomers are starting to buy like the millennials."

Evolving Styles

We wanted to know how styles are evolving in the casual industry and what is particularly attractive to consumers today. Bill Howard, at Crosley Brands, offered, "There are a lot more options, many more looks, and more styles."

"Product categories have grown as more chat sets and fire features are seeing expanding popularity," said Rory Rehmert of Summer Winds. "These are the #1 product requests by millennials.

"Speaking for our lines, the entrance

of luxury contemporary designs has been a tremendous growth area. In 2016, the modern designs, including frame and table styles, components, and finishes, created tremendous sales. Sleek and linear, geometric and clean angles, contemporary style, from a luxurious perspective, continues to trend. Many retailers are finding that they cannot keep contemporary collections on the floor."

Shelby Sari, of Furnitureland South, agreed, "There is a major trend toward modern designs and sleek transitional lines. Consumers are loving that look. They are seeing it in ads; they are seeing it on the web. Live-edge tables have become very strong this season. Brown has been so strong, but now we're finally seeing some beautiful gray finishes."

"Design trends for the outdoor category typically follow indoor trends by a year or so," responded Robin Mack, outdoor buyer for Art Van. "As a result, we are seeing an increase in urban, modern, and transitional styles, with a decrease in the demand for the more traditional styles. There has been an evolution to more on-trend designs. Gray as a key color has made its way from indoor furniture to outdoor. Navy is the new outdoor neutral."

"There is certainly an interest in mixed materials," added Agio's

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Michael Gaylord, "especially incorporating the welded and wood looks, the reclaimed look. These are very hot in our industry right now, especially with designers. Fire pits have helped extend the season, both at the beginning and at the end, allowing people, even in the northern climates, to spend much more time outdoors in comfort and luxury."

"In product categories," reported Robin Mack, "we are seeing a shift from dining to seating. Today 45% of the business is coming from the seating category – 20% of this is seating with fire pit options. Dining comprises 38% of our sales at Art Van, with cast aluminum being the most important composition by far."

"Over the past 15 years," Bob Gaylord pointed out, "the biggest growth in our industry has been deep seating, the sofas, lounge chairs and chat groups, which has changed the whole dynamic. Furniture retailers can now sell what is basically living room furniture for the outdoors. It is a big business, but in a lot of respects, the outdoor room is still in its infancy."

Developing Savvy Retailing

Furniture World asked what a savvy retailer needs to know to enter the field of casual furniture. Bill Howard responded, "One thing we encourage retailers to do is develop proprietary

lines and a private label. I recently worked with a retailer whose average shopper for outdoor will never, ever get to \$799 on any set of outdoor furniture. That makes it necessary for them to develop styles that will resonate with more than 75% of the people who walk through their doors. To do that, they need to investigate alternatives based on a close look at the outdoor products carried by competitive mass merchants like Home Depot, Lowes, and Target."

Rory Rehmert agreed, "More often than not, indoor furniture retailers looking to get into outdoor really don't have a good grasp on what their price points should be. If they are selling \$499 indoor sofas, they shouldn't be



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"More often than not, indoor furniture retailers looking to get into outdoor really don't have a good grasp on what their price points should be."

-Rory Rehmert, Summer Winds
division Pride Family Brands

buying \$2,000 outdoor sofas. The outdoor furniture assortment should parallel a retailer's indoor selection. Outdoor price points can be a little higher because as an outdoor product it has to be very durable. But it can't be radically different.

"I suggest that retailers carry good, better, and best," Rory continued. "Let's say Home Depot tops out at \$699, maybe start with something at \$999. In other words, don't go down and fight with Walmart, Target, K-Mart, the big guys. Put yourself a step above them, but then layer it on up to a point where you're comfortable. Everything should be sandwiched between the low and the high."

"What we typically display on the floor at Furnitureland South is going to be above the price point of Lowes and Costco," confirmed Shelby Sari. "But there's always a way to sell against that big box store."

"A shopper may be looking at a table with two swivel rockers and two dining chairs in the high-back version. We can accommodate the price point they are looking for by going to a low-backed chair. We can change the grade of fabric; we can change the premium finish to a standard finish; we can go from cast aluminum to extruded aluminum to find a happy medium."

"Shoppers are always looking for price points," added Bob Gaylord, "but quite honestly, the mass merchandisers in this country are not doing a good job fulfilling customer desires right now with a limited selection of lower-end furniture. We believe that the future of the industry is with furniture retailers who offer a wide selection and employ good horizontal merchandising throughout all the categories. This industry can more than double or triple if the indoor guys get

this message."

Bill Howard, of Crosley Brands, was of a similar mind, "Here's the biggest mistake I see when I talk to a retailer who says something like, 'I've been in it now for a year or two and I haven't had the type of success that I'd like to have.' Too often what I see with new retailers in the outdoor industry is that they will start out at \$1,499 or \$1,799 and go up from there. My take on this is that they are appealing to probably less than 20% of the consumers that are going to walk through their door.

"For every other category they have the ability to move them up and down the price point scale, but they don't do that with the outdoor furniture. I mean, realistically, what percentage of the population is going to put a \$2,000-plus furniture set on their patio or deck? That's one reason the online retailers have done a really good job of capturing a lot of the outdoor business."

"Retailers must be wary of chasing the mass marketers, adds Agio's Michael Gaylord. They need to figure out their competition and where they are going to fit into their individual markets. You probably won't want to chase the specialty guys at the high



"You want the guests to be able to picture the collections in their own backyards."

-Robin Mack, Art Van

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"Retailers can't be successful

by showing just three or four sets. That's the #1 mistake. They need to take steps to become a destination location."

-Michael Gaylord, Agio

end either. Most retailers need to attract outdoor customers in the middle because that is where most of the business is being done."

Bob Gaylord expanded, "To be successful in this category there has to be a commitment from top management to create a five-year plan and commit the space, the inventory dollars and the advertising budget to really go after the category. They must also understand that to get business they must earn it, and to do so means they have to take it from somebody else. Success in this category doesn't happen by accident."

Looking the Part with Horizontal Marketing

"So bottom line, where must retailers start in order to be successful?" Bob Gaylord, of Agio, continued. "They must look like they are in the business. That can include changing the look of the store and its emphasis. If you want to be a factor, you need to have selection. This is no different than selling indoor furniture. If you don't have 30 or 40 sofas to sell, you're not going to do significant volume. Likewise, you should have a decent selection of outdoor dining, deep seating and chat, outdoor bars, and all the accessories so you can look like you are absolutely in the business."

"The breadth of products a retailer carries must be available in season," Michael Gaylord explained. "There are some wholesale clubs who sell out earlier because their selling seasons

for outdoors only last from February through June, or at the very latest, July 4th. Then they get out of the business so they can start moving back-to-school. To be a full-service, full-line furniture store, retailers need to set up the floor in a way that makes them look like they are in the business for the long haul."

When we asked what was the best way for a new retailer to 'look like they are in the business,' the resounding answer was horizontal marketing.

Rory Rehmer, of Summer Winds, offered some statistics: "Fifty-four percent of millennials buying outdoor furniture 'absolutely need' to feel the comfort; 41% 'maybe need' to experience the comfort. The attention to detail and the quality construction of our products also need to be experienced, as opposed to choosing furniture from a photograph. Best practice is that the collections are displayed as they would appear in your outdoor room – complete and accessorized."

Shelby Sari's gallery displays at Furnitureland South bear out that best practice. "We have specific galleries where I've tried to put similar categories together. For example, where we have a wood-species manufacturer like Jensen Leisure, who is working with lpe and Roble woods, or Kingsley Bate and Gloucester who are designing with teak, I put them in the general vicinity of each other.

"Similarly, we would showcase the cast aluminum lines near each other in distinct gallery settings with either full or short walls to break them up. We accessorize the settings with outdoor rugs, umbrellas, and throw pillows.

Shelby concluded, "It's important to have the very best designs that manufacturers offer. Here we are set up to display by manufacturer, so I try to make sure not to show duplication. For example, many manufacturers use Sunbrella® fabrics and they may use the same patterns, but we display different colors. We try very carefully to differentiate manufacturers and highlight their strong suits. The design consultants know that there are options for special orders and that the customer is not restricted to what is in the store."

"Most retailers at first try to fit outdoor furnishings into their existing space," commented Bob Gaylord. "They might try to work items into vignettes or create a store-within-a-store. That's obviously a good idea for retailers who have the available floor space. Right now many retailers have spaces in their stores that are not necessarily producing year-round and can be re-purposed for outdoor. It works. I can tell you that retailers who realize the potential of the category will start building free-standing, separate stores – just like it's already happening in the mattress end of the business."

"At Art Van," Robin Mack said, "we execute a store-within-a-store approach to the outdoor category. It is important for retailers to have a clearly designated outdoor area with each vignette completely accessorized with rugs, umbrellas, lanterns to create a fun atmosphere. You want the guests to be able to picture the collections in their own backyards."

Agio's Michael Gaylord added, "Today, retailers are showing about a third dining, a third seating, and the



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"There's a statistic

out there that 60% of the people in the United States who plan to buy outdoor furniture say they will shop at either Lowe's or Home Depot." -Bob Gaylord, Agio

remaining third fire pit chat on their showroom floors. Being able to put a different assortment out there with lots of choices in each category is very important. Retailers can't be successful by showing just three or four sets. That's the #1 mistake. They need to take steps to become a destination location for patio furniture. And the only way to do it is by doing a better job than everybody else. Or, at a minimum, be at least as good as whoever is doing the best job locally."

Bill Howard, of Crosley Brands, cautioned, "In outdoor, it's really easy to get pigeonholed into dark brown, flat looking, and mundane. I always recommend big pops of color to draw people in. Retailers should consider

increasing attention by creating attractive point-of-purchase displays that show customers all the options and how to piece an outdoor selection in various ways. The more you get the consumer touching, feeling, considering, and interacting with the displays, the better the chance of selling something."

"At Furnitureland South we are kind of an anomaly in the casual industry, in that we are totally special order in outdoor furnishings," reported Shelby Sari. "So I can go a little bit on the trend and bring in some fun, bright colors. Our design consultants are well-versed in letting clients know all the choices that are available."

Rory Rehmert continued, "The best sellers are dressed in neutral textiles, however, a show-stopping color or geometric patterning can draw attention on a sales floor. Attention can also be drawn by the use of shining metallic frame finishes or colorful dec-

orative pillows."

That paralleled Shelby Sari's experience: "So many times consumers will go with neutral fabrics, to the point where it is almost plain, and then they will pop it with color from the rug or with throw pillows or the umbrella. They realize that it's the furniture itself that is an important investment. It is not just a fly-by-night purchase. They want comfort, durability, and simple upkeep."

Bob Gaylord, of Agio, discussed a clever work-around for showcasing fire pits. "Besides deep seating, fire has been a big trend because it contributes ambient lighting and is a heat source. Just like indoors, fireplaces add a real focal point to the outdoor room. Unfortunately, retailers cannot light them inside of a store, so that's why we're making videos. Showing a lit fire pit is a terrific way to sell consumers on the benefits. The fireplace chat means four or six nice, big deep-seating

Below, cast aluminum Contemporary deep seating on display at DeVries Garden Center, North Brunswick, NJ. Photo compliments of the Castelle division of Pride Family Brands.



"There is a major trend toward modern designs and sleek transitional lines. Consumers are loving that look. They are seeing it in ads; they are seeing it on the web."

-Shelby Sari, Furnitureland South

lounge chairs or solo rockers or gliders around the pit. It's a super strong category."

Is an outdoor specialist necessary?

We recapped what a savvy retailer needs in the casual industry: long-range planning, budget commitments, and horizontal marketing of a great selection of furniture in colorful displays. We asked if it was necessary to have a specialist on board.

Bob Gaylord recommended unreservedly, "Hire somebody with experience. There's a learning curve and early mistakes can cost a retailer a lot

of money. Selling indoor furniture is different than selling outdoor furniture. There are differences in materials, finishes, fabric qualities and grades that you just can't easily learn about through on-the-job training. At the very least, retailers need to get somebody who becomes passionate about selling outdoor, really embraces it as their own and is willing to educate him or herself by engaging with companies, reps and others who have the experience and the background.

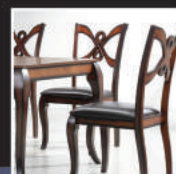
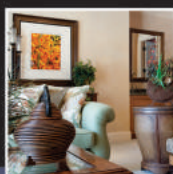
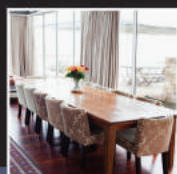
"With the customization feature of our products, an outdoor furniture specialist is key. That person would be versed in the features and benefits of the products, the performance of materials, and also the custom ordering of elements to create one-of-a-

kind outdoor rooms. They also would be able to coordinate a furnishing plan with a customer's existing elements, as well as enhancing the indoor to outdoor flow. And they would have a knowledge of the core consumers' buying habits and expectations."

"Millennials are a growth area, but it depends on the price point that you're addressing."

-Rory Rehmert, Summer Winds division Pride Family Brands

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Shelby Sari offered another perspective: "If you've got a sales background and you know how to sell indoor products, then I think you can sell outdoor. It's all about learning the nuances. I don't think you have to have somebody that knows outdoor – and it's harder and harder to find somebody that specifically deals in outdoor furnishings. But if you can train them properly and they've been in sales, then it becomes a natural flow."

Crosley Brands' Bill Howard observed, "I often encounter a stand-by, wait-and-see sort of mentality among retailers who are at the stage where they are considering giving outdoor furniture a shot. They've read in trade publications that they should get into the category. When they go to the markets, all the vendors tell them the same thing. They just barely dip their big toe in without fully committing to it."

"But to do it right and be successful," Bill continued, "retailers need to go in with a good, positive mind-set, and look at the category as a big opportunity for growth. If they do it right, present their lines well, take

advantage of the head counts and the traffic they are already generating, they will have a big leg up."

Michael Gaylord, went on, "There are so many under-served markets in this country right now, where the only place consumers can go to buy patio furniture is a home center or a club. To do a better job, retailers need to have a professional sales staff, excellent financing, and professional delivery."

"Art Van Furniture has tremendous market share in the indoor side of the business throughout the entire state of Michigan and beyond. When they got into the outdoor side of the business they did it right by hiring a local guy who had a specialty store in the area as their first buyer. They've just done a tremendous job of advertising and have a beautiful full-color booklet to give customers. They have a fantastic selection and their floors are accessorized properly. That's why they are having tremendous success in the category, growing on the outdoor side of their business every year. I'd say they are a case study for anybody looking to do it right."

Getting the Word Out

"There's a statistic out there that 60% of the people in the United States

who plan to buy outdoor furniture say they will shop at either Lowe's or Home Depot," reported Bob Gaylord. "Do you know why? Because every customer out there, whether they drive a Kia or a Mercedes, visit Lowe's and Home Depot. And for six months out of the year, they see outdoor furniture there. They don't go into specialty stores. Tell me, how often consumers go into

"Salespeople have to be ready with the answers to customer's questions about materials and fabrics.

Good educational information is much appreciated by consumers who can't get this type of service from mass merchants and home centers." - Bob Gaylord, Agio

Fireplaces are a huge trend, adding ambient light and heat that can extend the outdoor season and help sell seating. Photo below from Agio.





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"Make the outdoor sales area a part of the regular pitch, no matter what the customer may be looking for on a particular visit."

-Bill Howard, Crosley Brands

an indoor furniture store? It's not very often. That's why it is so important as a furniture store to tell them you're in the outdoor furniture business.

"If you are a factor in your marketplace," Bob continued, "the one goal you need to have is for every shopper in your trading area to come into your store before they buy indoor furniture. They may not buy from you; they might buy it from your local competitor; they might even buy it online. But it's a goal to get them into your store. And that goal should be exactly the same for outdoor furniture. The advantages that indoor furniture retailers have in offering customers everything from financing to home delivery is huge."

Rory Rehmer, of Summer Winds, observed, "Castelle, of Family Brands, finds that television continues to be the best method for advertising outdoor furniture."

"Another good way to get the word out to shoppers who visit your store," Bill Howard suggested, "is to make the outdoor sales area a part of the regular pitch, no matter what the customer may be looking for on a particular visit. Just saying, 'Hey, are you aware that we also have a big selection of outdoor furniture and accessories at various price points? We can take care of your needs when it comes to the outdoor space as well.' It's a good idea to make it interesting and advantageous for customers to buy by working in promotions or contests."

"Art Van typically runs a percent-off sale on the entire department," Robin Mack added. "This allows the guest to choose the set from the entire assortment that works best for their unique situation. We also feature 'Hot Buy' prices on specific sets throughout the season."

Shelby Sari enumerated the special

events at Furnitureland South: "We have an annual Fabulous February kick-off sale, with participating manufacturers giving discounts. We have an outdoor-living event in April and an Awesome August sale."

Educating Both Sales Staff and Consumers

"A lot of floor sales people who are not yet well trained avoid the outdoor category," Bill Howard observed. "They don't want to look foolish or jeopardize an existing sale they hoped to make. It's important to educate and work with them to establish a regular rhythm so they can take people by the hand and show them what's new in outdoor. You can't just roll product out onto the floor and expect it to automatically resonate overnight. It is important to make a conscious effort to build consumer awareness throughout the organization."

"Training is very important when it comes to the outdoor category," agreed Robin Mack. "Art Van kicks off each season with an extensive 6-hour seminar in each geographical location. We invite our key vendor partners to come and give a hands-on presentation to teach the features and benefits of each of their collections in our assortment."

"We encourage the associates to ask questions and participate. These associates become our department experts and teach the other associates in their respective stores. In addition," Robin concluded, "we produce special informational videos so that all sales associates can learn key features and benefits."

Bob Gaylord, of Agio, added, "Salespeople have to be ready with

the answers to customers' questions about materials and fabrics. They have to reply with real honesty about care and maintenance of outdoor furniture. Truth in selling is number one, and good educational information is much appreciated by consumers who can't get this type of service from mass merchants and home centers."

"I think it's very much an education process," confirmed Shelby Sari. "Our design consultants raise a valid point: it's not apples to apples. Consultants have to explain the different nuances to the consumer. If you are looking at the aluminum frame under a woven piece, you can talk about the durability of the frame and how it will hold up over time, as opposed to the possibility of going into a big box store and looking at a light-weight frame that can corrode and cause problems. You don't want a piece of furniture that's light-weight and can toss and blow around in a windy location."

"I believe that most consumers would rather buy locally," Bill Howard added. "Yes, there are some attractive things the online guys have that the brick-and-mortar guys don't have. Online retailers can show an infinite number of products at an infinite number of price points. Buying from them is convenient – just point, click, purchase, and get it quickly. But most people still would rather have someone they can speak to face-to-face, someone who will explain how the features and benefits meet their needs. They need someone to support them if things go sideways."

Shelby Sari concurred, "You've got the issue of replacements. If something happens to your purchase, there's just a 1-800 number, and depending on the time frame, chances are your piece may no longer be available. You may only get a refund, and then you are

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"In outdoor, it's really easy to get pigeonholed into dark brown, flat looking, and mundane. I always recommend big pops of color to draw people in."

- Bill Howard, Crosley Brands

Image from
Crosley Brands

starting over at square one.

"Replacements for us are less of a maze. Manufacturers always come out with new collections. If the problem is a warranty issue and they cannot replace the part, they can offer the customer a complete new collection. You're not going to have that with a big box store.

"Most of the time if a manufacturer drops a collection," Shelby continued, "they still carry the fabric pattern to do replacement cushions and replacement slings. So you can get replacement parts even if the collection is not current."

Rory Rehmert of Summer Winds, added, "At the price point of our furniture, the more knowledgeable the sales person, the easier the sale. The better they know not only the product, but the performance aspect of the materials and the custom ordering options, the better they can be at fielding customer questions. Castelle provides a training handbook for retail sales personnel, as well as providing in-store training sessions upon request from the territory managers."

"It's very important that sales people qualify customers, to understand how they plan to use their furniture and get information on the environment where it will be used," said Michael Gaylord, vice president of sales at Agio. "For example, there are not a lot of people who end up very happy when they buy

the thick, heavy deep seating cushions for use in an uncovered area. After a couple of years, they may get tired of sitting on wet cushions. Those customers might be steered towards just the seat pad, or possibly a sling chair."

Shelby Sari underlined the importance of training, "A consumer was recently talking to one of our design consultants and said, 'The price is a lot lower for this collection than the others I'm seeing from the same manufacturer. Is there something wrong with it?' The consultant and the customer popped by my office and I spoke with the customer. I explained, 'All the manufacturers were looking at ways of coming out with more value-conscious pricing. If you compare the different frames, you can see on one the aluminum strap is narrower and thinner. It is still the same quality but some of the metal and weight has been taken out of the frame to reach a value price point. The cushions are still the same comfort, still the same core – it's just that some of the metal was taken out.' We sold it!"

Bill Howard, at Crosley Brands, observed, "I think it's always important for salespeople to focus on developing a rapport with outdoor consumers, instead of just pitching and regurgitating everything they know. Showing interest in what the customer needs and then listening carefully to their answers comes off as being a lot more sensitive, a lot truer, no matter what category is being sold."

"Traditional furniture retailers are awakening to the potential of outdoor living and, therefore, outdoor furniture," said Rory Rehmert. "Full-line furniture sales associates must be trained

thoroughly on outdoor products. They have to understand why outdoor furniture is slightly more expensive than indoor furniture. Offering collections of multiple levels provides teachable value practices. Educating retailers on the value found in the outdoor category is a matter of doing the math."

Robin Mack was like-minded: "A clearly defined outdoor area with fully accessorized settings will create an enticing atmosphere. Pair this with knowledgeable associates ready to explain the key features and benefits of each collection, and you have a winning combination."

Bill Howard counseled, "Retailers new to the category should be looking for a nice steady progression over time. They can learn a lot by paying careful attention to the items their customers gravitate towards. As a seasonal category, it gives retailers an opportunity to reinvent themselves seasonally until they get to the point where their outdoor choices have optimal price points, advertising, exposure and looks. My biggest message is just to have fun."

Rory Rehmert concluded with this advice, "Retailers need to evaluate their customer base and make decisions for expansions into new sales demographics. Retailers add value by having well-trained, knowledgeable sales personnel who are personable and professional. Retailers add value by having inventory and being able to complete the sale in a short time frame. Retailers add value by going the extra mile for the consumer. Retailers add value by servicing what they sell, today, tomorrow and sometime in the future."

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How to quantify the cost of poor quality.

By Peter Schlosser

"No violence,
gentlemen—
no violence,
I beg of
you! Consider
the furniture!"

-Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

I began working in the furniture industry in 1993. I remember my first week on the job at Boyles Furniture in Hickory, North Carolina, as an introduction to an industry that at first took me completely by surprise: I had no idea how much I would grow to love it. The warehouse was sweltering, the furniture was very heavy, the lacquer fumes made me feel like I was going to pass out, and it took a long while, as a Yankee, to get used to the beautiful lilting dialect found in Appalachia. But like a siren's song, I couldn't run from it if I tried.

Coupled with that was a dizzying display of the world's most elegant furniture from such storied manufacturers as Henredon, Kindel, Henkel-Harris, and Baker. The grain of the wood was like a symphony, flashing and changing in color as you viewed it from different angles. Fabrics from all over the world were stretched over frames by skilled and talented artists from Sherrill, Southwood, and Century, so perfectly flow matched you could spend all day looking for a flaw--if you ever found one.


But my initial exposure to the furniture industry would cloud my reasoning for years to come. My standards, cultivated from years inspecting Hickory Chair and Maitland-Smith, did not serve me well when I ultimately

transitioned into the mass-produced furniture industry familiar to the other 99% of the globe. All the while I was dancing a vicarious waltz with high-end furniture, the rest of the world was shopping for the basics, reasonably-priced and functional furniture, goods mostly produced in the United States at the time, but beginning to show up in showrooms with labels from countries like Malaysia, Taiwan, and China. More and more, import labels started appearing everywhere, and in the earliest part of this century, domestic factories in western North Carolina began going dark like windows in the Walton house: Good night, John Boy.

Begrudgingly I began finding myself face to face with China. And it took a long time, believe me, but what I came to realize is, this stuff isn't half bad. In fact, while the finish wasn't too complicated, just a standard no-rub satin nitrocellulose lacquer, the wood species beneath it was still the same wood species I saw on higher-end goods. Perhaps mahogany was replaced with sapele and khaya, or cherry with alder, but the faux finishing produced essentially the same effect. I started to realize that the big hairy elephant in the room was staring me down, and I'd better saddle up or be left behind.

And then I realized, why do I have

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"Let's focus on the gigantic

middle-of-the-road of furniture and discuss what you, as retailers, can do to lift yourselves above the competition and deliver true quality."

to settle for compromising my standards, the very ones I advocate for the customer on their behalf, based on dollar value? It became increasingly clear to me that with customer demand for quality growing faster than the quality level itself, there were going to be a lot of retailers who would be left in the dark unless they searched for that ethereal, magical, intangible netherworld where customers are actually pleased with their purchases.

But come on. Quality isn't so complicated, and let's stop using the word so loosely that consumers tune out when they hear it, like the words satisfaction, customer service, and guaranteed. Let's focus on the gigantic middle-of-the-road of furniture and discuss what you, as retailers, can do to lift yourselves above the competition and deliver true quality furniture.

Hire people who know what they're doing.

If you try to pigeonhole a delivery driver with little talent and no training into the repair shop, you're doing him, and yourself, a disservice. A carpenter who quotes a job at 50% lower than the highest estimate in town is usually 50% worse than the best in town. Years of experience are valuable and deserve to be paid as such. When hiring a technician, ask for a demonstration of their skills--a burn-in, lacquering a top, repairing a crushed corner. Ask for a critique of your current shop:

What would they do differently? Where is the shop lacking? And yes, their suggestions come with financial costs, but don't most business decisions?

Look at the furniture.

This one confuses me. When I open and inspect a piece of furniture, I am looking for anything that jumps out at me, cocked drawers, crushed corners, unfinished edges, glue or oil smears on tops, rub-throughs on the corners of upholstery. If I see them, she will too. Being proactive reduces your even exchange rate because there's geometrically less to argue about in the home upon delivery. Fewer even exchanges reduces your as-is inventory and eliminates zero-revenue space on your delivery trucks. It also keeps you off the negative social media merry-go-round. Hire someone who understands what the furniture is supposed to look like in its perfect state, and have your technician get it to that perfect state. Doesn't that seem logical?

Equip your drivers.

What does a perfect delivery look like? Ask your drivers! Then ask them what is standing in the way of that perfect delivery. As managers, we have to put ourselves in harm's way and open up about a few things, like... we don't have all the answers...or, perhaps we've failed to give custom-

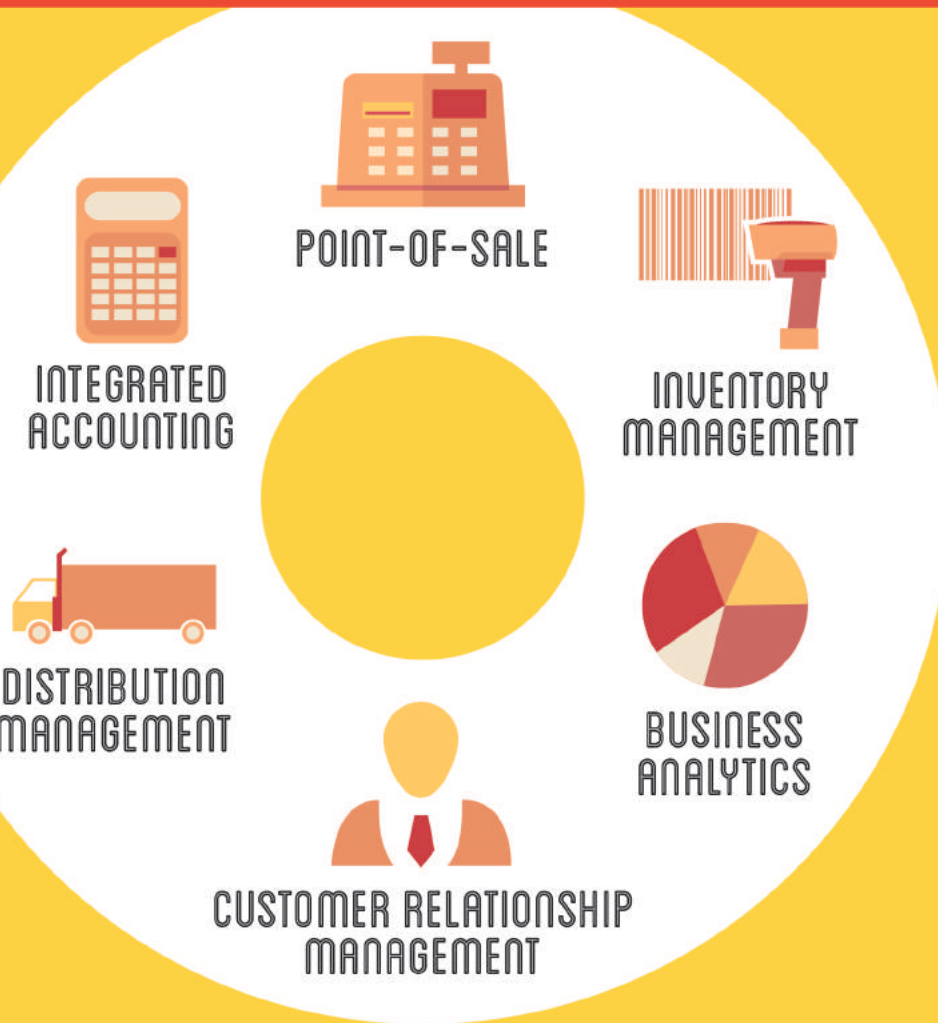
ers what they need. I learn something new every day from the people with whom I work, and I am so blessed to have their input, and exposure to their experiences. Humility makes me more valuable and more capable because I'm open to change.

Sell quality furniture.

The most uncomfortable argument of this article, though, can be summed up in this statement: Sell quality over quantity. This topic often ends in disagreement but I'm going to plead my

"Ramping up on prep, assembly and deluxing, but ignoring the delivery processes, is like throwing money into the wind. Equipping drivers with the best touch-up materials and supplies, but loading them up with shoddy merchandise, is equally fruitless."

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THE FURNITURE

case. Everyone would agree that a piece of solid gold jewelry is superior to a piece of pot metal, gold-plated jewelry, correct? Why? Because when the material is precious, manufacturers tend to put more time into its quality. Conversely, when the end product is made more cheaply, the expectation for the product is much lower. No one expects a \$39 import tablet to last, but a \$1200 Microsoft Surface Pro 4 better be humming for a long time. Our expectations for the better machine are based, in part, on its price. The quality of the product is usually commensurate with that price.

Generally, furniture quality also rises with price. If you doubt this, think about a \$299 sofa. If I buy a sofa to resell at \$299, I probably bought it wholesale for \$200 landed cost. Whoever made it, though, didn't sell it to me for cost, they made money on it too. If we assume we all make a decent margin, then the manufacturer may have had \$125 in it. Even if they're vertically integrated, they had to purchase the materials to make that sofa from suppliers, each of whom

also earned a decent margin. Let's tease out the components of a sofa, regardless of its cost:

Deconstructing your sofa.

Cover. Typically, a sofa uses about 10-17 yards of fabric. What's the cheapest fabric you've ever seen?

Foam. Have you seen the price of polyurethane foam lately? Especially four inches or more thick?

Dacron. Fiber filling stuffs every back pillow and bolster.

Padding. Dacron sheets typically pad the arms and crown the seat cores.

Frame. Wood has to be straight in order to machine it, and OSB panels, while inexpensive, aren't free.

Fasteners. Finish staples, construction staples, t-nuts, hanger bolts all cost money.

Suspension. At least ten or twelve sinuous spring strips, with hangers, are

used in every sofa.

Construction. All the fabric has to be marked according to template, cut, and assembled properly, panel by panel. All wood components have to be judged, marked and cut by hand. Frame components need to be fitted and assembled by hand. Inside and outside upholsterers need to assemble the entire unit.

Inspection and trimming. Upholstery is messy, and folks need to prepare it for packaging.

Packaging. Even the thinnest bag costs money.

On your very best day, could you even begin to source all of these components for \$125? I understand perfectly economies of scale, but what kind of quality is baked into this product? That being said, and considering the laundry list I've shown above, are we doing our customers a service or a disservice by selling them something that clearly has very little inherent quality? Are they likely to come back to us after it fails premature to their expectations, and shake our hands? I strongly doubt it.

We owe it to our customers to give

"So in the first scenario, we end up with a loss of \$261, and in the second, we end up with a profit, although slim, of \$90."

Scenario #1: Promotional Sofa

Transaction	Dollars Spent	Dollars Earned
Initial cost of sofa, landed	200	99
Cost of replacement	200	0
Delivery income	60	60
Exchange delivery cost	60	0
Clearance recovery	0	100
TOTALS	520	259
NET DIFFERENCE	(261)	

Scenario #2: Higher Priced Sofa

Transaction	Dollars Spent	Dollars Earned
Initial cost of sofa, landed	600	600
Cost of replacement	600	0
Delivery income	60	60
Exchange delivery cost	60	0
Clearance recovery	0	750
TOTALS	1320	1410
NET DIFFERENCE		90

"But consider the same scenario for a better quality sofa, perhaps one with a \$600 landed cost and a \$1200 price tag."

them the best quality they can afford--but not only to them, to ourselves as retailers. Consider that every piece of furniture we sell comes with a warranty, usually a year. Typical warranties from reputable manufacturers usually cover the frame integrity and some components for a year or more. Going back to my example (see Chart), what was the gross profit earned on the sofa I mentioned, \$99 or so, right? If you have to replace that sofa according to warranty--most likely due to a frame separation or failure--that often means buying another one, a fixed price of \$200. The delivery fee the customer probably paid was enough to cover your delivery expense, but the exchange delivery cost, maybe around \$60, is all on you. The returned sofa has a value of perhaps \$100 at clearance if you repair it or not.

But consider the same scenario for a finer quality sofa, perhaps one with a \$600 landed cost and a \$1200 price tag. The sofa costs that much because the quality is much better, is made with better materials, and has more features, and therefore can be sold for more at clearance, usually 20% over cost. Presuming a frame failure of an identical nature:

So in the first scenario, we end up with a loss of \$261, and in the second, we end up with a profit, although slim, of \$90. Even though the first sale was probably a cash sale and the second one financed, you can clearly see the difference in

selling quality over quantity.

Furniture quality is not intangible: We all affect it. It begins with how it's built, but it also hinges on the way we sell it, how we handle the furniture during receiving, how we put it in the racks, how we pull it and stage it, how it's prepped and assembled, how it's inspected and repaired, how it's loaded onto the delivery trucks, and how it's delivered into the home. No one component of the process can receive more attention than another. Ramping up on prep, assembly and deluxing, but ignoring the delivery processes, is like throwing money into the wind. Equipping drivers with the best touch-up materials and supplies, but loading them up with shoddy merchandise, is equally fruitless. Dialing in on handling is wonderful, but if you don't

have anyone who can repair the defects, what's the point? It takes a concerted, herculean task to change the culture of any organization to one of true quality, but look at any other team who's done it, like the Alabama Crimson Tide. Love 'em or hate 'em, they are the benchmark of their trade. This coming from a Penn State fan.

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

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Best Selling DESIGN



Classy Art

A piece from the new Rose Gold Collection features a three inch wide rose gold frame. This paper was created by Designer/Artist Carol Robinson. Approximate retail price is \$39.00.

Contact information on page 128.

Arthur W. Brown

The Francesca home office system is available in Maple & Oak. It features six moldings, 12 colors, dozens of standard sizes/combinations as well as custom sizes and paint colors.

Contact information on page 128.



Crosley

The Catalina Collection features plush piped cushions, deep seats, and modular design. All weather wicker is elegantly woven over durable steel powder coated frames and married with UV/fade resistant cushions to provide comfort and durability.

Contact information on page 128.



Bramble

The Antoinette Dining Chair is shown in Aged Honey Mahogany wood stain.

Contact information on page 128.



Capel

Kodari is a new collection of traditional and transitional designs with an erased feel in four colors gray, light blue/gray, ivory and multi ivory. The group is machine made in India of 80% New Zealand wool and 20% viscose. Sizes include 5'3" x 7'6", 8' x 11' and 10' x 13'. A 5'3" x 7'6" rug may retail for \$699.

Contact information on page 128.



Agio

The Del Mar Woven Deep Seating Collection of contemporary design wicker seating uses quick-dry foam external padding on the seat to ensure dryness.

Contact information on page 128.

Borkholder

The solid-wood Sienna Collection is shown here in brown maple medium to dark tones, hand-distressed with rubbed-through finishes that allow the beauty of the wood to shine through.

Contact information on page 128.



Best Selling DESIGN



Nouveau Concept

Shown in the new Loft finish, the AV683 offers enough space for electronic components. Already assembled, this 72" width TV unit is available in other trendy finishes.

Contact information on page 128.



Kas Rugs

Retreat is an Easy Care flatweave collection machine-made of 100% polyester chenille with a non-skid backing. This rug is treated with a special finish that prevents liquid from penetrating the fibers and repels stains. The collection features contemporary, transitional and traditional patterns made in Turkey, and a low profile 1/4" Pile Height.

Contact information on page 128.



Lane

The Diego features a new armless chair w/a drop down table, cup holders and an exclusive air charge wireless charging plate for smart devices. A sleek "puck" adapter is hidden in the storage pouch to assist in charging all smart brands and models.

Contact information on page 128 .



Wallbeds

The white Nantucket fits on an eight foot long wall. It has a continuous top and base molding. Available in queen size and six other finishes.

Contact information on page 128.



Lazzaro Leather

The stylish Ames Sling Chair combines a distinctive metal frame with a seat in Calvados leather. Details include double-bar framing, leather arm pads and deep horizontal tufting on the seat and back.

Contact information on page 128.

Klaussner

The Picasso mattress features a Tencel™ zip-on cover that's 100% machine washable. TSC Gel Memory Foam positions the gel layer as close to the sleeper's body as possible, enhancing the ability of the PureGel™ Plus TSC Memory Foam to conform, and eliminate painful pressure points.

Contact information on page 128.



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Best Selling

DESIGN



Maxwood

The All In One Line offers a sturdy high loft bed that rests on interchangeable desk and storage units. These new beds are made from solid hardwoods and come in three different finishes, natural, white and cherry. Available with matching case pieces. Contact information on page 128.



Momeni

The Millennia collection is hand tufted from silky viscose designed with a hi-lo effect for added texture and depth. Colors in this collection prominently feature this year's metallic trend coupled with pastels and neutrals. Contact information on page 128.



Jaipur Home

Retro Patchwork Console, one of hundreds of rustic looks, trendy industrial and hand painted designs direct from the factory. Contact information on page 128.



Castelle

Lounge Chair from the Gold Coast collection has angular arm/leg supports with decorate fabric inset panels designed to coordinate or contrast with cushioning. Contact information on page 128.



Legends

The Parliament collection invokes a feeling of a stately old English manor with its strongly defined details and mature finishes.

Contact information on page 128.



Nourison

The Twilight Collection reflects the special beauty of early evening. These wool-blend rugs are a perfect complement to today's leading trends in contemporary furnishings.

Contact information on page 128.

Norwalk

The Kimberly Sofa is available in both 92 inch standard and 106-inch. Features include lavishly scaled track arms, generous plinth legs, and extra-deep loose seat cushions, back pillows and bolsters. Available in 800 fabrics and 30 wood finishes.

Contact information on page 128.

Furniture of America

With bold lines and rustic details, "Elkton" is a cabin-inspired set featuring natural wood grain and antique oak finish.

Contact information on page 128 .



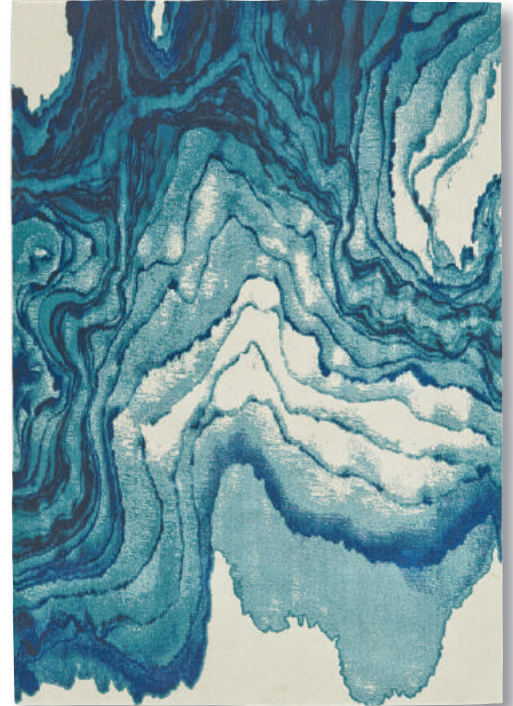
Best Selling DESIGN



CordaRoy's

A patented foam chair that converts to a bed. Just remove the washable cover to reveal the bed. It's available in youth, full, queen, king, and an ultimate king sofa with 2 foam mattresses inside.

Contact information on page 128.



Feizy Rugs

The Brixton Collection's contemporary and transitional designs are power loomed in cobalt, yellow and green, balanced with a neutral gray. The combination of colors lends itself perfectly to the watercolor effects used throughout the collection. Power loomed in Turkey of polypropylene.

Contact information on page 128.



TOV

This mid-century styled sectional features clean, straight lines with classic button tufts in an eco leather cover. Handcrafted from a kiln dried solid wood frame, the Blake is sturdy, elegant, and comfortable. Available in right or left configurations plus multiple color and upholstery options.

Contact information on page 128.



Surya

The Belhaven lamp features a ceramic body with subtly distressed finish atop a crystal base. It is paired with a textured polyester shade. Dimensions are 16"W x 30.5"H.

Contact information on page 128.



Tayse Rugs

"Jayce", from the new printed Elements Collection have a latex backing so they're perfect for use in a foyer, kitchen, or any high-traffic indoor area. Available in eleven sizes. MSRP for 5'x8' is \$69.

Contact information on page 128.



Omnia

The St James is made in America. It can be personalized in hundreds of fabric and leather combinations.

Contact information on page 128.

CLOSING THE SALE

The start of Closing is the Presentation Step.

by David Benbow

"Closing the Sale is a process that begins immediately after a customer has shown buying signals on a particular product."

In our previous issues of *Furniture World* we covered the following Steps of the Sale:

1. Meet and Greet
2. Qualifying the Customer
3. Selection of the Right Product

These articles can be found on the Better Bedding and Mattress Sales series page at www.furninfo.com/series. Now it's time to begin our discussion of Closing the Sale.

We will start with the Presentation step. Some sales trainers might argue that Presentation should not be included as part of Closing the Sale. I understand the argument, but Closing the Sale begins immediately after the customer has shown buying signals on a particular product. In my book, we call this **LANDING ON THE BED**. Landing on the bed is the goal and culmination of the Selection step. Once the customer is Landed, everything else is part of the Closing sequence.

Before we go any further in our discussion, let me say that the RSA (Retail Sales Associate) CANNOT close a sale unless the customer is LANDED. Asking for the sale won't work when a customer is wandering around aimlessly, giving no buying signals, and

showing no interest in anything the RSA is saying. If you find this concept hard to understand, I suggest you go to *Furniture World's* on-line furninfo.com archives and read my article on the Selection step of the sale.

The Presentation

Presentation is explaining the features and benefits of the product that the customer has selected. (We also call the presentation step "Pitching the Bed.") But, bear in mind, presentation is more than merely covering all the features and benefits. Presentation also means educating the customer and building enthusiasm for the new bed. These benefits have real value. They are worth more than the price. That is the point of the presentation.

The truly professional RSA will also segue these benefits into a message of better sleep, better health, and better lifestyle. This is the true value of a new, quality mattress set. This type of presentation will help convert "need" into "want."

Allow me to repeat myself. The RSA should not explain any features and benefits of any bed UNTIL the customer is Landed on his bed of choice. Features and benefits should



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"Here's a little alliterative slogan

that RSAs should remember: *Buyers Buy Benefits. Features are Fast Forgotten.*"

be presented ONLY on the bed the customer has selected. You might ask, "I thought you said, in another article, that customers compare when they shop; that they want to know the comparative value of the bed they like versus other beds on the floor, and to beds in other stores. How do you do that if you don't talk about other beds?" Yes, I did say that. And, this comparison can begin AFTER the customer has been Landed on the bed.

At an old mattress chain where I used to work, we had a cardinal rule, "Don't pitch the bed (present features and benefits) until the customer is Landed on the bed." Pitching the bed should include favorable comparisons to other products, both in your own store and in competitor's stores. It is better, however, to save these comparisons until AFTER the customer has decided which bed he likes the best.

Support The Customer's Decision

Pitching the bed (explaining features and benefits) is done to reinforce the wisdom of the customer's decision. If the RSA goes around talking about specs and other features randomly on every bed he shows the customer, it doesn't take long for the customer to become confused, bored and annoyed by the whole thing. Features of other beds should be shown, as a comparison only, to enhance the customer's perception of the bed he has selected and is willing to purchase. For example, if the customer is Landed on a \$799 queen set, and that \$799 queen set has some features (and therefore benefits) that are also found in a \$1499 bed, the RSA is wise to point this out to the customer. When the customer finds out he is getting some \$1499 benefits for only \$799, he is probably going to be happier with his decision, and as a result, the sale will be easier to close.

On the other hand, if the \$799 bed has features (and related benefits) that are not found in the \$699 (or less) bed, the RSA should point this out in his presentation. This is another way to demonstrate added value for the money.

In the Selection step, the customer makes his decision based on feel and comfort, his realistic budget expectations, among other intangibles. The point then, of the presentation step, is to add value to the customer's decision. Justify the price and the cost (there is a difference.) "You've made a good decision, and here's why, in terms of features and benefits, that

your decision makes sense and will yield greater benefits than the modest price you are paying."

Don't forget Control. The RSA must maintain control of the sales process. Control means focusing the customer's attention on what the RSA is saying, and not letting his attention wander off to some distraction.

Features And Benefits

Here's a little alliterative slogan that RSAs should try to remember: *Buyers Buy Benefits. Features are Fast Forgotten.*

Of course, the RSA must actually KNOW the features and benefits of a product before he can begin to recite them. This goes back to product knowledge and preparation. For the sake of this discussion, we will assume the RSA is prepared.

I'd like to suggest that each store compile a list of every conceivable feature for every SKU on their floor, and then compile a corresponding list of benefits for each feature. Some stores have a contest between the RSAs to see who can come up with the most potential benefits for each feature and product. Then, put this list on a computer, or i-Pad, or some medium that the RSA can easily access when Pitching the Bed.

I understand that not too many stores will have this sort of list. The professional RSA should memorize as much as possible about each bed and have it ready for recital, but I don't think there's anything wrong with having some lists that you carry around with you on the floor. I usually

"Mr. Lawhon also urges that the presentation should really 'pour on' the benefits. The more benefits, the more value the customer gets for his money. The more value he perceives, the easier he is to close."

CLOSING THE SALE

kept several lists with me, to remind me of anything important that I might

"You've made a good decision, and here's why, in terms of features and benefits, that your decision makes sense and will yield greater benefits than the modest price you are paying."

overlook while working a sale.

Speaking of benefits, my old friend Gerry Morris, in his book *Spring Training*, makes an excellent point about how to explain features and benefits. He says that the RSA should give a benefit first, and then show how the specs (features) support and provide that benefit.

The reader might be saying at this point, "I really don't have a list and my store hasn't provided anything, either. What do I do now?" John F. Lawhon, in his book *Selling Retail*, said "Your product is your script." So, use what you know about the product as a presentation for that product. Mr. Lawhon also urges that the presentation should really "pour on" the bene-

fits. The more benefits, the more value the customer gets for his money. The more value he perceives, the easier it is to close.

Why is all this important?

The RSA might say, "Why do all this, and what does it have to do with closing the sale? Do I do this every time? When do I stop, and when do I ask for the sale?" Well, the fact is, sometimes the RSA does not have to make a presentation. Once in a while, when the customer is Landed, he suddenly pops up and says, "Can I take this with me right now?" The RSA can have several possible responses to this

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	Content	Percentage
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	Certified Organic Latex	10%
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CLOSING THE SALE

“What is your opinion of this bed as opposed to any other beds you have seen so far?”

A positive answer to this question should be a major leap toward the close.”

question. Among them are:

- “Yes, but first I have to tell you all the features and benefits of the bed. Our sales manual says this has to be done. So, here goes...” Maybe not. I agree with John F. Lawhon that the customer should understand all the benefits of his new bed. Sometimes, however, the customer doesn’t really care. The customer may be in a hurry; it may be a cheap guest room bed, etc. When the customer says “I’ll take it,” I think the RSA should write it up straightaway. Don’t risk losing your sale by over-talking. That being said, though, an experienced RSA can do a lot more selling and adding on during and after writing the ticket. Each sales situation is unique. If the RSA has the time to do a presentation and follow up with more add on sales, by all means, do it. But, respect the customer’s wishes. If he wants to load up and get going, let him.
- “Yes, but first let me see if we have

it in stock.” Definitely not. The RSA who qualifies, understands the customer’s priorities, and works the Selection step correctly, already knows that the bed is in stock. If you have to go look at inventory after the sale has been virtually closed, you may have already made a fatal mistake.

But, when the customer does not preempt your presentation with an “I’ll take it” here’s WHY the RSA should proceed with a presentation.

1. Show that your product is better than your competitor’s product.
2. Show that his selection has more value than other cheaper products.
3. Build enthusiasm in the customer’s mind.
4. Interpret benefits so customers perceive improved lifestyle.
5. Reduce the possibility of buyer’s remorse.
6. Compare the great new bed to the bad old bed.
7. Display the RSA’s professionalism and competence.
8. Enhance your store’s image and encourage future purchases.

So, what do we say
in a presentation?

Presentation is a conversation; the RSA explains to the customer why he or she should buy the product. While

reciting benefits (supported by features) is the point of the discussion, the RSA should not make it sound as if he is reading specs out of an assembly manual. As the RSA covers the features and benefits, he should be carefully observing the customer’s response. A positive response could be the trigger for asking for the sale. The prepared RSA should also be asking for the customer to acknowledge his presentation. Presentation is not a one-sided conversation where only the RSA speaks. Many times, the RSA is yapping away and the customer is not paying any attention. How do you get the customer to listen and acknowledge?

I like to phrase some of my presentation as a Did You Know (DYK) question. A statement of fact is easily ignored. A question, on the other hand, demands an answer (at least from a polite, interested customer.) Here are some examples.

“At an old mattress chain where I used to work, we had a cardinal rule, “Don’t pitch the bed (present features and benefits) until the customer is ‘landed’ on the bed.”



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"Will you be paying cash,

or would you like to hear about our great credit program?" This question, when asked BEFORE the close, focuses the customer's attention on the closing of the sale."

"Did you know that this mattress has the highest coil count in the industry?" The RSA can follow this response with an explanation of the benefits of coils and in particular, high coil counts.

"Do you think that this posturized coil structure will satisfy your problem

with morning back ache?" This can follow an explanation of posturized coils and their benefits.

"Did you know that this \$799 queen that you like, has the same amount of memory foam as the \$1199 queen?"

I don't mean to imply that every pre-

sentation statement should be stated this way. Don't make it monotonous. Asking for acknowledgment keeps the customer involved. Each agreement or nod from the customer moves the whole sales process closer to closing the sale.

How does the RSA know if it's working?

As the RSA makes his presentation, he should also search for feedback on how well the customer is receiving the sales pitch. Asking for the sale is, of course, one way to find out. If the RSA is hesitant about asking for the sale, or fears that the customer has not given enough buying signals to warrant asking for the sale, a good way to measure progress in the sale is to use a convention known as the "Trial Close." A trial close is an indirect way for the RSA to determine if the customer is warming up to the idea of buying. The trial close, rather than asking for

"I brought my pickup truck and some rope to tie it down', pretty much tells the RSA that the customer came to buy."



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START CLOSING WITH THE PRESENTATION STEP

a yes or no decision, tries to find out how the customer is currently thinking, or what the customer's opinion is. Here are a few examples.

"Will you need your new mattress set delivered, or do you have a way to pick it up?" Most RSAs ask this question AFTER the close, but if it is used BEFORE the close, it makes an excellent trial close. A positive response, such as "I brought my pickup truck and some rope to tie it down" pretty much tells the RSA that the customer came to buy. Of course, this same information can also be extracted during the qualifying step. It is wise to remember, however, as rapport is built between RSA and customer, the customer may be willing to answer a trial close question, when he would not answer the same question in the qualifying step.

"Will you be paying cash, or would you like to hear about our great credit program?" Again, this question, when asked BEFORE the close, focuses the customer's attention on the closing of the sale. The customer says, "I was going to use my credit card, but tell me about your finance plan." The RSA, once again, has learned a lot about the customer's intentions.

"What is your opinion of this bed as opposed to any other beds you have seen so far?" A positive answer to this question should be a major leap toward the close. In fact, I would certainly ask for the sale if I got a "yes" on this question.

Go back and review your qualifying questions. Also, look at my articles in *Furniture World* on qualifying. A lot of these qualifying questions can be re-purposed as Trial Closes.

Using display materials, such as cut-aways

I always used cutaways, posters, padding samples, etc., when demonstrating and presenting features and benefits. In fact, I used anything the manufacturer provided. I don't see much of these now when I visit showroom floors. Coil samples and mattress cutaways are effective means for demonstrating features which then can be translated into benefits the customer will understand.

In my book, I have an entire chapter on coil demonstrations and how to do them. I can't begin to count how many extra sales I've made just by using a

vivid and effective coil demo. If your store does not have these touch-and-feel sales aids, ask your sales rep to please provide them.

Another good thing about samples, cutaways, etc., is that the RSA can involve the customer directly. Invite the customer to touch and feel the samples. Any customer will pay closer attention to your presentation when you use visual and tactile sales aids.

Once in a while, manufacturers will produce a wall poster that actually contains useful information that can assist in making the sale. I'll admit, these are rare, but if you have one hanging on your wall, make use of it. I like posters that actually convey real information, not just pictures of blissfully smiling models acting as if lying on this mattress was a bit of heaven itself.

"Did you know that this mattress has the highest coil count in the industry?" The RSA can follow this response with an explanation of the benefits of coils and in particular, high coil counts."



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"I like posters that actually convey real information, **not just pictures of blissfully smiling models acting as if lying on this mattress was a bit of heaven itself.**"

Using published information

We've always had consumer advocate magazines that give their opinion on the quality of various products they tested. And, these can be useful, if properly interpreted and applied. Every RSA should certainly have, and be familiar with, the last several issues of *Consumer Reports* that evaluate mattress and bedding products. (These reports can cause controversy. I am not endorsing the information contained inside them as necessarily valid. I'm just saying the RSA should have copies and be familiar with their contents.)

In the last several years, the internet has become a rich source of information on matters relating to the bedding industry. Of particular use are studies on Sleep Deprivation, children's bedding and many other subjects. While not all internet information is of equal validity or value, the discerning and diligent RSA can find plenty of information to build a persuasive presentation and closing argument.

Pacing the presentation

So, how long does this presentation go on? Anywhere from seconds to hours; go until the job is done. The RSA should ask for the sale, and keep asking for the sale. An old rule of thumb I've used is, "the longer the customer is in the store, the better chance there is that the RSA will make the sale."

Customers don't always pay attention and some don't understand the information. The RSA must be prepared to repeat and re-repeat features, benefits and supporting data for the benefits. Some studies show that listeners only absorb about 25 percent of what the speaker says. By all means, don't go too fast. Make sure the customer is grasping the information. The RSA is not only closing, he is also educating the customer in the process. The better the customer understands an intelligent closing argument, the more likely he is to buy.

On the other hand, remember "Brevity is the soul of wit." Don't just keep talking because you love the sound of your voice. The point of the presentation is to Close the Sale. Don't forget that.

IN SUMMARY

We have just begun to scratch the surface on the subject of closing the sale. While closing, as a concept, is not complicated, each closing event can have its own bedeviling details that seem to constantly thwart progress. As the RSA presents, and attempts to close, the customer will invariably raise Objections, and that will be the subject of our next article on Closing the Sale.

About David Benbow: David Benbow, a twenty-three year veteran of the mat-

tress 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 by phone at 361-648-3775.

"Will you need your new mattress set delivered, or do you have a way to pick it up?" Most RSAs ask this question AFTER the close, but if it is used BEFORE the close, it makes an excellent trial close."



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An interview with Jena Hall

by Russell Bienenstock

Legendary designer and Hall of Famer talks about home furnishings design, plus how retailers might approach visual merchandising and store display to combat the sameness and boring at retail.

In this edition of Furniture World Magazine's "Design and Designer" series we interview iconic designer Jena Hall. Jena was the first interior designer to successfully launch her own label and license it to over 22 home furnishing companies. The result was a huge body of work, over 35,000 sku's, from furniture to fabrics, lighting, rugs, sheets, shower curtains, table top, bathrooms, kitchens and much more.

Over a span of 30 plus years, her company, Jena Hall Designs evolved into a design and consulting company developing private label and other licensed and cross-merchandised concepts for some of the top furniture and related companies including: American Drew, American Leather, Andersen Windows, Bassett, Broyhill, Casa Bisque, Casa Stradivari, Century, Domain, Ethan Allan, Henredon, Hulster of Germany, Johnston Casual, Lyon-Shaw, Maitland Smith, Nichols & Stone, Profiles, Pennsylvania House, Sarreid, Wynnwood, Valdesse Weavers, Vanguard Furniture, Carolina Mirror, Revman Sheets, Wildcat Territories Top of Bed, Riverdale Pillows, TransOcean Rugs, Elger Plumbing, Andersen Windows, Lenox China, Oriental Accents Lamps and decorative accents, HGTV HOME Brand, Aspenhome retail environments, Robb & Stucky, Horchow, JC Penney, Spiegel's, Ethan Allan, Sears, and Bruenens. She was

also a home furnishings columnist for New York Newsday, syndicated in over 450 newspapers.

Beyond her design work, she set herself apart as a role model through charitable efforts. She is the founding President of WithIt (Women in the Home Industries Today), past Chairman, and a member of its Board of Governors; served as National Co-Chair and serves on the National Executive Committee of City of Hope's Home Furnishing Industry Division, participated on its National Board, plus was active on the ADL's National Board.

"Jena's idea was somewhat radical at a time when mid-range furniture was designed in matching sets without accent pieces, painted finishes, or variation in finish, color or texture."



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"Retailers should be looking

to purchase designs that are familiar enough, yet still fresh...

so they don't end up putting dated looking brown box furniture in front of customers."

Home Furnishings Division's Executive Committee. She was inducted into the American Furniture Hall of Fame in 2014.

Evolution Of Furniture Design

Asked how furniture design has evolved during her tenure designing furniture, Jena observes, "Back in the early 80s, 'very few better goods were being shown at High Point, then known as the Southern Furniture Market. At that time a handful of suppliers created and/or imported off the shelf products, bringing in original designs I had designed for high-end European factories, some times custom finished in America .

These suppliers catered To The Trade or the so-called custom market, and were primarily sold through designer showrooms such the D&D

building in New York , the Dallas Mart, LA Mart, and of course later, Chicago, Atlanta and the Miami Design Center. That was the beginning of the higher-end market blending with the more commercial brown boxes."

At that time Jena designed for Casa Bique, and Gamble Stoll high-end lacquered furniture in the New York area as well as Werner Myer, a company that primarily, brought in antique reproductions from Spain and Italy. "Some of these showrooms," she recalls, "imitated the Italian lacquer popular at the time, and these were the first to open up showrooms in High Point on North Hamilton Street, attracting fashion merchandisers from better department stores that had

decent furniture departments. It's hard to believe, but it wasn't that long ago, that companies like Marshall Field's in Chicago, Bloomingdale's in New York, Altman's and other department stores carried really beautiful furniture, an assortment of off the shelf designs from Europe alongside trade showrooms. And since I had my own interior design business, and understood the market, that's where I got my start designing products for retailers and high-end importers.

Chance Meeting at imm cologne

"In the early 80s, while attending the Cologne fair," Says Hall, "I shared a cab with Bill DiPaolo, Vice President of the Southern Furniture Market Center. He asked me why I didn't go to High Point instead of Germany to buy goods. I replied that I had been to

"The more you can help consumers visualize what furniture might look like in their homes, focus attention and spur imagination, the greater opportunity you have at making a sale."



Inspirations from the Old Country by Jena Hall bedroom rendering for Broyhill above, and Jena at right.





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Shown above is *Elements and Origins* by Jena Hall for Thomasville from 2015, plus her *Inspirations* by Casa Bique and *Inspirations from the Old Country* line by Broyhill from the early 1980s. Jena pioneered the use in the mass market of two-toning wood pieces, painted pieces and accents, and a mix and match ethos.

High Point but there was nothing there for me."

Jena went on to explain that as a result of that chance meeting, she introduced DiPaulo to some vendors, and that was the beginning of design oriented European participation at the International Market Center. "That's when the market really started to change," she added.

Birth of Mass Market Furniture Designer Lines

"I had designed a European Antique inspired painted group for Casa Bique called *European Country Inspirations™* by Jena Hall. Broyhill in the meantime, like a lot of typical North Carolina factories, was still producing basic, brown

case goods."

Jena was approached by Broyhill to create a group based on Scandinavian Country furniture design, similar to what she did for Casa Bique. "I wasn't sure it was a good fit since I had been designing high-end, hand painted, To The Trade furniture," she explained.

By that time, she had noticed the growth of licensing in apparel. "The apparel industry," Jena observed, "used to have brands for men like Robert Hall suits and ladies' Ship 'n Shore blouses. These were just manufacturers' brand names. But in the late '60s, little by little, the old apparel brands took on designer names. Ralph Lauren who was a menswear designer designed branded sheets for department stores. Gloria Vanderbilt created a line as well. Before that, sheets were either white, ecru, pink or mint. There were no plaids and no florals, and there was no licensing at all except for Pierre Cardin & Dongia, both too early and too expensive for retail furniture.

"The apparel people put their name on one type of product, and then another product, and another. And it all went together. Wow, I thought, that's how I design interiors. I realized

that it could be done for a mass-market home furnishings line. No one was designing a cross merchandised collection "

She was writing a syndicated column at that time for about 450 newspapers, a full page in *Newsday* every week with a Q and A, taking questions from all over the country. "Consumers would ask me questions such as, 'I'm re-doing my room, and I don't know how to put it together. What would go with my avocado sofa? And what would go with my pink rug?'

There was a need at the retail level for a home furnishings line that could mix or match like a ready-to-wear line to help people put things together themselves... a decorator look at affordable retail price points. Products would be pre-designed by a number of manufacturers under a license with a designer."

That was the start of her licensing division. She started working with Broyhill, then added 21 additional

JENA HALL

licenses over the next ten years.

"Before that, everything in retail furniture stores was lined up, as Broyhill's President Gene Gunther used to say, like brown boxes."

Jena's idea was somewhat radical at a time when mid-range furniture was designed in matching sets without accent pieces, painted finishes, or variation in finish, color or texture.

"We didn't call them accents then. The Broyhill line was called 'Inspirations from the Old Country'. It included, for example, an accent piece, an armoire, that went with one other accent piece and complimented the upholstery and a wood element in the broader collection. Another thing we did in Broyhill's Inspiration line, which really changed the industry, was the creation of a casual great room that included an informal entertainment cabinet inspired by a captain's table and chair I found in an Andrew Wyeth painting."

The Inspirations from the Old Country line included as well, a two-toned table and chairs. Consumers could still use an all-wood buffet,

or an all-white hutch. "So, as time passed, she noted, they could keep some of their old furniture, but freshen up the look by adding new pieces. For example, an accent painted armoire in pastel colors or two tone wood as a bridge."

Jena noted that when she first showed her sketches to Broyhill, they objected to combining two finishes on one item due to manufacturing concerns. She explained that these pieces acted as a bridge, "a term that came out of the apparel industry. Apparel lines used to have what they called bridge lines that would help consumers transition from winter to summer with the spring line in between. It also helped companies get higher price point bridging from entry to higher end goods."

"Two toning pieces is an industry standard today as are colored painted accents. The Elements and Origins line I recently designed for Thomasville included painted and two tone bedroom pieces that give customers the choice of buying a black bed or a wood bed and one nightstand with a black wood top and stained brown

case, a painted crabby apple red end table, or a hunter green end table that marries to the upholstery fabrics, the area rugs, top of the bed and everything else designed to go in that room."

Jena went on to explain that the importance of the Broyhill line for retailers was that they could offer for the first time ever, a decorator at an affordable retail price point. "After that", she noted, "Timberlake came out, Gloria Vanderbilt, Bob Mackey, followed by all sorts of designer du jour licensed lines identified with celebrities, movie stars and museums. And today in the furniture industry, the practice of licensing is a huge part of the market."

More recently, Jena has moved on to work on private label projects and develop creative strategies for manufacturers.

Good Design Today

When asked what makes good furniture design in today's market, she



At left, Jena Hall's Inspirations cross merchandised home accents & accessories retail boutique display.



"Become a cultural anthropologist by watching movies and TV shows. They are a great place for retailers who are paying attention, to track trends and get inspiration."

"Consumers have been the victims of a long standing industry-wide focus on manufacturing what she calls widgets and gadgets as opposed to fashion."



Price

Elements & Origins™, Scandia bedroom by Jena Hall for Thomasville pictured above.

observed, "First of all, the timing has to be right, the quality has to be right, and the level of innovation has to not be too far ahead of the curve and not too far behind. The fact that a group is licensed or not has little to do with how well it will sell. That's just marketing icing on the cake." And what should retailers be looking for? Jena, who also has deep experience with retail merchandising and store design recommends, "Retailers should be looking to purchase designs that are familiar enough, yet still fresh." Her prescription is that when retro designs such as Mid-Century Modern, Country French or Scandinavian Country are brought back out, they need to have to have a new twist, fresh finishes, be differently scaled or include innovations in function, so retailers don't end up putting dated looking brown box furniture in front of customers."

She says that the industry has come a long way in the last 30 years, but asks, "how many changes can you make to a dresser and still have it be a dresser? The plain case has given way to multiple sizes and drawer configurations. It has to have drawers, a top, legs and feet. Traditional styled feet can be changed to modern. Now what?"

"Now what" is what retailers should be asking," she insists. "That 'now what' is the most important question to ask when merchandising a line."

Jena elaborates. "We all know that much of the furniture out there today has a 'me too' mentality driven by price competition instead of innovation and fashion, better value and functionality. Great merchants today have to be much sharper in carrying good, better and best price points. And how do they get to best? They have to offer customers more in size, scale, features and styling. Most better merchants who survived the recession know how to do this, but it doesn't change the fact that consumers have an abundance of choices today. Some retailers seem to forget," she observes, "the last thing consumers consider is price. They have to like it first. It has to serve their needs second. And then, they consider how much it costs. Only if they find the same thing in three stores, are they going to shop for the best price."

Design Trends

As consumers have become more mobile, tastes in furniture have become less regional. Jena explains, "while you can't sell white finishes in certain parts of the country or dark finishes in others, especially younger consumers are looking for products that suit their individual taste and preference to mix and mingle instead

of match. My Elements and Origins collection for Thomasville used the term American Nouveau™ instead of eclectic to describe this current trend."

Is there still work to be done at retail to both update displays to reflect this change and get consumers excited about new possibilities in home furnishings?

"Old habits die hard," she says, noting that in some sense consumers have been the victims of a long standing industry-wide focus on manufacturing what she calls widgets and gadgets as opposed to fashion. "If you pay attention to home furnishings used in old Turner Classic movies, vintage movies, you will notice that those stage sets were gorgeous, and nothing matched. The same has always been true with high-end and antique furnishings. Nothing matched at the Palace of Versailles!

"This was not the case with our mass-produced furniture. Manufacturers made cuttings and retailers bought what they made. Consumers were sold brands marketed as quality heirlooms that would last forever. They said, 'here's your matched beautiful cherry, 18th century dining room.' The average consumer

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"Manufacturers need to have courage and conviction about their designs, encourage retailers to display it beautifully in showrooms and lifestyle photos so they have a better shot at giving their customers more exciting interiors than just a matched set."

didn't know the difference and had few options. Consumers were mostly interested in buying functional furniture that they could brag to their friends that they spent 'X' amount of dollars buying 'X' brand."

Jena also notes, "selling matched sets made life easy for average sales associates who just wanted to get an up, make a sale, close the deal, and move on to the next up."

"That generation of customers and retailers are dying out," she continues, "or have changed their preferences."

"On the manufacturing side, most are importing, so they don't have huge cuttings but they still have to consider if they can sell another 50 or 100 pieces of an item before they reorder. They

are generally reluctant to do too much mix and mingle, too many different finish choices or accents, because they don't know how retailers are going to buy a group. Therefore, the majority are still offering mostly matched brown boxes.

"That's wrong thinking," she adds, because "to do it right, manufacturers need to have courage and conviction about their designs, and encourage retailers to display it beautifully in showrooms and lifestyle photography so they have a better shot at giving their customers more exciting interiors than just a matched set."

But that isn't enough she tells us. Retailers, in general need to get better at helping customers, using interior designers or, depending on the retailer, qualified sales associates, to at least pick out an accent piece or two and mix it up to create excitement.

"Younger consumers who are coming out of a West Elm or Pottery Barn experience don't want their furnishings to match. They just want to like what they buy. I think we're going to see Millennials start to evolve as they get jobs, move out, up and get married. They are mobile, just now getting jobs and settling in. This group already has experience decorating online, has access to a huge amount of decorat-

Lacquered Buffet by Jena Hall for Gamble Stoll pictured above. Also, the "Chairishibles" display created during a store re-design at Home Inspirations Thomasville.



ing self-help information, and helpful apps. They like change, instant gratification and easily get bored. These are factors that retailers who want to be successful should consider and address. I suggest an 'ever changing what's new' display every few weeks and promote it, They love new."

Finally, Furniture World asked Jena to talk about where she sees the market going in terms of design.

"Right now, we're in a 20th century, retro period," she tells us, "with a focus on Scandinavian Modern. We are seeing Teak, and Walnut in dry-hand finishes. Also, '50s white and lacquered painted pieces are back. While mid-century seemed to be just a blip on the screen a couple years ago, it's hotter than ever right now even in upholstery where if it's not up on exposed legs, it's not selling."

"I think we're going to stay in this retro mood for a while which has, in part, been brought to the attention of everyday consumers by retailers such as Design Within Reach, Pottery Barn and Crate and Barrel."

"There are still plenty of decades in the 20th century to explore and be inspired by. Just when you think something is really, really, really dead, it starts to creep back in again slowly! It never comes back in its pure



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"For the future?"

traditional Asian fused with Chinese modern and 50's modern. Maybe even Mediterranean with a new bleached look, think Havana in the 1950s."

Cultural Anthropology

form." An example of this is the introduction by Thomasville Jena recently designed. "We brought the traditional Scandinavian back this time for Elements by Thomasville. This collection has a cleaner, relaxed look and modern feel even though it was inspired by pieces popularized during King Gustav III's time in the 1800s."

For the future? "I think we are going to start seeing traditional Asian design fused with Chinese modern and 50's modern. Maybe even Mediterranean again, but rethought of course, with a new bleached look, think Havana in the 1950s," she says.

"Another important trend on the horizon is truly multi-functional furniture, meaning furniture with changeable components that can be moved around internally. Pieces like these can go in a bedroom, dining room or even a living room. People are very mobile today, Baby Boomers are downsizing, Millennials are upsizing. Pieces have to find new functions when they move, especially when spaces don't permit everything to fit. I did a great Collection for Somerton Dwelling—totally modular and flexible called Improv. It started out slowly but now it's really moving very well to interior designers and Millennials, go figure. Furniture must serve dual functions. Building in functionality is essential for success today. This fact is always on my mind because furniture that does something, has an extra bell or whistle, has higher perceived value. We've heard about smart furniture which is normally associated with electronics, but there's a huge future in exploring furniture that provides innovative storage, is stackable or stretchable."

When asked what, in general, are the most important areas for improvement for home furnishings retailers, Jena suggests, "Most retailers need to work on their visual merchandising. A surprising and easy way to do this is to become a cultural anthropologist by watching movies and TV shows. They are a great place for retailers who are paying attention, to track trends and get inspiration. This kind of focus can make a major difference for how retailers present furniture, helping them to make it interesting using color, fabrics, lighting and accessories. The time has past when retailers could get away with just putting any old lamp on an end table. My suggestion is that retailers should not place a lamp unless it's fabulous. Every added element in every display should be really beautiful to finish off a room, much like a pair of earrings on a woman.

"Also, when retailers build a display around a group of furniture, then decide to replace a piece, they should make sure to replace it with something compatible. Often retailers just throw anything from their inventory on to the floor to replace a dead horse, and guess what? It doesn't help."

Continuing, she explains, "Investing time and resources to create a well-designed retail store helps to close sales much better than just placing furniture haphazardly. There needs to be some type of rhyme and reason to displays that help shoppers stop and focus on product categories. When showing products by lifestyle, color can be a marvelous vehicle. Organizing a store by product category, where furniture

is all lined up is a much bigger challenge, but it still offers some focus."

"The more you can help consumers visualize what furniture might look like in their homes, focus attention and spur imagination, the greater opportunity you have at making a sale. If retail customers walk to a sea of furniture, it's hard for them to know what to look at first." Jena explains that consumers get confused very quickly, and that visual merchandisers should create displays that encourage their customers' eyes to rest on specific areas of importance. "Having a talented designer on staff or hiring or a freelance visual merchandiser is often the key to getting great results."

Finally, retailers should not sit there like Chicken Little (the sky is falling) because the internet business is cutting into their retail market share. They MUST invest in their own e-commerce presence and social media to build that end of their business.

JENA
HALL



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August 18 - 21, 2016



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*Living Rooms, Dining Rooms, Bedrooms,
Office, Occasional Furniture*

NO OVERSEAS FURNITURE IS EXHIBITED AT THE EXPO

September 8 & 9, 2016 are the dates of the 6th annual All American Furniture Expo at the Lancaster Convention Center in the heart of Lancaster, PA.

"Our All American Furniture Expo has become the premier American made furniture show on the east coast, in a city and in a market that is a hotbed for furniture," says Wanda Gregg, show coordinator. "I expect this year's show to be our best to date with more exhibitors, more new products, and more buyers. We are very excited to host it."

Wholesale buyers will be able to choose from a selection of American made furniture including upholstered, hardwood and pine furniture. Primitive, transitional, mission, modern, contemporary, and urban styles will be featured in a variety of styles and finishes on the 46,000 square foot trade floor space. The Expo has spent a lot of time making this years show more buyer friendly. There will be free parking in the Penn Square Garage sponsored by Penwood Manufacturing, free and discounted transportation and storage for their purchases sponsored by Lancaster County Showcase and PackShip USA, plus a few other perks for those that attend.

With more than a dozen new exhibitors this year including Honey Run Woodcraft from Ohio and Schwartz Creations from Indiana, Gregg notes that this year will also feature more new products. "Last year we made a concentrated effort to bring in more new products than ever before. This year we continue to build on that effort and manufacturers are really coming through with new product designs, materials and services. Smuckers Woodworking will debut a new line of gun cabinets with hidden gun storage and Countryside Rustic Log Furniture will unveil their new line of Colorado Aspen Log furniture, just to mention a few. Some new products will be featured on our online buyers guide, which will be available on our website by August 1st and at the show. Other new products won't be unveiled until the first day of the show."

This year's expo is already 90% full and manufacturers continue to register to exhibit, so buyers should keep checking the Exhibitor Listing on our website, **allamericanfurnitureexpo.com**, throughout the upcoming weeks. Buyers can also follow the Expo on twitter and the All American Furniture Expo Blog for continuous updates about this years show.

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

All American Furniture Expo

Ph 717-393-6466 • Fx 717-295-2625

allamericanfurniture@comcast.net

www.AllAmericanFurnitureExpo.com

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SALESMANSHIP IN PRINT

Create advertorial marketing assets that really sell!

by Jeff Giagnocavo

// **T**here is no such thing as a lack of attention span, only the lack of being entertained."

- Jerry Seinfeld

The quote at left from Jerry Seinfeld is one I keep in mind when it comes to the marketing of my two mattress stores and also my mattress retailer coaching business.

And it SHOULD be what you have in mind too when marketing your store.

Ask yourself why is it that Kim Kardashian is worth MILLIONS? When you include brand equity and name recognition she is likely worth hundreds of millions. Yet what exactly does she DO? You may snicker and say nothing, and you would be dead wrong. She entertains, and for that people pay her very well. Now of course her type of entertainment is fleeting and it requires many things to remain within the crosshairs of the Hollywood paparazzi. From sex tapes, to outrageous marriages, risqué photos, family drama, and oddly named offspring. You name it she's done it in order to perpetuate the entertainment empire she has created. All of it has meaning, all of it points to entertainment which keeps every one of her fans engaged and paying.

All that said, none of her antics are what I would call marketing assets. As each day goes by, the asset that is Kim Kardashian is one day older and one day less cool; all while someone else is coming up right behind her,

even her own family, with even more over the top entertaining antics. There are no true marketing assets in the Kim Kardashian empire. Some day the perfume deals will end along with the appearance fees and endorsement deals.

Now stop thinking about why Kim is worth millions and re-focus on three questions you should be asking yourself about your business.

1. How can you create assets in your business?
2. How entertaining is your advertising?
3. Do you consider your advertising a valuable scalable asset that when you run it, a payoff is guaranteed?

The fact is that most furniture and bedding store advertising is down right boring and certainly not scalable year after year across all kinds of media. Most all advertising that comes across my desk begs of desperation with the same old tactics since the days of the caveman selling chiseled rocks as chairs to one another. Here is the advertising recipe that has been sinking our collective ship for decades now.



Over 82 Years of Trust

It's About Trust When Every Delivery Counts

Cory knows that your reputation and profitability are on the line with every home delivery. That's why for 82 years, the Cory family has built a business based on long-term relationships, mutual trust, and shared goals.



For more information or to set up an appointment at Las Vegas Market Contact Cory

"Every reader is searching

for the problems in their daily life affecting their health, yet they've never considered that their mattress could be a major cause of why they lack energy, and don't feel well."

Bad Advertising Ideas

1. Find a reason, any reason for a sale

2. Create a reference or MSRP price (Did you know in most European countries this reference price must be charged within about 3 weeks of the day you run your advertising! Imagine if that happened here!)

3. Offer a first discount typically 40-60% off

4. But wait it's not over, take another 5-20% off citing some other reason for this additional discount – store card, loyalty card, friends & family, etc.

5. Add in stock pictures of the product

Very few retailers attempt to actually entertain anymore, let alone take the time to educate readers about why their store above all others is the undeniable choice to buy from. Few take the time to clearly answer, in each and every advertisement, why my store?

This is a skill, it's called copywriting, but it can also be made very personal and a retailer can tell a personal story. By no means am I a copywriter for hire. I am able to hold my own and have invested heavily in the study of copywriting over the last five years. You should know that I can't possibly distill my study of the great copywriters, nor do this skill adequate justice, in these pages. My goal is to introduce you to a different, more profitable way to advertise that will create an asset for you that is scalable across many different types of media, both online and offline.

From here on out, let's call copy writing salesmanship in print because that is the goal of great advertising, isn't it? When I sit down to sell in print I focus on these five things first and in this order,

1. The Offer – make it irresistible.

2. The Headline – promise a reader benefit.

3. The Message – tell readers specifically what they are going to get.

4. The Call-to-Action – tell readers exactly what to do next.

5. The Deadline – tell readers what they might lose if they don't act now.

Every advertisement should sell for your store, regardless of media type, by incorporating the five components mentioned above.

I start with the offer first because ultimately that will frame my headline. Frankly the offer is the easiest part to come up with. There is always a good offer to put out there, but it's the head-

"There is always a good offer to put out there, but it's the headline and subsequent message, plus selling in print that makes the offer compelling."





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18-21 March 2017

home / home decor / home textile / outdoor

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office / hotel / commercial / machinery & raw materials

China Import and Export Fair Complex & PWTC Expo



The 38th China International Furniture Fair (Shanghai)

7-10 September 2016

home / home decor / home textile / outdoor

/ office / hotel / commercial

/ machinery & raw materials

National Exhibition and Convention Center (Shanghai) in Hongqiao



**Fantastic Furniture Fair in
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ciff.fairwindow.com



Technology for the Next 100 Years

For 97 years, Kimbrell's ran their 49 store retail chain manually. All of their sales and in-house financing accounts were processed without software. While this was truly an amazing feat, they were overdue for software to save them time, help them automate processes, and increase the efficiency of their business activities. Kimbrell's knew that with a system in place their inventory management would be greatly improved and that they could better grow their operation. In addition, software would provide consumer protection and PCI compliance for their in-house installment financing program.

The Kimbrell's team began researching software providers to find the best fit for their business system. After completing their due diligence, they were confident in their choice - STORIS. After a positive implementation experience, Kimbrell's began processing live in 2013. STORIS has provided Kimbrell's with many operational benefits from inventory efficiency to system-wide accountability. Year after year they note positive changes to their key performance indicators and look forward to continuous benefits from the partnership.



RECORD RESULTS Through STORIS, Kimbrell's management can monitor credit decisions and collection follow up. Kimbrell's can check in on consumers' account history and stay ahead of delinquent financing in real-time as opposed to at the end of month. In 2015, this resulted in a 20 year record low for bad debts as a percentage of accounts receivable.

EXECUTIVE VISION Staying on top of the performance of 49 stores used to be difficult. Today Executive Vision is their favorite Business Intelligence tool. Kimbrell's now has real-time, visual data. They can instantly see any issues as they arise such as store productivity. Within minutes the executive team can be on the phone with store managers and work on a strategic resolution. Quick follow up right from their central office has made a substantial impact on the organization overall and has been especially helpful with margin management.

REPLENISHMENT EFFICIENCY With a manual system, once a piece of inventory left Kimbrell's warehouse, they couldn't monitor its movement or impact on stock quantities. Replenishment has since become a much easier process. They use demand forecasting tools through STORIS to manage their open to buy, combined with real-time performance to make sure they are accurately purchasing to replenish fast moving inventory.

INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY STORIS has provided members of the Kimbrell's team with tools to be more successful. Their team members have features and reports that help them find issues and handle them before they escalate. This motivates everyone to do their best. This proactive approach to management has proven results. With STORIS, Kimbrell's sets company goals and now has the resources to measure and achieve them.

STORIS

Creating a Culture

Over the past 27 years, STORIS Leading Retail Software Solutions has made it a mission to build a company culture that motivates its employees and fosters teamwork. Not only have countless studies shown that having a positive work culture drives productivity and delivers better results, but the intrinsic value of working in a positive environment is something you can't put a price on.

The workforce is also changing as more and more millennials begin their careers. Millennials site workplace culture as a top factor in deciding which company to work for. This makes culture even more vital to attracting and retaining the top talent in the field.

The benefits of having employees who love to come to work every day extends to our partners. The majority of the STORIS team interacts with our retailers at one point or another, so having someone who can share that positive attitude during an on-site visit or when they answer a support call is an important part of the value proposition we bring our retailers. Working in technical support or software conversions can be challenging. Our employees love what they do, so we maintain an average tenure of almost 10 years.

Not every employee is the same, so it is important to offer a variety of culture building activities. Every summer we host a Summer Olympics series. This fosters friendly competition and allows employees from different departments the ability to know each other better as we break into random teams. We also participate in a Softball League, which brings employees out to both play and cheer on their peers. Our employees are also given the opportunity to give back to the community. Every year we participate in a school supply and holiday toy drive. The employees visit the recipients; this has become a very special experience for the participants. Having the ability to see the reaction of the children is amazing.

One of our newest, and favorite culture building programs, is called C.R.E.W. or Colleagues Recognizing Exceptional Work. In this program, peers can acknowledge a fellow team member that went above and beyond to help them get their job accomplished. It is a rewarding feeling to see the nice things their co-workers have to say.

Building a positive work culture goes a long way. We always look to other companies to inspire new ideas for us to grow our culture and hope to be inspiration for other companies to do the same.



SALESMANSHIP IN PRINT

line and subsequent message, plus selling in print that makes the offer compelling and one that will swing the door and ring the phone.

Advertorial Example

Take a look at the advertorial on this

and the following page that Gardner's Mattress and More has been running now for over a year. In case you are not familiar with advertorials, they are advertisements designed to look like articles in the publication, with the intent of catching the readers' eyes by not looking like every other ad in the publication. It was the late, great

ad-man David Ogilvy who said, "It has been found that the less an advertisement looks like an advertisement, and the more it looks like an editorial, the more readers stop, look, and read."

The Offer

Let's breakdown the offer - it's compelling, almost unbelievable, and one that most can't refuse. That's why we get on average, 85 people a month visiting our store to take us up on the offer. As you will see we are offering four bonus gifts. The perceived value is high but in fact our cost is very low to fulfill this offer, and I'm happy to "go negative" to get a high-ticket customer in the long run.

The Headline

You might be thinking that the headline is too simple, but since we know our target reader for this message, and place this ad in an organic-focused

Is Your Mattress The Problem?



How to get a good night's sleep, without harmful chemicals

Take this quiz:

1. Do you have back pain when you wake up?
2. Neck pain? Stiffness or soreness?
3. Does it take you more than 30 minutes to fall asleep?
4. Do you experience restless sleep? Toss and turn at night?

If you answered "yes" two times or more, this may be the most important article you read all year. Here's why...

While you sleep, your immune system recovers and prepares for the day ahead. It replenishes every cell in your body.

Low-quality, uncomfortable mattresses have been linked to discomfort and pain, which can prevent quality sleep.

People who struggle with sleep deprivation may suffer from irritability, depression, over-eating—and even face a higher risk for Alzheimer's.

If your mattress is filled with chemical toxins, airborne allergens, or worse, your body is doing battle with those things rather than repairing itself. You're losing valuable energy each night instead of healing your body and revitalizing your mind.

And all of that can wreak havoc on your health and well-being.

What's In Your Mattress?

The following information may be *disturbing* to some. That's because the Environmental Protection Agency has identified at least four possibly dangerous chemicals commonly found in some synthetic mattresses—benzene, propane, naphthalene and styrene—especially bedding made in China and overseas, where such governing agencies do not exist.

Consider these facts:

- Typical mattresses made from artificial materials are known to emit potentially harmful gases in your bedroom—a phenomenon known as off-gassing.
- Laboratory researchers in the U.S. and Europe have identified up to 61 potentially harmful chemicals that off-gas from typical synthetic mattresses.
- Exposure to these 61 chemicals has been associated with irritation of the skin, eyes and digestive systems.
- Additionally, the chemicals off-gassed by synthetic mattresses have been associated with headache, fatigue, depression and even hearing loss.
- Your skin, the most porous entry point into your body, has contact with a mattress for 8 hours every night, on average.

- Children, who breathe faster than adults, are especially vulnerable to chemical exposure.

Every night, we lie down with minimal clothing for a seemingly good night's sleep. But in reality, while lying on a conventional mattress, we are breathing in and absorbing through our skin a range of chemicals from synthetic materials—chemicals that can disrupt our sleep cycles and negatively impact our health.

Our mattresses emit gases from a toxic brew of components used to create them. From the *polyurethane* foam used in the padding to *fire retardants and other additives*, conventional mattresses continue to release chemicals in gaseous form long after they roll out of the factory.

Even after they have finished off-gassing, the chemically based construction of a conventional mattress provides an ideal environment for dust and dust mites, whose excrement is the #1 trigger for asthma attacks.

And get this. You know those white labels on a mattress that say, "Do Not Remove"? Incredibly, the law actually allows manufacturers to include potentially hazardous chemicals in your mattress *without* disclosing the fact on any label.

But if a true list of ingredients were available for conventional mattresses, it would likely include *TDI* (a common component), a known carcinogen, which can cause respiratory ailments such as bronchitis and asthma.

In addition, liver damage and breathing problems have been linked to *vinyl chloride monomers*, another common mattress material.

The list goes on. Unfortunately, it is highly unlikely that you would be given information about any of these chemicals from a manufacturer of conventional, synthetic mattresses.

The Natural Alternative

One of the most significant actions we can take to reduce our exposure to toxins and improve our overall health is to make changes to the one household item that is in direct contact with our bodies for one third of our lives—our mattresses.

"There are more ways than ever to sleep better and wake up pain-free on a natural, organic mattress," says Ben McClure, president of

"Always tell your reader what you want them to do, don't assume anything. Candidly, I have begun writing everything I produce with my 8-year-old son Aidan in mind."

Advertise BIG!

Use your trucks and windows...

Why
Drive
This?



Serving the furniture
industry since 2000!

When
You
Can
Drive
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SALESMANSHIP IN PRINT

publication that reaches that target, it works wonderfully well. This publication's readers are searching for problems in their daily lives that affect their health, yet most have never considered that their mattress could be a major cause of why they may lack energy and a sense of overall wellbeing. Not so simple after all now, is it?

The great copywriters spend exponentially more time on the headline than on anything else. The headline is what snaps the neck, rings the alarm, and delivers that first moment of entertainment value I wrote about earlier. The headline is what grabs the reader and invites them to the threshold of your store.

The Message

Now let's take a look at the message. Stellar salesmanship in print is what gets the reader, your customer,

"The truth is that the vast majority shortcut the process because they believe readers have no attention span, when in fact, their ad copy is at fault."

to cross the threshold and cross the divide between their casual interest and visiting your store. So many in our industry think they are doing this already. The truth is that the vast majority shortcut the process because they believe readers have no attention span, when in fact, their ad copy is at fault because it's not nearly entertaining enough.

The copy in the advertorial is designed to be down right alarming to readers. It explains that all the pills, potions, meditation, diet and exercise these health-conscious readers are doing to better their health is likely being undone every night while they sleep.

I urge you to take this next paragraph to heart.

Gardner's Mattress & More, in Lancaster, PA.

"Many people, like me, are in search of a natural sleep system. I was shocked to learn that toxic emissions from mattresses are a major source of daily pollution in our lives," says McClure.

An all-natural, organic mattress is free of potentially harmful chemicals. Instead, natural materials like latex are used. Latex is naturally hypoallergenic and resistant to dust mites, making it ideal for allergy sufferers.

Also, latex is antimicrobial, inhibiting the growth of bacteria, mold and mildew, which can cause asthma and respiratory distress. No synthetic materials are added to provide these benefits.

"All latex used in our natural mattresses is from the sap of a rubber tree, which can yield latex for up to 30 years. When a tree is done producing latex, it is taken down and turned into furniture. A new tree is then planted in its place, thus making latex a sustainable bedding component," says McClure.

What's the difference between an organic mattress and a conventional one? "Organic mattresses are crafted from natural materials. Conventional mattresses are made mostly of artificial materials from nonrenewable sources, such as plastic and other petrochemicals," says McClure.

Do organic mattresses come in different firmness? "Yes, there are two main types of organic mattresses: Natural latex rubber and inner-spring. Both styles are available with varying firmness options to suit anyone's sleep needs," says McClure.

What To Look For

When researching natural, organic mattresses, look at these areas:

1. Visit a store that carries the top certified natural and organic brands, including Savvy Rest, Prana Sleep, Pure Latex Bliss and Vi-Spring. "Each of these manufacturers crafts bedding that is safe and sustainable," McClure recommends.

2. Try out a new mattress for at least 15 minutes. Lie down in various positions, to simulate a night of sleep. Look for a store that offers a clean pillow to test out. "We offer the only Dream Room, where you can spend 15 minutes to 4 hours resting or even

sleeping on a mattress, with 100% sanitary linens, blankets and pillows so people can truly 'test drive' any natural bedding," says McClure.

3. Protect yourself by insisting on a strong guarantee. "I know people are tired of sleeping on a worn-out, chemical-laden mattress. That's why we give every customer 365 nights to sleep on it and return it for a refund if it doesn't deliver the sleep you want," says McClure.

If you're not sleeping well or you're worried about toxic chemicals in your bedroom, consider this: The two things in life you spend the most time on are work and sleep. How much of your remaining hours on earth do you want to waste losing sleep on an uncomfortable, chemical-laden mattress? That's a question that many are asking.

Now Explore Your Options

"To help *Natural Awakenings* readers make the right choices, we're offering a package of 4 Free Gifts for a limited time," says McClure.

Readers may bring this article to the Gardner's Mattress & More location to see the latest natural organic sleep systems and claim the following gifts:

FREE Gift #1: All-Natural Latex Pillow (\$40 value). You get this just for visiting the store. *There's no obligation to buy anything.* Here's why this is important: A good pillow is essential to your health, because it can gently support you in a healthy sleep position while providing comfort to your neck and shoulders.

Doctors and chiropractors agree—nearly all neck and back problems are made worse by improper sleeping habits and bad or

worn-out pillows. The All-Natural Latex Pillow, reserved and waiting for you, is filled with soft, 100% natural latex.

Fact: About 10% of the weight of a 2-year-old pillow is actually dust mite droppings—excrement. With one big exception: Dust mites hate natural latex pillows, like the one waiting for you to pick up at Gardner's. (Ask why when you visit—the answer will surprise you!)

FREE Gift #2: Natural Latex Mattress Guide (\$9.95 value). Inside, you'll discover little-known facts about how men and women are sleeping better on Natural and Organic Latex Mattresses—waking up energized and more productive—and why ignoring problems with your current mattress can lead to depression, permanent health problems, and even damage family relationships.

FREE Gift #3: \$200 Savings Voucher, good toward the purchase of any Natural Organic Mattress in our store. This special \$200 discount is not available to the general public. It's only for you, as a reader of *Natural Awakenings*.

FREE Gift #4: FREE DELIVERY (\$50 Value). Be one of the first 11 people to purchase a natural or organic mattress this month and you will receive free delivery with any purchase that totals \$499 or more.

"To see the difference that natural and organic sleep systems have made in people's lives is nothing short of miraculous," says McClure.

Freelance writer Kevin Donlin is based in Minneapolis.

FREE READER'S GIFTS

As a reader of *Natural Awakenings*, you are entitled to 4 FREE GIFTS by visiting our store and answering three simple questions. Bring this coupon (code: LB0416) to Gardner's Mattress & More to receive:

- **FREE Gift #1:** All-Natural Latex Pillow (\$60 value); 2nd is 50% off!
- **FREE Gift #2:** Natural Latex Mattress Guide (\$9.95 value)
- **FREE Gift #3:** \$200 Savings Voucher on an Organic Natural Mattress
- **FREE Gift #4:** Free Delivery on any purchase \$499 or more (\$50 value)

Bring this coupon to the store at 830 Plaza Blvd. in Lancaster (behind Park City Mall, next to Vanscoy Jewelers). *There's no obligation to buy anything -- just answer three simple questions. Your Readers' Gifts expire June 30, 2016.*

Gardner's Mattress & More - 830 Plaza Blvd., Lancaster, PA 17601
Phone: 717-459-4570 - Online: www.GardnersMattressAndMore.com

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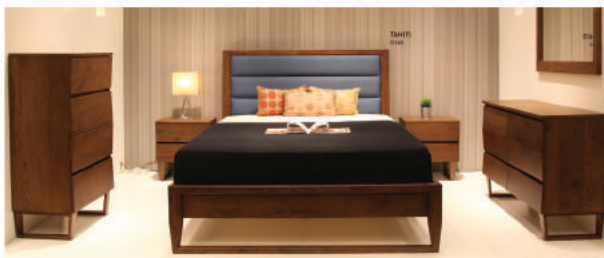


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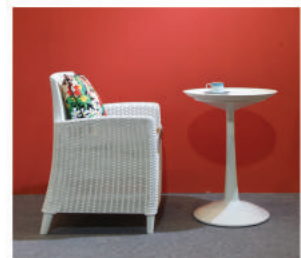


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"Marketing assets that focus on salesmanship in print have the ability to skyrocket your sales like no vendor, salesperson or cost control can do."

Picture & Price Ads

What possible impact can you have that is on par with the selling in print exhibited in this advertorial by simply showing a picture and price in your ads? Most Main Street furniture and mattress store advertising showcases product and lifestyle images. This ignores what should be the goal of meeting customers where THEY ARE in THEIR moment. Few if any tell a story about what customers can expect their purchase to be like and the meaningful benefits they can expect that will make their lives better.

Call to Action

Now for the call-to-action. Always tell your readers what you want them to do. Don't assume anything. Candidly, I have begun writing everything I produce with my 8-year-old son Aidan in mind. When I want him to do a chore around the house I spell out all the steps. Then I get him to repeat them back to me. How many of your ads are missing clear directives as to how to get to your store, including directional reminders and even a map image. It must be clearly communicated how you want them to respond.

Deadlines can be difficult because truthfully, we all know that when it comes to furniture and mattresses there is no real, honest reason why

someone needs what we have to sell right this minute. Even during Christmas time when Grandma comes to town, she could sleep on the couch or store her clothing in bins for a few days. However, the old reliable way to create urgency is to use "this weekend only" or "ends this month", verbiage.

In this advertorial, I use the old reliable "ends this month" appeal because the magazine running the ad is a monthly publication, but I clearly spell out and reiterate my offer.

This creates urgency in the reader's mind. When it comes to deadlines, you must always consider the shelf life of the media.

Facebook and other online vehicles present far more opportunities to get creative with deadlines.

I hope this article fired you up a bit. It's meant to. The marketing of your store is your number one priority. Marketing assets that focus on salesmanship in print have the ability to skyrocket your sales like no vendor, salesperson or cost control can do.

Please play nice with this copyrighted advertorial example which is also available from a link to this article which can be found on Furniture World's website at <http://www.furnitureworld.com/Series/Bedding/1>. Use this as a study guide. I share all that I share to inspire, not to do free work for others.

If you would like hear the math and sales numbers behind this article, or need help creating your own ads

with a high degree of salesmanship in print, send me an email and we can set up a time to discuss the success of this piece and how I make it all happen.

About Jeff Giagnocavo: Jeff Giagnocavo is the Chief Sales Officer of Infotail Systems, Inc., a profit automation company empowering home furnishings retailers to get 100% of the profits they deserve, 100% of the time, automatically. For more information about this article, visit www.infotail.com or email him at jeff@gardnersmattressandmore.com.

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Hyper GOING LOCAL

by Jay Bojan

What's Hyper Local Social Marketing, and Why Does It Matter?

Getting on board with social media marketing and keeping up with it has been crazy, if not daunting for some marketers. In the early days, the general message was, 'you can't sell on social media'. Now the popular social networks have morphed into complete ad platforms.

Without question, social media has blossomed to define one of the most amazing transitions in advertising!

The root cause of this transition stems from the fact that social media is becoming a primary source of information for consumers with mobile devices in hand. In fact, according to "Wearesocial 2016", of the 382M Americans, 223M are active internet users and 80% of those have smartphones. Fifty percent of smartphone owners say they immediately grab their smartphone upon waking up.

Social media has taken its place amongst traditional advertising channels with 192M or 68% of the active US internet users also being active social media users. 77% of those active social media users are women using Facebook, followed by 66% men. From this data, it has been derived that 51% of Facebook users are more likely to buy products and services from the brands that they follow. The tables have fully turned!

With that said, when a company's

TV ad is playing, even if customers haven't fast forwarded through the commercials, they are distracted by their phones and tablets.

Decline in organic reach

The reality is that social media represents a great opportunity for furniture retailers to reach their primary audiences. There are challenges, and the biggest of these is a decline in organic "reach". Reach is a measure of the number of users that see a post. Over the past few years the likelihood of an organic (free) post being seen by the company's target audience on one of their timelines has declined into single digits.

Users who engage with posts by liking, commenting or re-tweeting are far more likely to see new posts due to newer social media algorithms. The decline in organic post rates started happening as the social networks pursued the mighty dollar, but also in an effort to avoid social spam. Keeping social content meaningful and relevant to users protects the value of a social platform to consumers.

To address the challenge of reaching current and potential fans head-on, Facebook offers a primary ad feature known as "boosting." Boosting

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"A hyper local strategy starts when a single brand presence is split into multiple local identities creating an affinity between the local community, its followers and its brand."

a post, page or website allows companies to reach a larger audience by defining a target audience outside of their current fans and followers, for a fee. In general, boosting is one of the most cost effective advertising techniques in use today. It costs a fraction of traditional advertising fees and is extremely effective at building audiences.

Hyper-local strategy

There have been a lot of changes in social media marketing lately. One of these is an emerging concept known as hyper-local social marketing.

The consumer, with phone in hand, is in control of what he or she sees and experiences. These consumers are firmly rooted in their communities. They walk around stores, streets, restaurants and parks with phones in hand.

So, a business's future profitability

is conditional on meeting its customer on his or her phone on a local, community based level, where locally relevant content drives success and effectiveness.

If a business has stores in different communities, then its social marketing will be much more effective if it does a good job of presenting locally relevant content.

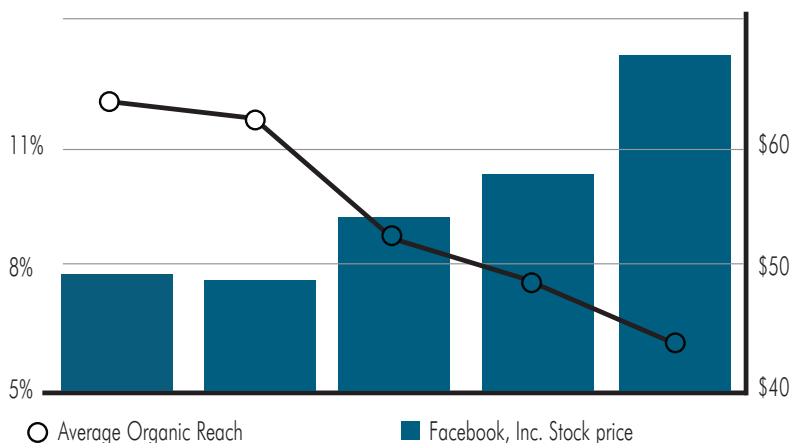
A hyper local strategy starts when a single brand presence is split into multiple local identities creating an affinity between the local community, its followers and its brand. Multi-location furniture retailers are a perfect match for a hyper localized social media strategy since they have the most to gain. However, if Corporate does not have the right tools to handle this strategy, it will be difficult to manage and extremely time consuming to implement.

The difficulty comes from the fact that many of the top social media management platforms are built for a single

brand presence. There are, however, solutions that automate localizing content within a social media post and associated landing pages. That way, posted content displays the right local phone number, images, city, town or sports team for each store location. Check out HubSpot, Sprout Social, Buzzigo Social and in the franchise world, FranConnect. Additionally, these tools have the advantage of automating the task of getting followers on a company's local social media account pages.

We have seen many situations where a corporate page has hundreds of thousands, or even millions of likes and followers, but its local stores have only 29 or 75 likes. There is a correlation between the number of Facebook likes in multi-store operations and performance. Stores with under 400 Facebook likes are likely under-performing, and those reaching a threshold of 2000 are likely to be experiencing accelerated growth.

"The decline in organic post rates started happening as the social networks pursued the mighty dollar, but also in an effort to avoid social spam."



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"Check out HubSpot, Buzzigo Social and, in the franchise world, FranConnect. Additionally, these tools can help automate the task of getting followers on a company's local social media account pages."

ROI improvement

A hyper local strategy improves ROI across all advertising channels and social media is no exception. In fact, it can be more than four times more effective than generic advertising. Here are some reasons why.

- The simple mention of a location or city name in a mobile ad can improve click-through rates by 200%.¹
- Historically, Yellow Pages' display ads with local numbers yield 40% more calls than those with 800 numbers.²
- Google and others have reported CTRs over 10x typical rates on

locally targeted Mobile ads featuring locally relevant data.

- National-Local advertisers have experienced 70% increases in click-through rates for ads dynamically localized and optimized versus generic ads.³

Getting Started

So how do furniture retailers engage in this strategy and benefit from hyper localization?

They follow the money by localizing social marketing. Any home furnishings retailer, from a single store to huge multi-unit franchises must connect with their communities to maintain engagement versus just selling. The place to start is to establish a separate social media page for each store location or region so that hyper localized posts can be made.

Hyper local social media marketing automation exists and can make the entire process easy, cost effective and well worth a company's time if the right tools are used.

Becoming Relevant

A strong localized social campaign

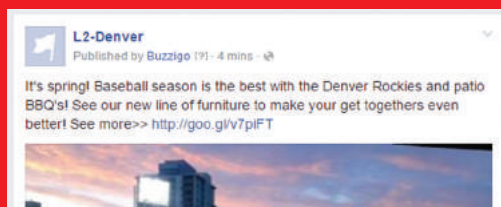
should engage brand fans, followers, and the community, addressing the reasons why people follow the brand. If you post four times a week... in our opinion just one of these posts should sell or provide an offer. Within that context, referencing a local interest story and connecting the content with the community and the target audience of a company can pay off exponentially.

The key feature necessary for success to deploy a social media campaign to dozens or hundreds of locations is that it automatically localizes the content making it easy to drive engagement.

For example, if a store sponsors a sports team, a post might reference that team, and perhaps promote outdoor, furniture, TVs and related items being sold at a specific location. For a store in Denver, the post would mention the Colorado Rockies along with a logo as permitted. An automated system localizes the content so that a Chicago location's post and landing page will feature the Chicago Cubs or White Sox. This kind of automatic localization can be adapted to be extremely granular.

On the following page is an example of a campaign that Jen O'Pry, owner of Streamline Consulting and Communications, created to include hyper localized content. Please note

"A business might want to ask its followers to vote on what living room set they like best. American Furniture Warehouse did something similar in the Colorado area."



An example of a spring campaign that Jen O'Pry, owner of Streamline Consulting and Communications, created to include hyper localized content. All trademarks and logos are the property of their respective owners. In the posts on the left, the city and team are circled in red pointing out that they are automatically updated based on the location. Pictures of the stadiums are also dynamically updated.



that in the illustration above all trademarks and logos are the property of their respective owners.

In the posts on the left, the city and team are circled in red pointing out that they are automatically updated based on the location; the Denver Rockies and Chicago Cubs and the pictures of the stadiums are also dynamically updated. The posts are linked to landing pages that allow users to click to be automatically redirected to a page that pulls in the local team logo, city and team name, as well as listing the phone number of the local store and their social profiles.

Another example to show how hyper localized posts can be accomplished with just a few clicks is to work the vignette angle with different follower types such as designers versus consumers. A business might want to ask its followers to vote on what living room set they like best. American Furniture Warehouse did something similar in the Colorado area, this type of marketing is highly engaging and can expand reach by thousands.

When a campaign is deployed to multiple locations, 'data variables' are embedded in the content which auto-

matically change based upon local profiles. Customizable variables can include almost anything from phone numbers to images.

Variables take social media marketing to an all new level, and companies may have the added ability to clone entire campaigns, all the highly customized, pre-programmed variables to all of its social media location pages with just a few clicks. The schedule for the posts can be pushed out live, respecting time zones and post times.

Some systems even have approval cycles and others allow location managers or agencies to post and contribute to enrich a company's marketing with locally savvy content, while maintaining brand control established by corporate.

7 Software Must-Haves

Here are seven key software functions and elements that can make multi-location social media marketing a breeze for furniture retailers.

1. Post to Multiple Networks: The system should support multi-network social media postings, especially

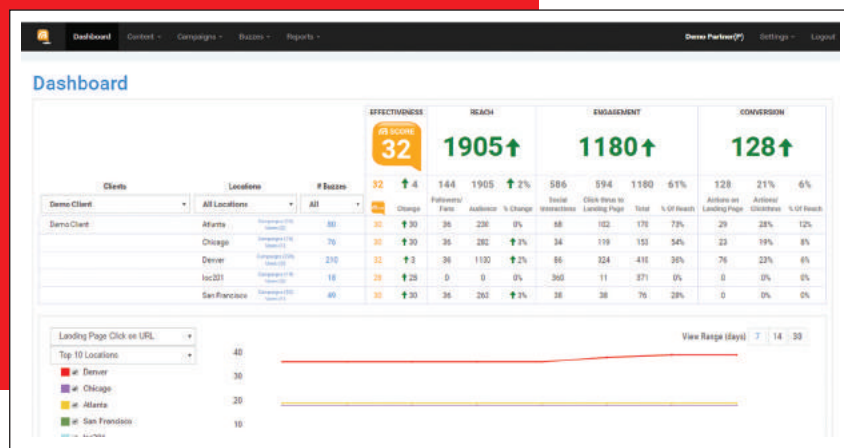
"Stores with under 400 Facebook likes are likely under-performing, and those reaching a threshold of 2000 are likely to be experiencing accelerated growth."

if designers are more active on a different network than its consumers. Yes, Facebook is the king but twitter is popular with designers. Make sure you can post to multiple networks at the same time so the software needs to count the post characters and number of images so nothing gets truncated.

2. Content Aggregation: It is best if curated content feeds can be location specific. A company should be able to apply keywords to each location to filter and further customize the feed. This helps tremendously for amassing much needed content, plus

Hyper LOCAL

A dashboard should show activity at each level for users, locations, clients so companies can drill down into metrics and mine for best performing content.



it can be used for monitoring and managing social temperament and brand reputation. It also is a huge benefit to be able to right click on content and save content to libraries, blogs and also to create posts and campaigns directly from the aggregation system.

3. Cloning of Campaigns: Cloning campaigns and all the posts under the campaign to other locations should incorporate automated content localization along with time zone management so time sensitive posts go out at the right time. This assures that posts "speak" to the local community without typos or errors. Automation is the key here, so companies can easily handle the work load.

4. Landing Page Builder: A company's social management package should include an integrated landing

page builder since landing pages are proven to convert and give companies the real estate to fully document its cause, pitch and more. Your pages can be connected to an email system, CRM or ERP for lead capturing and to complete the monetization cycle. Make sure the landing pages are integrated with social metrics so no one has to cobble together reports. A good landing page builder will come with brand control features that allow you to lock down specific brand elements.

5. Unified Metrics: Unifying metrics was just touched upon. This feature tracks follower actions across all content. It should also track across user levels, so the company knows how each level is performing, what's working and where. Some systems boil down all the metrics into easily understandable scores. This approach can even value user monetization interac-

tion and boil it down to a single effectiveness score at every level.

6. A Well Designed Dashboard: A dashboard should show activity at each level for users, locations and clients so companies can drill down into metrics and mine for best performing content.

7. Co-Branding: Hook up with a notable area sports team or one of your furniture manufacturers. If the partner changes by location, then have the partner's logo automatically updated in the content along with mentions of that brand.

About Jay Bojan: About the author: Jay Bojan is a Co-Founder of Buzzigo Social which is social media management platform built specifically for optimizing and automating the challenges of multi-location social media marketing! Buzzigo can be white labeled. www.buzzigosocial.com

Sources:

1. ThinkNear March 2012 reported by Gordmans.
2. CRM Associates gregsterling@Internet2Go.
3. PaperG gregsterling @ Internet2Go,
4. Econsultancy.
5. Aberdeen Group.

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taking
✓THE E-COMMERCE
PLUNGE!*by Frank Layo and Sekar Sundararajan*

Survey suggests that if you don't dive head first into the e-commerce space soon, you won't be able to give your customers the retail experience they demand.

Retail sales online are predicted to grow from \$231 billion in 2012 to \$370 billion by 2017, driven in large part by Millennials—digital natives very much at home with online shopping—who wield as much as \$1.3 trillion in buying power. While one in 10 consumers has already purchased a piece of furniture online in the last year, according to Kurt Salmon's Consumer Shipping Survey, there is still significant opportunity for furniture retailers to further engage shoppers and capture additional sales via the online market. This is especially true when considering the fact that 52% of consumers are willing to shop online for furniture, according to a study by Mississippi State University.

The furniture industry, however, has yet to dive full force into the online space, likely due to the fact that buying furniture has largely been perceived as dependent on the visual and tactile in-store experience. But shifting consumer behavior means that furniture retailers must capitalize on the growing e-commerce market to drive sales among the increasing number of tech-savvy Millennials to

remain competitive.

To do so, furniture retailers must answer these three key questions:

- "Why should I enter the furniture e-commerce market now?"
- "Who's winning in the space?" and, finally,
- "How can I get there?"

"Why Now?"

The market for furniture e-commerce is growing.

Overall consumer comfort levels with online shopping and the benefits of e-commerce, including convenience and low shipping costs, have increased receptivity to shopping secondary categories, such as furniture. According to Kurt Salmon's survey, more than a third of individuals indicated that they would shop for furniture online over the next few years, whereas only a quarter of respondents expressed similar sentiments in 2008. Additionally, Kurt Salmon's study found that, on average, con-

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"Pinterest is used

to generate room decorating ideas for more than a quarter of Millennial consumers, according to Mississippi State's study."

sumers spent over \$500 on their last online furniture purchase and nearly half of all purchasers bought multiple times within the last year—further proof of the opportunity the online market presents for furniture retailers.

Millennials are the prime demographic furniture retailers should target when honing their e-commerce strategies. These consumers tend to over-index in online furniture purchasing, according to Kurt Salmon's survey, likely reflective of their current life stage and digital-savvy nature.

And though Kurt Salmon's study found that consumers of all ages are

at least "comfortable" purchasing furniture online, generational differences are especially prominent when looking at consumers' intentions to shop for furniture online in the next few years. While almost half of Millennial shoppers and a quarter of Gen X consumers indicated that they would do so, less than one-third of Baby Boomers and only 17% of Depression/pre-Depression consumers agreed, according to Mississippi State's study.

Millennials' predilection for mobile shopping and browsing is another critical factor to consider when crafting e-commerce strategies. Seventy percent of Millennials use their mobile device to make online purchases, and more than one-third are comfortable purchasing household items, including furniture, from a smartphone or tablet, according to MediaPost. A desktop, tablet and mobile-friendly website that is aesthetically pleasing and up to date in terms of assortment, pricing, store locations and other details is therefore key to connecting with this demographic.

Social media also plays an important role in consumers' search for and discussion around furniture items. For example, Pinterest is used to generate room decorating ideas for more than a quarter of Millennial consumers, according to Mississippi State's study. Consequently, savvy furniture retailers could grow their presence on social media to not only track consumer sentiment toward assortment, pricing, etc., and adjust strategies accordingly, but also to bolster awareness among, and engagement with, shoppers.

What are the results of a strong digital and e-commerce presence? Activating consumers online has been shown to increase store traffic and consumers' interactions with brands. Additionally, store and associate recommendations based on consumers' online behavior have been found to increase basket size in stores. "Next visit" digital recommendations have also been linked to increased sales, especially when promotions are predictive and personalized based on consumers' online and in-store behavior.

Who's Winning?

According to Kurt Salmon's Consumer Shipping Survey, about 40% of respondents made their last online furniture purchase from Amazon.com, a brand in which consumers indicated they have a strong trust. In fact, over 20% of survey respondents had purchased only furniture from Amazon.com in the past year.

But Amazon.com is not the only market leader. A major challenge facing furniture companies looking to enter or further penetrate the e-commerce world is strong competition from big-box retailers, such as Walmart and Overstock, which, together with Amazon.com, comprise more than half of respondents' most recent online furniture purchases, according to Kurt Salmon's study. Online furniture sales, on average, represent 6% of total furniture sales for these brands, making them leading online furniture retailers.

"According to Kurt Salmon's Consumer Shipping Survey, about 40% of respondents made their last online furniture purchase from Amazon.com, a brand in which consumers indicated they have a strong trust."

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“62% of those surveyed want the ability to purchase items online and make in-store returns, and 44% want to buy furniture online and pick up their purchase in-store.”

Other retailers in the furniture e-commerce space who pose potentially tough competition include Wayfair, which excels in product variety; IKEA, whose strength lies in its strong brand recognition; and Ashley Furniture, which stands out for its logistics and delivery capabilities.

Ultimately, emerging players wishing to enter or expand their presence in the e-commerce market should look closely at these leaders' online furniture strategies when crafting their own approach.

How Can I Get There?

Today's online purchasing process is often supported by multiple channels. Retailers who can provide a compelling omni-channel journey through each phase of the e-shopping experience—including consideration, evaluation, purchase and post-purchase—will drive sales (e.g., by transforming more “considerations” to “purchases”)

and bolster brand loyalty (e.g., by improving post-purchase strategy).

While current customer satisfaction with the online furniture shopping experience is high, at 83%, it drops below 50% when shoppers are asked specifically about retailers' flexibility in delivery date and time, ability to reroute packages and options for “green”/eco-friendly shipping.

Today's shoppers seek a variety of flexible options from retailers—Kurt Salmon's survey found that 62% want the ability to purchase items online and make in-store returns, and 44% want to buy furniture online and pick up their purchase in-store. According to Kurt Salmon's survey, offering flexible fulfillment services is crucial to attracting and keeping customers, in which consumers want to:

- Track the status of delivery online (29%)
- Have next-day delivery (18%)
- Pick up or return a purchase at a physical store (17%)

In addition to these fulfillment options, furniture retailers should consider refining the following three capabilities as they enter the e-commerce space:

1. Data analytics to underpin enhanced customer experience and engagement: Technology's ability to store and retrieve customer information can facilitate and enhance the customer relationship by helping retailers learn more about and develop stronger relationships with customers. Honing data and analytics capabilities can offer retailers insights into consumers' past purchases, brand loyalty and online vs. in-store shopping behavior. With today's consumers moving away from simply need-

ing things, to demanding authentic and personalized brand experiences, this information can enable furniture retailers to personalize assortments, offerings and promotions; design merchandising operations; and connect more deeply with consumers.

2. Cross-channel inventory and fulfillment vision—Furniture retailers should have one inventory vision spanning all channels, in which an increased assortment should be available to customers online vs. in stores. Additionally, retailers should aim to offer consumers a broad range of fulfillment options, as detailed above. This, candidly, may require changes to their supply chain logistics, often in the form of additional distribution centers and “dark stores.” Ultimately, end-to-end supply chain visibility is key to optimizing supply chain operations—without it, seamless fulfillment is nearly impossible.

“Next visit digital recommendations have also been linked to increased sales, especially when promotions are predictive and personalized based on consumers' online and in-store behavior.”

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The transportation element of supply chain logistics is especially important to consider, as large furniture items will likely need to be locally delivered. As a result, implementing a “hub” concept through leveraging final-mile deliveries may be strategic.

3. The Omnichannel experience— Ultimately, operationalizing omnichannel, or providing a seamless shopping experience to consumers across online and physical channels, is an exercise in change management, which requires a company-wide transformation in organizational structure, IT and supply chain. Successful

change management should start at the top, where company leaders make their sponsorship of the initiative clear to everyone, both inside and outside of the organization.

It's Time to Dive In

The e-commerce opportunity for furniture retailers is significant. By looking closely at industry leaders and adapting, tailoring and enhancing fulfillment, customer engagement and omnichannel e-commerce strategies, furniture retailers can capitalize on this growing opportunity. Ultimately,

leveraging e-commerce will enable retailers to drive sales, heighten brand loyalty and garner the competitive edge needed to thrive in today's retail marketplace.

Frank Layo & Sekar Sundararajan:

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12 QUICK TIPS

by Tim Smith

If you build it, they will come, is the epitaph of many a deceased retail furniture store. Modern customers must be wooed - not sold, and not bought. So get wooing. Check out and check off these retail furniture marketing tips for the second half of 2016.

1. Colonize Craigslist: Harvest .organic traffic from Craigslist, Facebook Marketplace, and other local classified advertisement websites. Pictures and proofreading will work wonders. Don't rite n fonetic English, k?

2. Build Your Own Oscar Mayer Wienermobile: Remodel an old school bus into a rolling furniture showroom that looks like a sofa for Paul Bunyan. You'll be basking in more brand awareness than you'll know what to do with.

3. Designate an Expert: Behind a polished counter-top in most any Apple store is a row of "Geniuses," clad in navy blue shirts, who provide technical support. You can hire a furniture craftsmen or interior designer to answer customer questions as well. Alternatively, like West Elm, you can deploy an interior designer straight to someone's home.

4. Design an Online Showroom: "We believe that more than 50 percent of the customers who buy in the store have been looking intensely at products through the site before they visit," say Mike and Doug,

owners of Wrightwood Furniture in Chicago. Exploit the power of CSS3 and HTML5 to engineer an interactive online showroom.

5. Switch to Salaries, Bonuses: Salaried employees make the most accurate, not necessarily the most expensive, recommendations, and customers can sense the difference.

6. Send Birthday Cards to Your Customers: Handwrite a message. Include a special discount. Ask about the kids.

7. Recruit a Sponsor: Find a local celebrity to hawk your products.

8. Post How-To Content: Spark passion in your customers by writing how-to blog posts, posting videos, and distributing e-photobooks.

9. Paint a Mural: Lake Placid, Florida, was a small, struggling town amidst an ocean of orange groves. Then someone had an idea: paint the town. More than 40 public murals now adorn Main Street, home to bustling boutiques and successful entrepreneurs.

10. Gamify: Take a lesson from McDonald's "Monopoly" sweepstakes. Arrange a raffle, a lottery, or a hula-hooping contest to attract foot traffic.

11. Offer a Free Test-Drive: Everyone has an inner, pig-headed toddler: Once they get their

hands on a toy, they won't let go. Let a customer try out a piece, for free, for 30 days.

12. Encourage a Shopkeeper's Ethos: West Elm encourages its retail outlets to adopt a "suburban hub" mentality, where salespersons recommend local restaurants and suggest popular apps to build rapport.

About Tim Smith: Tim Smith is a writer for Modernize, a website that connects contractors of all specialties to homeowners looking for home improvement services. Head to Modernize to find inspiration and other tips and tricks for your next home improvement project." For more tips, visit Modernize.com.

"Modern customers must be wooed - not sold, and not bought. So get wooing. Check out and check off these retail furniture marketing tips for the second half of 2016."

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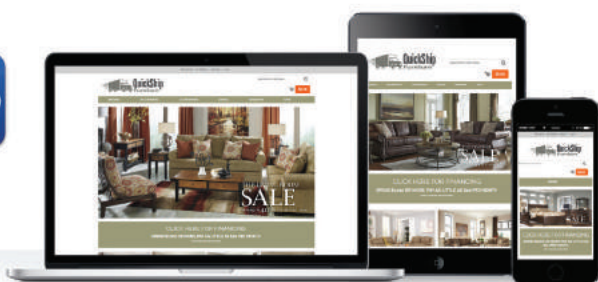
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