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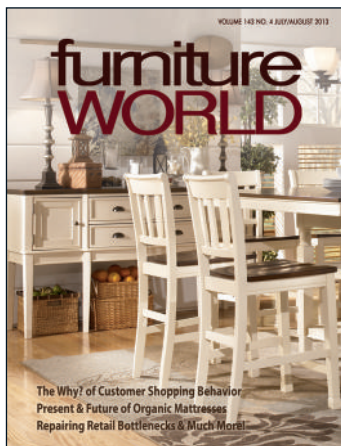
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The Business Solutions Magazine For Furniture Retailers

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Cover Image: The Whitesburg Dining Collection by Signature Design, by Ashley Furniture creates an inviting cottage retreat within the decor of any dining room. The group features white and burnished brown finishes that beautifully accent the stylish cottage design. For more information about Ashley Furniture see page one in this issue, or visit www.ashleyfurniture.com.

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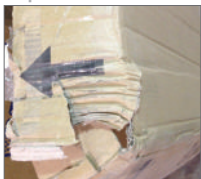
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EDITOR'S CORNER

"Groundhog Day"

Are you a big fan of the movie "Groundhog Day"? If so, you may remember lines recited by Phil Collins (played by Bill Murray) who exclaims, "It's the same thing your whole life, wash your hands, sit up straight, don't chew with your mouth open,... Oh yea, don't drive on the railroad tracks!"

Phil, who does decide it's OK to drive on the railroad tracks has, of course, just realized that, any ill advised behavior has no consequences for him because he is living the same day over and over again.

Although many of us experience deja vu when we arrive in Vegas or High Point for yet another show, the similarities in our business lives to "Groundhog Day" end there. Our business decisions have consequences, "do-overs" are not automatic.

So, as you read through this edition of Furniture World, please notice that among the in-depth articles on retail marketing, finance, operations management, sales education and sales management, you will find single column tips for owners and managers unrelated to the feature articles.

It's our way of squeezing in a few more tips to help you to have successful business days today and well into the future. So, remember, "don't chew with your mouth open" and, as always, your comments are welcome at russ@furninfo.com.

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WHY POWER

If you answer this question “Why?” and deliver the answer to your staff, they will follow you, and so will your customers.

by Karen Florence, CPC

This is the first entry in a series of articles about how brain-based coaching can help you and your business. You will find lots of basic and innovative ideas on how to approach your business, your staff and most importantly, yourself. I will offer advice that has worked for my own clients as well as offer input from other colleagues who are experts in their fields.

In this installment we will look at ways to help your managers, employees and customers to become more

passionate and committed to supporting the “Why” of your business. It doesn’t matter if you are a top 100 retailer, independent furniture chain or single furniture store operation; the goal is the same. If you can lead with passion, you are on your way to having what most companies can only dream about.

WHY IS A POWERFUL WORD

When you understand the “why” of what you are doing, you can begin to create space for new behaviors and beliefs to develop. Why? is a very empowering question to ask.

For business owners and managers, bringing a group together to function well and move forward is sometimes like herding cats. Everyone has different opinions and alternate ways of approaching tasks. Everyone has their own unique personality drivers.

How do we get you and your staff on the same page, believing the same thing and acting in a way that enhances your business? It begins with you. You must decide what is important to you and why you do what you do. What do you want to accomplish and what path do you want to

take to get there? These questions all begin with Why? If you answer that question and deliver that answer to your staff, they will follow you, and so will your customers.

Before you read further, it will be well worth your time to view a fantastic TED Talk by Simon Sinek. You can find it on the right side of the www.furninfo.com website labeled “Power of Why Video”. I dare you not to be inspired!

Simon Sinek says that people don’t buy WHAT you do or HOW you do it. What you do and how you do it should be just proof of WHY your company exists. Getting your co-workers to follow you and customers to buy from you, he notes, are both much easier when they understand why you do things, rather than just what you do and how you do it.

Most retailers don’t think about themselves in this way. They define their businesses in terms of what they do and how they do it. A typical furniture store owner might explain her business and how she entices customers to buy in the following way.

WHAT: QRS Furniture sells great fur-

“Start with a series of questions and answers to drill down to find core values that are true. It may take you less or more than five questions to get to your ultimate Why.”



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niture for every room in your home.

HOW: Our furniture is beautifully designed. We offer great credit options and fast white-glove delivery. Our knowledgeable staff has helped our customers furnish homes since 1962.

QUESTION TO CUSTOMERS: Want to visit our store?

Now, compare the statements made above with those of an identical furniture store. Instead of asking What and How, it asks Why and What. Which approach do you believe is more compelling?

WHY: Everything we do at XYZ furniture store comes from a belief that we can improve the lives of our customers and the community we serve by thinking differently than the typical furniture store.

WHAT: The way we do this is by searching for products that make our customers' lives more beautiful, easier and more interesting. We just happen

to sell furniture for every room in your home.

QUESTION TO CUSTOMERS: Want to visit our store?

By the way, your "why" can't be money. Yes, we all want to make money. But there are many ways to make money. If you work just for money, you and your staff are trading time for money. There is no passion in that. It is not sustainable nor does it create loyalty.

Later in this article we will look at concrete action steps you can take to re-align how you think about your business using the concept of Why. First, let's examine how traditional ways of leading people and changing behavior can meet with resistance.

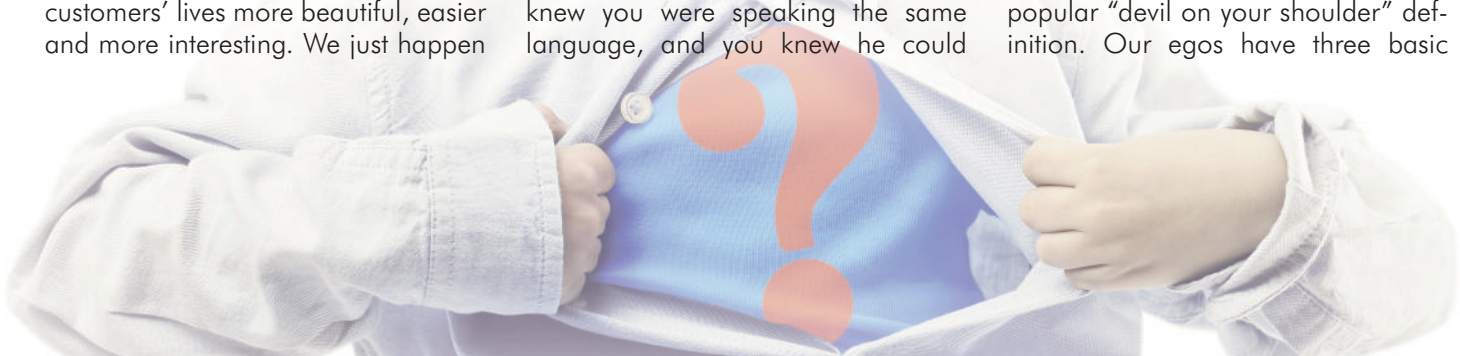
RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

"Have you ever tried to explain to a recently hired sales associate your store policy regarding how customers should be handled? If your approach is vastly different than what worked for him at his last sales position, you may have encountered resistance. You knew you were speaking the same language, and you knew he could

hear you, but he seemed completely unable to understand.

Or have you ever had a conversation about religion or politics and the other person just couldn't see your point of view, or perhaps, you couldn't see theirs? The reason for this is that we become what we have been exposed to. Our personalities, beliefs, political ideas, world view, work ethic, parenting style, etc., are developed from input we have received throughout our entire lives. We are unconscious about what those beliefs are, and how we developed them. Because we are bombarded with so much information of all kinds every day, our brains filter out what does not agree with the beliefs our ego is trying to maintain. This can cause us to be inflexible. In essence, our minds close and will not allow new ideas or new behaviors in. The older we get the more closed our minds can get.

That's because we are hard-wired to be closed minded. One of the major functions of our ego is to maintain our identity. I am using the psychology definition of ego here, not the popular "devil on your shoulder" definition. Our egos have three basic





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and very important jobs. Those jobs are to 1) maintain our identity, 2) keep us safe, 3) get our needs met. Everything we do, and I do mean everything we do, is driven by one of these three functions. I am not going to go too deeply into how it all works. Let's just agree it is complicated.

The important take-away about the ego is that it uses filters to reject information that threatens our identity; that goes against what we believe to be true about ourself, our company and the world.

ALL IS NOT LOST

Before you begin thinking we are doomed by our egos, let me point out the really great reasons for being hardwired this way.

Being hard-wired to maintain our identity allows us to form connections. We belong to families, religious and social groups. We play sports and follow our favorite team (go Phillies!). We find friends who like what we like and enjoy their company. We find work that fits our identities and often co-workers who share our same values. And, we gravitate to

companies whose values, pre-dispositions and passions resonate with our own.

Behavioral change is hard. I want to say behavioral change can be nearly impossible.

That's why the power of Why can be such an important motivator for change in your business. Once you understand why you do what you do – and if that reason resonates with your employees' and target customers' core values, then the behaviors of your sales associates, managers, warehouse/delivery employees and customer service people will more easily slide into place. As was mentioned at the start of this article, the power of Why creates space for new behaviors and beliefs to develop.

THE FIVE WHYS

A really great technique you can use to organize the process of finding a mission statement that incorporates a "Why" is called "The Five Whys". It works like this; say you want to write a company mission statement. Start with a series of questions and answers to drill down to find core values that are true. It may take you less or more than five questions to get to your ultimate Why. Here, for example, are four Whys for a sample independent furniture store:

Question #1: Why are we in business?

Answer: We are in business to sell fur-

niture to our customers.

Question #2: Why do we sell furniture to our customers?

Answer: Because we believe that offering high-quality products and services improves the quality of their lives.

Question #3: Why do we want to improve the quality of our customers lives.

Answer: Because it is important to do business the right way.

Question #4: Why do we believe it is important to do business the right way?

Answer: Because our family has always lived and conducted business by high standards. It's our family value.

Just keep asking questions until you get to that "feel good" place about why you do what you do. Keep in mind, "because it makes money" is not an answer to Why. That is a result.

Your bottom line answer to Why, will keep you wanting to move in the right direction. Southwest Airline's Why is they want to be the best, lowest cost airline in the sky. When they are thinking of making a change, they have only one question to ask; will this help us be the best lowest cost airline in the sky? If the answer is no, the change is not made. When NASA was working on the moon-landing project, they

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WHY?

POWER



had a great mission statement. MAN, MOON, DECADE. Nobody had to think about what the focus was. There was only one question; will this get a man on the moon in a decade?

GETTING EMPLOYEE BUY-IN

Once you determine your all important Why statement, you will need to develop a plan to convince your managers, employees and customers to become passionate and committed to supporting this Why of your business.

Ultimately, if you want things to be different, it will require the courage to really look at your situation honestly. Denial and blame will not work. Nor will letting an “expert” fix the problem. This is the big difference between

coaching and consulting. It is easier to let someone else tell you what is wrong with your business from their perception than it is to take an honest look to discover your own answers. You are the expert on you and your business. Cookie-cutter solutions don’t really work in the long term. Your situation is unique to you. What matters in the end is what you think, what you want and what you will do.

As with any substantial project you undertake in your business, the search for why you do what you do should be given time and careful consideration. The process works best when someone is assigned responsibility for organizing and mediating the process. You may have the talent within your organization or you may want to seek out a good coach who can help even the most apparent cynic to get underneath behavior to find the Why.

Remember to be patient with employees and with yourself throughout the process. They have been doing the same things for years and may resist seeing that something has to change. Though, once they see their own behaviors and their own attitudes, circumstances shift quickly and the result is happier employees more satisfied customers and healthier financial statements.

CHANGE AT THE TOP

Up until this point, this article has only asked you to work through the process of getting to Why and to find ways to help other people, your employees and customers change the way they see your company.

The reality is that it must all start with you, the person at the top. Sorry, I know it is easier if you could find external reasons why business is not running the way you say you want it to. While it is true that there may be existing external conditions that inhibit progress, it is your perception of them that matters. Your perception comes from your filters; how you see the world and how you believe it works.

Let’s say, as in the above example, your Why statement is that, “Everything we do at XYZ furniture store comes from a belief that we can improve the lives of our customers and the community we serve by thinking differently than the typical furniture store.” To make good on that statement and that intention you can’t run your business without actually taking concrete steps to improve the lives of your customers, your employees and the community. If this is your Why statement, you can’t work at the same time to make your employees and customers lives more difficult, and you can’t, ever again, think like the typical furniture store.

TIME TO REFLECT

Did you ever say something you had no intention of saying and it shocked even you? Or reacted in a way that was totally inappropriate? Or worse yet, do you remember the first time you said something to your kids you hated that your parents used to say to you? We are hardwired for that sort of thing. Deep in our unconscious are the drivers of that behavior. It happens to all of us. It is part of the human condition. Logic and control

“Once you determine your all important WHY statement, you will need to develop a plan to convince your managers, employees and customers to become passionate and committed.”

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work to a point, but when emotions get high, we say and do things we normally keep repressed in our unconscious. This is the reason we say hurtful and inappropriate things in a heated argument. I often hear clients say that they would never do or say certain things at work that they do or say at home and vice versa. Keep in mind that the notion that we can be one person at work and a different person at home is rubbish. Personality drivers are functioning constantly regardless of our location. We may act in different ways at different times, but the motivation is the same. When emotions run high, our subconscious drivers pop up and the result is rarely good.

When this behavior is being acted out by management and they don't see it, (and they don't), it becomes a very big problem. Managers are

human beings along with everyone else in the company. It is easy to say it is them, not me. If you want your staff to do the work, you must lead by example. It is worth the effort. And it is worth being transparent about it. That kind of leadership creates safety. Safety makes it OK to change.

About Karen Florence: Karen Florence is a Certified Professional Coach and founder of Tabula Rasa Coaching, a coaching firm that specializes in transformational coaching for individuals as well as organizations. She works with people who want to explore their lives in a deeper way to create change in their personal, business and spiritual challenges.

Karen has worked with CEO's and high level executives around the world, coaching, mentoring and consulting. She has worked one-on-one

with executives from Pierce Global Promotions, Pinnacle Foods, Jaguar Land Rover, The Disney Channel, BBDO Russia, New York Life, The St. Croix Foundation, Volvo Italia, Prudential Life, Intel and The Learning Channel among others.

When working with Karen, clients' lives change. With her unique way of digging for the truth and finding the answers within her clients, doors open and circumstances change. Karen's keen intuition and curiosity often helps the truth to bubble up in surprising ways, allowing her clients to see themselves as whole and resourceful individuals moving forward into all that is possible.

Questions about this article or related to her consulting practice can be directed to Karen Florence at kfmcullen@gmail.com, or call 610.228.4145.




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RETAIL TRANSFORMATION

Case Study: How 41 year old Davids Furniture & Interiors was transformed into a 21st century destination where customers create stylish homes.

by Pamela N. Danziger

Following the release of a new study about the luxury home furnishings market, "Home Is Where the Luxury Is: A Study of Luxury Consumers & Their Home Furnishings, Redecorating and Remodeling Purchases," Michael Martin, President of Davids Furniture & Interiors and son of the company's founders David and Nancy Martin, decided to seek help in finding new opportunities to build his business selling to high-end, luxury home customers. His central Pennsylvania three store retail home furnishing chain serves an extensive trading area including Berks, Lancaster, Dauphin, Cumberland and York counties.

Michael describes the company's unique market position, "We position ourselves as a higher-end design business that caters to the top 15 percent of the population from a household income standpoint. What drives

our business is design projects, which can range between \$10,000-\$15,000 for a room and go up to \$40,000. All of our staff are qualified and trained interior designers."

The demographics of those counties revealed about 150,000 affluent households (top 20 percent) and nearly 50,000 at the top 10 percent of national incomes. The Davids' team recognized that they had significant growth opportunities, as some stores were underperforming. They believed the company had the potential to increase sales by one-third to one-half in a fairly short period. Further, the chain's Berks county location borders

on the affluent western suburbs of Philadelphia and offers an opportunity to reach those customers willing to travel west rather than east to the city for home furnishings.

So, Davids Furniture & Interiors had bright prospects on paper with Unity's latest marketing research indicating affluent consumers have high purchase intentions for home furnishings, combined with the fact that Davids' stores are located in areas where affluent consumers live. But their corporate balance sheet wasn't showing it. Michael defined the opportunity succinctly, "We want to carve out a specialty niche in our marketplace that is high service, custom oriented and design driven."

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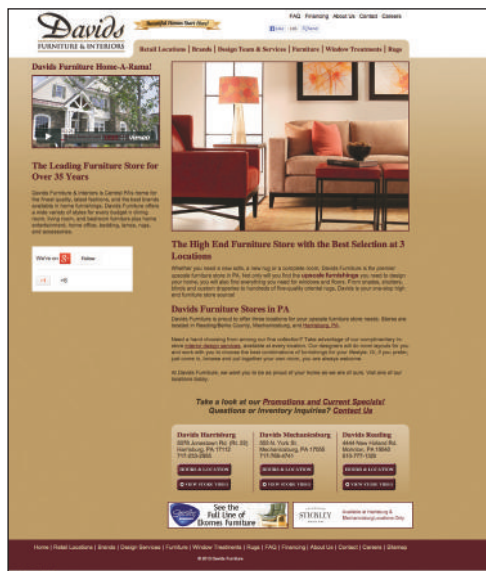


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Pictured above is the company's old website and logo along side the soon to be re-launched site with an updated look and feel that reflects Davids' new branding.

Davids began with a marketing audit where Unity Marketing studied the existing business and all its touch points with the customers, from store front, displays, advertising, website and its position in the local competitive market. Initially we decided customer research wouldn't yield too many actionable recommendations, since we needed to branch out into the community to reach a new target customer. The marketing audit focused on the four Ps of marketing – Product, Price, Promotion & Placement—as well as the competitive environment.

Product: To involve the staff in the process and make them feel invested in the future of Davids Furniture & Interiors, key members of each local store visited a competitor's store with a questionnaire designed to help them evaluate and analyze each competitor critically.

A study of the competition found different strengths in various local retailers, but, most notably, many local retailers excelled in the effectiveness of their internet presence. Though there was some cross-over in furniture brands carried competitively, Davids

lacked nothing on that score. In fact, Davids exceeded most competitors in the brands they carried and the company's ability to deliver a customized design service. Rather than focusing on selling furniture as most of the competitors do, Davids sells a complete design package. "We are a one-store shop in that we sell custom window treatments, room accessories, rugs and installed wall-to-wall carpets. When someone comes into our store, we are all about understanding their total room and their styles and needs in order to develop a plan so that they can buy to that plan overtime, if need be," Michael explains. And that design-intensive approach is what distinguishes Davids in the local market.

Placement: With the Product part of the marketing 4Ps covered, the audit revealed some key recommendations around the Placement side of the equation. For example, one of the stores displayed a sofa that was set up too close to the front door. The sofa crowded the customer, effectively pushing them back out the door, rather than inviting them in. In retail it is critical to provide customers a 12-14 foot

decompression zone upon entering the store where the customer can transition from outside and get ready to explore a retail environment. Davids needed to push back that display and give the shopper room to get oriented to the store.

Next, special attention needed to be paid to what is displayed to the right after the decompression zone. The space to the right of the door is prime, as that is the typical way customers

"In retail it is critical to provide customers a 12-14 foot 'decompression zone' upon entering the store where the customer can transition from outside and get ready to explore the retail environment."



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www.davidsfurniture.com

Recent advertisement in "Susquehanna Style" featured a new look and a redesigned logo. Standing at right is Michael Martin, President. David Martin who co-founded the store along with Nancy Martin is seated.



move when they come into the retail environment. Another of Davids' stores was not effectively using that prime right-of-the-door retail space. Ekornes's Stressless Collection is one of that store's top-selling brands, which was displayed in a separate gallery toward the back of the store. Rather than have customers search out that line, it was moved to the highly visible location inside the right front door. In that way,

"A key recommendation was to break the company's dependence on monthly discount promotions and become more selective with when and what to discount, in keeping with the company's high-end positioning and design-intensive service strategy."

they put their best 'foot' forward utilizing that high performing space to its maximum potential.

Pricing & Promotion: The marketing audit revealed the main areas of weakness and need for improvement for Davids Furniture & Interiors were toward the Pricing and Promotion parts of the 4Ps marketing equation. These were intricately linked because discount pricing had become the mainstay for promotion during and after the recession. A key recommendation arising from the marketing audit was to break the company's dependence on monthly discount promotions and become more selective with when and what to discount, in keeping with the company's high-end positioning and design-intensive service strategy. Davids' business is not to sell discounted or off-price furniture, like its competitors. While everybody enjoys getting a good deal, the sophisticated customers to which Davids aspires are even more eager to get a good value, and that comes along with superior style and design support.

Breaking the reliance on discounting promotions takes time and discipline, as Michael describes, "During the second part of the year we are starting to migrate away from monthly promotions. Our thoughts on this have evolved as we realized we needed to

have our image, branding and logo, redesigned website and new advertising together before we could back away from monthly promotions. In the meantime we need to get our name out there for mind awareness and to keep us out in front of customers." So, as the company backs off direct mail promotions offered to its customer lists and outside lists selected by geography and income levels, they are getting ready with a whole new brand image, new advertising, and new website that will attract the right kind of customers and welcome them into the store.

For that, they brought in an advertising and marketing firm, Verve Marketing & Design, headed by Diane Lemonides, that specializes in the affluent customer segment. Diane finds Davids Furniture & Interiors' challenges more common than one would expect, "There was a big disconnect between Davids' external messaging and the products that they had in the stores. So they were attracting 'tire kickers' coming in attracted by discounted advertising, looking for deals. They needed a total rebrand, new logo, tag line, color palette, collateral material to appeal to the type of sophisticated clients that their products and services appeal to. The new brand attitude is being communicated on the website, billboards and local lifestyle magazines to pull in their ideal client."

"Carrying the finest lines

with an outdated message, image and marketing tools never translates to sales conversion, only confusion. Careful attention to branding is critical especially with a more affluent consumer."

NEW LOOK AND FEEL

To create a high-style image, the new corporate logo is clean and sophisticated. The new tag line, 'Building Beautiful Rooms,' focuses on the experience that Davids delivers to the customer, not the products or things it sells. Diane describes the concept, "We ask 'What's Your Style?' and show a diversity of styles. Here (see ad at top of page 22) we have three chairs, but it could be three case pieces or other items that would attract different types of buyers. And because Davids doesn't just sell furniture, we came up with language in the ad to describe the service so people wouldn't feel intimidated about using a designer." Michael shares, "We wanted to communicate that Davids offers a wide range of styles with three simple, clearly defined silhouettes that convey the message that this is a place that is doing things differently than other stores."

Because Davids is a brick-and-mortar retailer, billboards will also be used in its three prime geographic locations, but with a simpler style-themed message that a driver can absorb in the blink of an eye.

Next in line for redesign is the website which is growing as a critical component of customer outreach and marketing communications. "Most customers start their shopping online," Michael explains. "You must make sure that they find you there and that the website attracts them to visit the store. When we track sales we find that the internet is now the third most

important reason why people come to Davids. First is still repeat customers or referrals from those customers and second remains driving by the store, but third used to be direct mail. As a result, we keep growing our budget on the internet, including google ad words and a new mobile app that optimizes the website for the increasing numbers of customers who primarily access the internet through hand-held devices."

NEXT GENERATION CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES

Davids Furniture & Interiors is currently in its 41st year of operation and had recently undergone the growing pains that transferring day-to-day management from the company's founders to its next generation entails. Michael worked in the business since he graduated from college. In preparing himself for his new role, Michael explains, "It is important to learn all parts of the business, from the warehouse, the office and the store floor in a position of serving customers to progress to higher levels of responsibility, as well as having an extended period of mentoring. Too often there is a temptation to put someone in a management role before they have earned it or had the experience to learn how all the parts of the business run."

Making sure that a company's branding and marketing messages are transferred successfully to the next generation of customers is a common challenge companies like Davids face at this critical time, Diane Lemonides

remarks. "When we studied Davids initially, the marketing materials had an outdated look and feel which is something I come across often in retail businesses, especially where a company is multi-generational and has shifted to a new generation, like Davids," she says. "The company hadn't done a clear review of who they want to be in the future and reflected that in the brand image. Rather, the marketing talked more about who they were 20 years ago. We found the external marketing messaging for Davids wasn't consistent with who they are internally today."

She continues, "This is a thread we see in many businesses passed down from one generation to another. If the external messaging doesn't transfer to the next generation of customers, revenue will still come in the door but as that first generation customer base stops buying, the next generation of customers doesn't necessarily come in. So the generational transfer must include both the internal and external messaging."

Diane stresses the importance of Davids' marketing targeting the specific customer segment for which the brand aims, "Carrying the finest of lines with an outdated message, image and marketing tools never translates to sales conversion, only confusion. Careful attention to branding is critical especially with a more affluent consumer."

As Davids Furniture & Interiors continues to evolve, Michael finds leadership skills are a top priority as he now is responsible to lead the company and

"Research by Unity Marketing indicated that affluent consumers have high purchase intentions for home furnishings and their stores are located in areas where affluent consumers live, but Davids' balance sheet wasn't showing it."

its 34 employees to the 42nd year and beyond. "A family business is a lifelong commitment. In the organization you are learning merchandising, sales and other key operational components that are essential to making the organization run smoothly. But you always have to be analyzing how to change things to make them better and that is where leadership comes in. You have to lead people and model a willingness and openness to change. I am a student of leadership, attending leadership training, reading about leaders and how they have done what they have done. Unfortunately too many people resist change and that is one reason why you see fewer and fewer independent retailers. They get too bogged down in their businesses and don't take time to look at how they need to be changing."

About The Author: Pamela N. Danziger is an internationally recognized expert specializing in consumer insights for marketers targeting the affluent consumer segment. She is president of Unity Marketing, a boutique marketing consulting firm she founded in 1992. Pam received the Global Luxury Award for top luxury industry achievers presented at the Global Luxury Forum in 2007 by Harper's Bazaar. She was named to *Luxury Daily's* elite list of 25 "Luxury Women to Watch 2013." Contact her at 717-336-1600 or pam@unitymarketingonline.com.

FURNITURE WORLD

TIPS

FORM fills space and defines it. A trained eye learns to notice not only the form, but also to appreciate the void which adjoins and is defined by it. This relationship is much like the interplay between shadow and light. Forms have bulk and shape.

Rectangular forms can give a room a sense of sturdiness and certainty, but overuse can be repetitive and monotonous. Most rooms, furniture and wall decor are basically rectangles; having straight sides and right angled corners.

Angular forms are less common than rectilinear. They, therefore, attract and keep attention.

Diagonals can be used to imply motion and also increase the apparent size of an object.

Curved forms impart feelings of security, continuous change and continuity. Circles, arcs and cones have a focal point to which attention is drawn, lending emphasis to a design scheme. Sectionals, upholstered back, arm and cushion treatments, lamp shades, dining and occasional tables, vases, plates, fabric and rug designs often employ curved forms and motifs. They can be used as the basis or theme of a room design or to offset and balance angular and rectilinear forms.

LINE can be used to alter the mood and proportion of a living space. Form and line are closely related. A rectangle can be tall and high or long and low, approximating vertical or horizontal lines. A low, long rectangular sofa may generate a feeling of stability and certainty resulting from its form - and also of informality and length due to its lines.

Horizontal lines can be used to make spaces seem more relaxed and informal, and accentuate the horizontal aspect or length of walls or furnishings.

Vertical Lines, like the geometry of a Gothic cathedral, can add dignity and formality to a room. They also make objects seem taller in relation to their width.

Curved Lines evoke the same kinds of responses as curved forms. Depending on their spatial orientation, they can also incorporate properties of horizontal or vertical lines.

Diagonal Lines can create a feeling of imbalance and dynamic movement. Like curved lines, their impact changes with their horizontal or vertical aspect.

Text excerpted from Furniture World Magazine's 16 page Interior Design Guide (reprints available).

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Are you an “absentee” manager?

by Ray Morefield, Common Goals



Today, many in positions of authority consider the concept of Participative Management to be the most productive and proficient in molding and motivating business associates.

Participative Management involves interactive communication, an open mind, an open-door policy and a proactive philosophy on the part of experienced managers to mentor associates.

Due to the press of time, managers may become so focused on urgent matters they fail to allocate time to groom associates that are under their supervision and tutelage.

Because of workloads and time constraints, we frequently find that retail managers are guilty of absentee management, which is the opposite of participative management.

It is the norm for us to think of an absentee manager as forsaking the workplace in favor of basking in the tropical sun, enjoying Bermuda beaches or snowy ski slopes. But dedicated leaders may be guilty of absentee management even though they may work in adjacent offices, on the same floor, in close proximity for years.

Supervisors that reflect the absentee management syndrome may be excellent employees from the standpoint of

accomplishing their job descriptions and technical tasks but may be lacking in the leadership skills required to motivate and challenge associates to reach their business and personal potential.

PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Today young, aspiring associates, not only want but expect to be mentored and trained for advancement in their careers by immediate supervisors.

The most successful managers that practice participative leadership find time to:

Become personally involved: reflect an interest in the personal and professional lives of those associates whose careers are dependent upon your administrative decisions.

Share decision-making rationales: Management by example has merit. But many managers also understand that proactively sharing proven principles based on experience helps their associates better understand the logic and basis for corporate decisions and policies that are enacted.

Understanding how and why decisions are made is critical in maintaining corporate morale and motivation.

Build good attitudes and confidence: More than just coaching personnel under our leadership to work within corporate guidelines, it is critical that we help develop and maintain proper and positive mental attitudes.

Astute leaders understand the importance of helping to cultivate and maintain confidence in the decisions and direction of the corporation by personnel at all levels.

One or two employees with no regard for quality or confidence in leadership can do irreparable damage. Unfortunately their dissatisfaction feeds on other associates.

Exit interviews frequently make us aware that more employees leave

“Take time to show a personal interest in your associates and their families.

Knowledge of a person’s name is one of the most meaningful words in your vocabulary.”

"Supervisors that reflect

absentee management syndrome may accomplish their job descriptions and technical tasks but lack in the leadership skills to motivate and challenge associates to reach their business and personal potential."

their place of employment because of discontent with their immediate supervision than their job or the corporation that employs them.

America's leading psychologist, Dr Karl Menninger, advises that "attitudes are more important than facts". This is

especially true in the world of retailing where hours are long, weekends are required, competition and the economy is challenging and peak performance is critical because of the limited time we have in front of prospective buyers.

Include associates in decision making: While recognition and appreciation are the primary principles to successfully motivate most employees, it is significant that we remain cognizant of the fact that the second most successful method of motivation for

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"Take time to write personal notes

of recognition and appreciation. Notes of this nature are shared with a spouse and family are most meaningful and have long-term benefit."

group oriented personnel is to be accepted and included as a member of the team.

Being excluded, in business and personal affairs is both demoralizing and depressing. Some suggest it is a form of "bullying".

Successful managers understand and implement programs to ensure associates feel they are included in continuous improvement of procedures and processes to: reduce costs, improve quality and service, increase customer satisfaction and enhance image.

Mentor associates: Significant studies reveal that many successful leaders who reach positions of power have been fortunate to have had an associate recognize their potential and adopt or mentor them on their journey up the corporate ladder.

They have not been required to stand alone, even though they possess and perform with unusual skills.

Being a self-starter and an independent achiever is considered a necessary and commendable attribute. But having a supervisor who takes the time to mentor or function as a "big brother" is mutually beneficial. The time invested helps senior colleges more proficiently evaluate skills and attitudes when reviews are required and paves the way to help subordinates develop the confidence to make sound decisions in areas that leaders may not or don't have the time in which to be involved.

Bring value to associates' lives: Larry Appley, former president of the American Management Association and an inspired leader who steered the organization through many of its formative years and current policies,

suggests throughout his scripts on successful leadership "that more than focusing on just corporate profits, a successful leader brings value to the lives of others".

This principle not only refers to external customers and vendors but includes our internal customers ranging from shipping personnel to sales associates including their families and friends. The practice of absentee management doesn't readily accomplish the goal articulated by Mr. Appley.

Participative management doesn't require that managers abdicate their position of authority in the chain of command. The general rule is that it encourages a mere compelling attitude of cooperation at all levels.

DANGER OF SATELLITE STATUS EMPLOYEES

If we allow associates to drift from the mainstream to assume the role of "satellite status" employees, they frequently become more challenging to manage and motivate.

It is estimated that by the year 2050 as much as 25 to 30 percent of our administrative workforce will regularly function outside the confines of corporate headquarters.

Office space, investments in electronic equipment, energy expenses and personnel benefits will be reduced. Employees will spend less time commuting, and have more flexibility. That's all good news. On the downside, the ability to motivate, manage and communicate will become more challenging.

One-on-one planned and spontaneous exchanges will become less frequent. Written memos and texting will become more prevalent and formal.

Understanding and interpretation will become more difficult.

Educators suggest that 55% of that which we communicate is conveyed through vocal melody and inflection of voice. Formal exchanges lack those attributes. The result will challenge the leadership and communication skills of even the most proficient policy makers.

The successful systems we teach today will be the tools that those who follow in our footsteps will reference and employ as successful management principles tomorrow.

Depending on the size and structure of your retail organization, you may not be able to develop the kinds of personal relationships you want to have with all associates. But taking the time to relate to them in a meaningful manner across all levels in the chain of command can have a positive and lasting impact.

POLICY VS. PERSONNEL

Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "This time, like most times, is a very good time if we know but what to do with it".

Frequently, when business executives feel an activity is low on their priority list, they rationalize that they will address that situation when they have time in the future.

Because your decisions may effect the ability of your subordinates to perform and achieve today's tasks, in many instances the future is NOW.

Many well-meaning managers with limited vision feel their time is best spent on matters of policy rather than personnel. NOT true.

Some senior managers feel that motivation and productivity of line employees are issues that should be

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ABSENTEE MANAGER

the sole responsibility of direct supervisors. NOT true.

STEPS TO ELIMINATE "ABSENTEE MANAGEMENT"

1. Take time on a periodic basis to brainstorm on all levels within the organization. You may wish to advise in advance certain subjects that are off limits. Not all ideas or feedback have merit but most employees have ideas and appreciate the opportunity to be given an audience to be heard. Ask opinions and ideas on:

- Cost reduction.

- Redundant activities.
- Productivity.
- Competition.
- New products.
- New trends in the changing marketplace.
- How to build the brand.

2. Take time to make yourself available on matters of concern before associates spin-out-of control.

3. Take time to leave the confines of your office and visit with your

associates at their workstations, on the sales floor, in the warehouse and at the point of delivery.

"Take time to leave the confines of your office. Visit associates at their workstations, on the sales floor, in the warehouse and at the point of delivery."

4. Take time to show a personal interest in your associates and their families. Knowledge of a person's name is one of the most meaningful words in your vocabulary.

5. Take time to write personal notes of recognition and appreciation. Notes of this nature that are taken home and shared with a spouse and family are most meaningful and have long-term benefit.

6. Take time to understand individual differences, but treat all with consistency. Showing preferential treatment is readily evident and creates confusion and resentment within the ranks.

CONCLUSION

Properly managed and motivated employees conduct themselves with excellence whether they are in your presence, working in teams or they are working individually on projects.

Involved leaders rather than absentee managers have the ability to build a team in which all associates are

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"Take time to
make yourself available on
matters of concern before
associates spin-out-of control."

considered meaningful members from career associates to part-time employees.

John Donne wrote: "No man is an island".

We all require space but allowing associates to feel isolated, and unsure of their future leads to a feeling of unimportance and eventually separation.

Enlightened leaders have found it is creditable to be "in-command" and have their directives followed without question but still be appreciated by associates at all levels in the chain of command.

Charismatic leaders create a vision and recruit teams that work collectively to achieve a common goal. They have the ability to be both liked and respected.

Both in business and personal relationships, Emerson summed it up succinctly when he said, "the only way to have a friend is to be one."

Author Jim Collins, in his book "From Good To Great" briefed his audience on the role of every astute manager.

He opined that helping those that are willing to entrust their future by subordinating themselves to our leadership and management training is an awesome and meaningful responsibility. We should not view the obligation lightly.

We encourage and challenge all in positions of authority to take the time to respond accordingly.

About Ray Morefield: Ray Morefield has been affiliated with leading corporations in the furniture, housewares, hardware and coatings industries. He has also served other industries in an advisory capacity through his company Common Goals, Inc. Questions on any management topic, can be directed to him at editor@furninfo.com. See more of his articles at www.furninfo.com.



RETAIL DELIVERY TRUCK TIPS

When planning a design for your car wrap or truck graphics you want to get your message across in a clear and concise way. People tend to want to put a ton of information on their vehicle so they get the most info out to the public. Remember, most people will just have a few seconds to a minute to read and take in your message. Don't overwhelm them with anything and everything you can think of, just the basics will do.

Who, what and where is really all that matters. Don't worry about putting email addresses, lots of text and all the product photos you can find. It just makes it look cluttered and hard to read. Look around when you are out driving, what signs catch your attention? Lifestyle images (photos of people using your product) make a good impression and always catch people's eyes. Don't use too many different font's, again, keep it easy to read. Be sure to use a QR code on your design, as these are gaining in popularity. Too much else is overkill. Bright colors always grab attention, but avoid white for trucks since it shows road grime.

Keep your message clear and recognizable. Your company name, what you sell, city, website and phone number along with a couple images is plenty. Name recognition is vital for your marketing efforts. The more your potential customers see your name, the more likely they are to think of you when looking for the products or services you sell, so let your vehicle graphics shout your name out there in a clear and professional way.

When designing truck graphics, who, what and where matters. Lifestyle images attract attention.

About The Author: The "Furniture Store Graphics Tips" series is written by Jordan White, Marketing Manager for TruckSkin, LLC. See all of Jordan's tips and her contact information at www.furninfo.com/series/TruckSkinTips.

RISKY BUSINESS

Part 3: Insuring your store and stock.

by Stephen J. Wisocky

To most furniture dealers, buying insurance is a necessary evil and expense, something that may never be needed or used. It ranks up there with paying taxes. The process of finding the best value by soliciting quotes from the insurance world is an arduous task with agents telling you what you should carry and why their policy is better than the competition. As it is most important to keep your sanity, a basic understanding of insurance terms and definitions that relate to essential property and casualty coverage for your business is helpful.

This installment will look at insuring your real property and follow up in coming issues with information on how to cover your liability exposures including trucks and employees, plus Workers' Compensation.

Protecting your assets, including your store, showroom, warehouse and the stock/inventory contents contained therein via property insurance, better known as fire insurance is prudent and necessary. When you purchase such an insurance policy, the following abridged but key definitions are important to understand:

Building refers to the building or struc-

ture named in the policy, including completed additions, and permanently installed machinery and equipment.

Business Personal Property or Contents that's located in or on the building named in the policy or in the open (or in a vehicle) within 100 feet of the described premises, consists of the following items:

- *Furniture and fixtures.*
- *Machinery and equipment.*
- *Stock.*
- *All other personal property owned by you and used in your business.*
- *Labor, materials or services furnished or arranged by you on personal property of others.*
- *Your use interest as tenant in improvements and betterments. Improvements and betterments are fixtures, alterations, installations or additions: (a) Made a part of the building or structure you occupy but do not own; and (b) You acquired or made at your expense but cannot legally remove.*

Property Not Covered: Accounts, bills currency, food stamps, money, lottery tickets held for sale; Animals; automo-

biles; bridges, roadways, walks, patios; The cost of excavations, grading, backfilling or filling; foundations of buildings; land; personal property while airborne or waterborne; bulkheads, pilings, piers, wharves or docks; underground pipes, flues or drains; electronic data; vehicles or self-propelled machines

Cause of Loss: What losses are covered with regard to your building and/or its contents? Most property insurance policies are written on a Special Form perils coverage, meaning the insurance carrier will pay for direct physical loss or damage to the property caused by any peril except

"Ask your agent to provide you a no-cost Building Insurance Valuation done by the insurance industry experts Marshall-Swift-Boeckh."

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RISKY BUSINESS

the following:

- Ordinance or law.
- Earthquake which includes landslides and mine subsidence (caving in or sinking).
- Government actions.
- Nuclear hazards.
- Utility services.
- War.
- Water (flood, surface water, mudslide or sewer drain backup).
- Fungus, wet rot, dry rot and bacteria including mold.
- Wear and tear, gradual deterioration.
- Inherent vice.
- Inventory shortage.
- Dishonest acts.

Deductible is the amount of your money that will be subtracted from the

claim payment.

Property Valuation options are as follows:

Replacement Cost is the amount of money needed to replace a building or its contents with like kind and quality in today's dollars. It is intended to put you back exactly in the same position prior to the insurable loss.

Actual Cash Value is simply Replacement Cost minus/less applicable depreciation.

Functional Replacement Cost is used when actual replacement is not feasible or not desired. This amount of insurance is based on the amount needed to buy or rebuild property that will serve the same purpose as the original property but will not have like kind and quality.

Selling Price is for stock that has been sold but not yet delivered. This clause provides stock valuation at your retail price.

Coinurance is the insurance-to-value requirement found in Fire Insurance policies. In return for a reduced premium rate from the carrier, you agree to insure your property, either Building or Contents, to a specified percentage (80, 90, or 100 chosen by you) of the Replacement Cost or Actual Cash Value of the property. If you comply by insuring properly, all is well. However if you underinsure the property you will suffer a penalty at the time of insurable loss. The following are examples using the same formula that carriers use to determine if a Coinsurance penalty would apply:

Your building is 20,000 Square Feet, using \$100 per foot to replace, the Replacement Cost is \$2,000,000

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Agio is the registered trademark of Agio International Company, Ltd.*Source: Independent study produced by Mann, Armistead & Epperson, LTD. February 22, 2012.

**"If you are a tenant,
be sure to include with the value of your Stock the value of Improvements & Betterments you made to the space in determining the insurable contents limit."**

and you have chosen 80% Coinsurance. So the amount of insurance you should carry is a minimum limit of \$1,600,000. If you carry \$1,700,000 coverage, no penalty applies and you would be paid 100% of your claim. However, if you carry \$1,200,000 you would be paid only 75% of your claim ($1,200,000 \div 1,600,000 = 75\%$), thus suffering a 25% penalty.

HELPFUL HINTS

1. Insurance is NOT a maintenance contract.
2. Buildings are permanent and immovable, whereas Contents is anything that isn't nailed down, dug into or built onto the land.
3. When determining the limit of insurance to buy on your
4. If you are a tenant, be sure to include with the value of your Stock and the value of any Improvements & Betterments (track lighting, paint, wallpaper, carpet etc.) you made to the space in determining the total insurable contents limit you should carry.
5. Replacement Cost is the most commonly used Valuation clause.
6. Functional Replacement Cost addresses the obsolescence

Building, do not get hung up on Real Estate value vs. Insurance value as insurance does not include Land value. Also, ask your agent to provide you with a no-cost Building Insurance Valuation done by the insurance industry experts at Marshall-Swift-Boeckh.

problem of old out-of-date Buildings.

7. In choosing a Coinsurance percentage to use, the 80% gives some negotiating wiggle room at the time of loss.

8. The higher the Deductible, the greater the premium savings. A \$1,000 deductible seems to be the best buy.

DISCLAIMER: The information contained in this article is for general informational purposes only as you should always refer to your insurance policy for specific language relative to coverage, limits, conditions etc.

About Stephen J. Wisocky: Stephen J. Wisocky, Home Furnishings Insurance Group President, has over 30 years of experience as a property and casualty insurance broker. He began with the home furnishings industry in 1986.

In January 2004 Stephen created HFIG whose mission is exceptional service to the home furnishings industry with the most competitive and comprehensive insurance products.

For many years Stephen has been the trusted insurance advisor for the International Home Furnishings Representatives Association (IHFRA), Interior Design Society (IDS) and Tri-State Home Furnishings Association (TSHFA). In 2011 he was named a Dean of IHFRA, and earlier received from TSHFA their President's Award. Both honors were given in recognition of his accomplishments and dedication to the home furnishings industry.

Questions about this article or any insurance related topic or issue can be directed to Steve at 610-366-0105 or email swisocky@hfig.net.

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BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Jaipur

The Riad collection is Moroccan and tribal influenced, made of 100% wool, spun with an abrash effect, creating a sophisticated hand knotted look.

Contact information on index page 100.



Hidden Vision TV

Mounted on the wall above the headboard this extended flip-out mount extends a TV to the perfect angle and distance for comfortable viewing. Made from heavy gauge steel, these mounts can easily hold the weight of any 15" to 32" flat screen TV. When finished watching, the mount retreats to the wall where it is completely hidden behind a framed picture or piece of artwork. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 100.

Furniture Traditions

The American Heritage Panel Bed is crafted with solid wood raised panels. While this method is more expensive, panels are much stronger and last longer. Available in Oak and Alder hardwoods. Shown in Muscovado custom dark oak finish. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 100.



Country View Woodworking

The Newport Shaker dining room features inset doors & drawers, English dovetail drawer boxes, tapered and turned table legs, self-storing leaves and choice of hardwood or upholstered seats. The three-door china includes a highly functional full length serving board extension. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 100.



Agio

The Willowbrook Fire Pit Chat Group features elegant deep seating c-spring chairs surrounding a portable gas fire pit.

Contact information on index page 100.



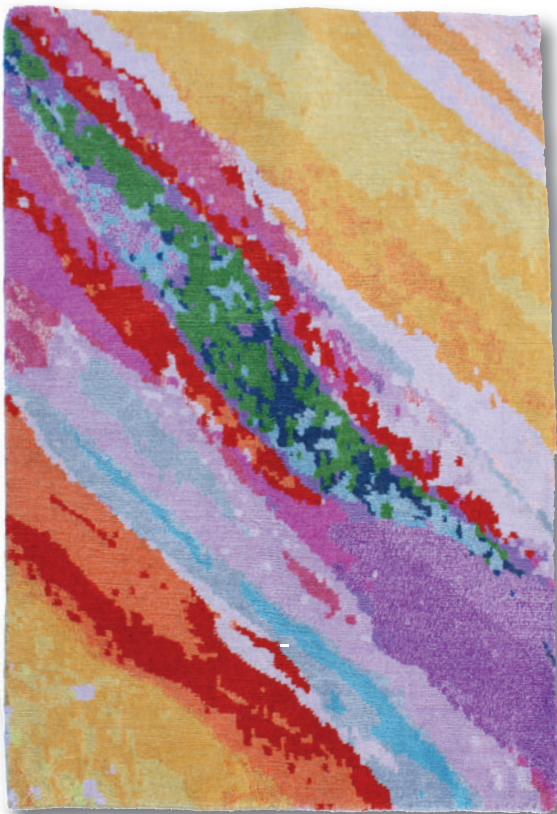
Ashley

Featuring a traditional dark cherry stain finish over the elaborately ornate details, the "Ledelle" bedroom collection is crafted from rich Ash swirl and Birch veneers along with Asian hardwoods and natural marble parquetry tops.

Contact information on index page 100.



BEST SELLING DESIGNS



M&M Design

This colorful modern rug is hand-knotted and made in Nepal of 100% wool. The designs are inspired by the paper paintings of NY artist Rai Alexandra.

Contact information on index page 100.

Ron Corl Design

The Ariel Fields Chest is from the Modern Walnut & Cherry bedroom collection. This collection includes bed, nightstand, dresser, chest and mirror. Size of pieces can be customized. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 100.



Stein World

This three-step mirrored accent cabinet has a cosmopolitan feel and offers storage with style. It's a statement piece that won't disappoint.

Contact information on index page 100.



Omnia

The Dominic sectional is contemporary in style. It is available in many configurations, over 100 leather choices and a variety of fabrics. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 100.



Copeland

With Unica Tables, name the size in one inch increments from as small as 16" by 18" up to 48" by 84". Available in solid American Black Walnut or Cherry hardwood in seven total finishes. Made in America

Contact information on index page 100.



West Bros.

The Phase Desk, is made of solid walnut with a pull-out surface in the center section to tuck a laptop away, a pencil drawer, a deeper drawer below it and a file drawer on the right side. This desk has the features of a large executive desk at residential scale. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 100.



Pastel Furniture

The Charlize rectangular dining table features 70" x 37" glass top, with stainless steel and walnut veneer wood frame. Shown with matching chairs.

Contact information on index page 100.



BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Rizzy Home

From the Volare collection this hand tufted rug is made of 100% wool in India. Sizes available are 2'x3', 3'x5', 5'x 8, 9'x12', 2'6"x8', 8' round, custom. Suggested retail for 5'x8' \$429.00.

Contact information on index page 100.

Lamb

This Wedge Desk is made of rustic Hickory with natural stain. Features include keyboard pullout, file drawer, full extension glides and two storage drawers. CPU compartment measures 19"D x 11"W x 24"H. Desk measures 60"W x 34"D. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 100.



Penwood

The Comfortwood 2.0 Wallbed is shown here in Brown Maple with Rich Tobacco finish. Also available in Oak and Cherry. A variety of side units and styles are available. The desk table stays level all the way to the floor. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 100.



Simply Amish

The Justine collection is made of solid Cherry and is shown here in Gold Dust finish. The group combines Amish quality with Scandinavian style for a look that's simple, yet refined. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 100.





Wallbeds

Recessed in the face of this queen wallbed is a large 40" x 48" table which can be used for dining, hobby or office. Available in a variety of finishes with many side pier cabinets.

Contact information on index page 100.



Twin Star

The Tresanti Amherst Desk has a flip-open locking desktop and features a magnetic dry-erase board for notes. Shown in midnight cherry finish with brushed nickel hardware. 36"W x 23.75"D x 35"H, srp \$199.

Contact information on index page 100.



Loloi Rugs

Rio is hand-woven in India of 100% New Zealand wool. This collection features nuanced variations in color throughout the rug for added beauty. Rugs are reversible and crafted to withstand plenty of foot traffic. Available in 3'6"x5'6", 5'x7'6", 7'6"x9'6", 9'3"x13'.

Contact information on index page 100.

Jasper Cabinet

Contemporary bedroom group is made of solid maple and cherry with self-closing drawers and built-in night lite in night stands.

Contact information on index page 100.



BEST SELLING DESIGNS



Surya

Liona is made of 100% wool, hand woven in India. This ultra --plush area rug is available in 2'x3', 5'x8', and 8'x11'.

Contact information on index page 100.



Borkholder

From the Livingston collection, this chest on chest measures 39"W x 20 1/4"D x 63"H. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 100.



Greenington

This Contemporary dining group is crafted in 100% solid Moso bamboo combining beautiful design and rich colors with a winning green sustainability story.

Contact information on index page 100.



Home Trends & Design

The London Loft 80" dark-walnut dining table combines inches thick Acacia with sleek forged-iron support to create a contemporary classic look. Shown with the London Loft 72" bench and Lara Banquette chair featuring tufted linen back and hardwood frame.

Contact information on index page 100.

Horizon Home

From the Bombay Collection, a new 82" entertainment piece. The 36" height allows for eye level viewing, and gives a multi-purpose to the console, \$799.00 retail. Also available in a new 75" configuration with double shutter doors, \$599.00 retail. Both are hand painted and highly distressed.

Contact information on index page 100.



Klaussner

Waldo is contemporary in style with track arms extending downward in a curve that continues to the straight front border. Bordered seat cushions rest beneath the attached back cushions that display tufted grid-like patterns with sewing accents. The sofa is supported by the tapered wood legs.

Contact information on index page 100.



Capel

Arden is hand-tufted of 100% wool, hand sheared and double washed to create a luxurious softness and sheen. Available in Menthol, Charcoal or Rust colorways. A 5' x 8' rug retails for \$561.

Contact information on index page 100.



Zimmerman Chair

This one-of-a-kind dining table top is cut by band mill into a 2" thick slab, kiln or air dried, and machined into this exquisite top. Tops are compatible with either contemporary or lodge-designed table bases. Made in America.

Contact information on index page 100.



OH-NATURAL!

Part 11: Are we in the middle of a bedding revolution, an evolution, or is it a non-starter for your operation?

by Russell Bienenstock

Where do you stand on organic? Your answer will likely be determined by whether your status is a major bedding retailer, an independent, or a niche player.

As a percentage of the bedding market, the organic segment is small, and depending on who you speak to in our industry, it is either growing fast, has the potential to grow fast, or has plateaued. Among those retailers and manufacturers who have a passion for selling the benefits of bedding that is natural, organic and healthy, there is both agreement and differences on a number of the issues that will be discussed in this and a subsequent article.

It's easy when organizing an article about organic mattresses to focus on technical definitions, terminology, and the various certifications. These are important, but can easily be found online by checking some of the websites that will be listed in the next install-

ment of Furniture World Magazine's "Selling Better Bedding and Mattress Sales" series.

Instead, this article will take a look at where the category is today, and where it may be headed. We will also discuss important core issues and identify strategies Furniture World readers might use to profit from an increased emphasis on this industry segment.

WHO CARES ABOUT ORGANIC?

In the article in our "Better Bedding & Mattress Sales" series two years ago (www.furninfo.com/series/bedding), major retailers and manufacturers named the reasons why customers start to look for a new mattress. Most people shop, they said, because there has been a marriage, divorce, birth, children leaving for school or returning to the nest. Sagging beds, edge supports, bad backs, shoulder pain, poor quality sleep and the like are additional pur-

chase motivators. Customers are trying to fix something, they said. Bedding is not normally a want, it's a need, and people usually don't go out and replace mattresses unless they have to.

Chemical sensitivities and concerns about the materials used in mattresses were not mentioned.

NATURAL/ ORGANIC/ GREEN WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

How big is the natural, organic, green market? How much consumer awareness is there regarding the category and how high is the level of consumer and industry interest? Furniture World asked a number of bedding experts to offer opinions based on their research and experience. As with any research, the answers received depend on the questions asked. For example, asking bedding customers if the quality and safety of the materials in their mattress is important, will yield a much

"Retailers ignore their organic segment
either because they don't identify with it personally,
or feel consumers won't spend the money for the product,
or think that if they have an organic product on
their floor it will diminish in some way their
other products. All three are incorrect."

-Walt Bader, OMI





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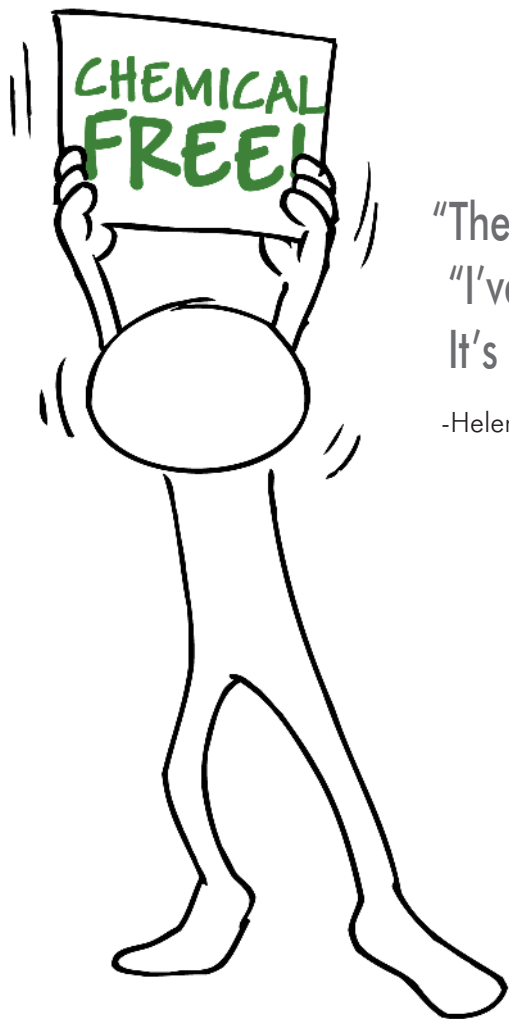
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"There's a lot of misuse of the words natural and organic. 'I've even seen mattresses marketed as 'chemical-free.' It's important to be science-based and credible."

-Helen Sullivan, CertiPUR-US®

Bader goes on to explain that the 70 percent figure is based on research published in the last annual report of the Organic Trade Association (www.ota.com) which reported that over seventy percent of American households are buying organic. "Organic," he explained, "includes food, beverages, personal care, cleaning products, textiles, and mattresses. These organic consumers meet the acid test for consumer behavior. They buy. And so, over seventy percent of American households buy something organic. This organic segment has a committed, demonstrated purchasing motivation for organic products because they believe they are healthier.

"greener" sounding response than asking them to list the most important things they look for when shopping for a new mattress.

We asked Walt Bader, President of OMI, the manufacturer of organic mattresses produced in a large-scale 100 percent organic factory and author of two books on the subject, to estimate the percentage of consumers who come into stores looking for organic mattresses. He replied, "If a retailer waits for a person to come in and say, 'I'm looking for an organic mattress.' Or, 'I'm looking for a certified organic mattress,' it's ten percent or less. That's because 90 percent of the public, or more, doesn't even realize that organic mattresses exist. The question really should be rephrased to ask, 'What percentage of customers would be interested in buying an organic mattress if they knew one existed?' So, if you asked what percentage of customers would be interested in buying an organic mattress if they knew one existed, then the answer is seventy percent."

"I remember a college teacher (and that's a long time ago) telling a marketing class that you can spend millions of dollars to discover consumer perceptions and then billions to try and change their preferences. The organic market is growing around 20 percent a year, even through the recession, and while retailers tell me often that they realize their function is to meet the needs of their customers, they ignore their organic segment either because they don't identify with it personally, or feel consumers won't spend the money for the product, or think that if they have an organic product on their floor it will diminish in some way their other products. All three are incorrect. We don't sell our mattresses by saying we are better than mattress X, Y or Z, we merely have the product on the floor for the consumers who already have an organic preference. It actually gives retailers another handle to close a sale in addition to comfort and price. And what retailer doesn't need more motivations for a consumer to purchase

these days? Retailers are shocked when they learn we have stores that will do a million dollars a year with our line," he concludes.

Michael Magnuson, president of the consumer destination website www.GoodBed.com estimates the percentage of active bedding shoppers interested in natural and organic to be between five and 15 percent. "Our SmartMatch mattress finder," he says, "allows people to indicate whether they're looking for a mattress with organic or natural features. Based on the use of this tool by many thousands of shoppers, we've found that between five and 15 percent of consumers have at least some interest in a mattress with organic or natural characteristics."

The Specialty Sleep Association's (SSA) President Dale Read agrees that many customers say they factor "green" into their mattress buying decisions. "I've seen several research reports," he recalls, "one that we did with underwriting by Simmons, and another study that confirmed that 30 percent of consumers said they thought green was a factor.

"If one in three buyers are interested, that's a huge opportunity, and our research showed that there are incremental sales and real money to be made by addressing health and safety issues. Fifteen percent of women who had purchased a mattress said that they would pay more for an environmentally friendly mattress if they could substantiate, through some kind of labeling or certification, that the claims that were made were real. They would pay substantially more, as much as \$200 dollars more, if they could prove they were putting a healthier and safer product in their home. Now that's huge

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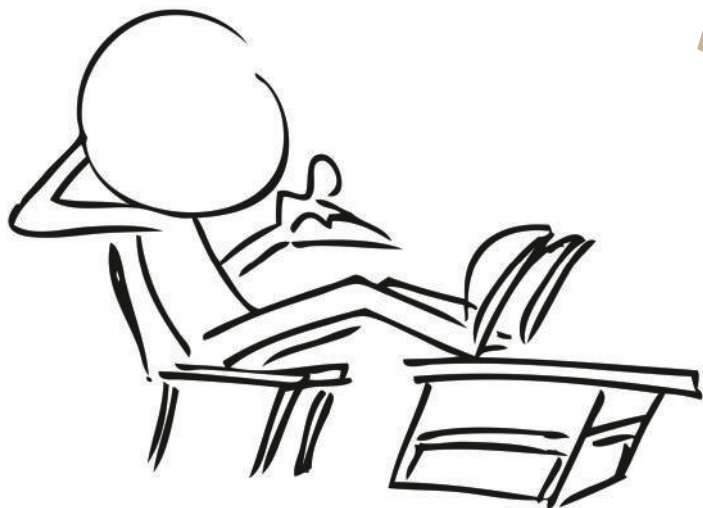
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"Before this interview

I took your questions, created my own little questionnaire, and sent it out to a hundred Sit 'n Sleep sales people to get their feedback. More than half of them responded with one line responses, such as, 'No need' or 'No one asks'." -Nelson Bercier, Sit 'n Sleep

in the mattress industry."

Read also mentioned that he was surprised when SSA research into the market for "green" products revealed that only ten percent of consumers interviewed said they care about product lifecycle issues. "So only about ten percent of all of those people cared about product lifestyle issues when you define green in terms of the future and welfare of the earth," he says. "But when they think about green as, I'm putting bad stuff in my house. I'm concerned about my kids and my home. Could it be off-gassing? Could my mattress be poisoning me? Could I get allergies from it? Are there chemicals in it that are dangerous? When you put it in those terms, that's where 79 percent of 637 consumers interviewed said they would choose a mattress that didn't have those health and safety issues."

GoodBed.com's Magnuson concurs that health and safety are the larger issue for consumers. "While there are certainly all kinds of people that are concerned with health and/or sustainability," he notes, "one of the groups we hear from most frequently on this topic is actually mothers that are buying mattresses for their kids. Most often, these are affluent, well-educated parents that are concerned first and foremost about how the mattress they choose may affect the health of their child. While sustainability considerations may be a factor as well, we see health and safety considerations as the key driving force for this group of consumers."

"I don't think you're going to find ladies with pitchforks and burning torches storming retail stores saying, 'We want organic beds,'" adds Dale Read. "What I think you're going to find is that as this awareness increases they will see organic as a buzzword that really means healthier, safer, cleaner living that's good for their kids, good for their families and good for their homes."

"I believe that the Sustainability Furnishings Council did some research," he continues, "and what they found out is the more that people are educated and informed about the opportunity to purchase green products, the more likely they are to do it. They need to know that these products are available. I believe they're going to find that as the economy recovers from survival mode, these women are going to demand more. It's going to be a women's revolution. Growth is going to come from concerned mothers, from consumers growing from the bottom up."

Susan Inglis, Executive Director, Sustainable Furnishings Council confirms. "We have, indeed, done research that shows that 49 percent of consumers are interested in choosing eco-friendly products, but they do not know what the options are. So, it is up to sales people to point out when a product is made in America or made of organic materials or certified no-VOC, etc." The SFC's 2012 survey of 432 women aged 30 to 60 with income of over \$50,000 who purchased at least

\$500 worth of home furnishings within a year showed growing interest among the most committed buyers. The study's authors noted that, "Purchase interest in green furnishings is holding steady. Those definitely interested remain over 30 percent and likely actual trial rates remain at 40 percent; both are very healthy numbers. Likely trial rates are significantly higher at 50 percent in both the West Coast and the Northeast. This finding is in line with assumed higher populations of sophisticated consumers there." Also found was that the percentage of consumers who "would pay nothing or only up to five percent more for green furnishings fell from a peak of 78 percent in 2010 to 67 percent" in the 2012 survey. The study suggests that this is a significant drop and an indication of some revival in consumer confidence.

MAJOR RETAILER'S VIEW

"The majority of retailers' consumer messaging," notes Gerry Morris, a bedding sales consultant and author of two books on selling mattresses, "gives customers reasons to buy such as urgency, low price, discounts, the most free services and longest financing. And that plays right into the consumer's mindset that they're seeking value. These messages make them more prone to shop, compare and chase that elusive best value. In general, retail advertising is not consistent with messages that manufacturers are putting out there, which is to paint a picture, an emotionally-based picture,

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"The food industry

has addressed this issue primarily through simple price stratification. Most grocery products now come in a range of options, with the organic options almost always being more expensive than the non-organic." - Michael Magnuson, GoodBed.com

with lifestyle images that portray the benefits of their products."

In fact, industry messaging can be thought of as both a cause and a result of how consumers view the mattress-purchase cycle. The more that low prices and financing are advertised, the more consumers focus on getting the best deal. The more consumers focus on getting the best deal, the more reason there is to advertise along those lines. It's a positive feedback loop. Major bedding advertising expenditures generally don't focus on natural or organic bedding. "The reason there's very little advertising in the organic mattress world," postulates John Muccino owner of The Organic Mattress, a specialty retailer based in Sudbury, MA, "is we'd be advertising to less than one percent of the people who buy an organic mattress. No one can really afford to advertise to one percent."

In addition to price/value advertising, Furniture World interviewed major retailers who focus much of their advertising on health-related issues unrelated to organic and natural materials.

We spoke with Nelson Bercier, President of the California-based chain Sit 'n Sleep. He explained that among

major bedding manufacturers and retailers, "The latest push now is quality of sleep, and quantity of sleep. Those are the topics we like to talk about, more so than all-natural, organic, recycled or eco-friendly mattresses. Organic doesn't attract me as a retailer because it is a niche market that doesn't offer enough return on the investment. But there are some smaller niche players that have made a go of it."

His view is shared by a number of majors we spoke to who emphasize the health benefits of a good night's sleep as well as address other sleep-related issues such as indoor dust mite allergy prevention, bedbug safety, weight loss, productivity and spine health, but do not focus on the natural or organic segment.

"That's because the retail industry has found that," continues Bercier, "major manufacturers have often skirted around the issue, putting a lot of words and labels out there that are misleading, just a hint of the truth, greenwashing. On the consumer side, there is a very small part of the retail demographic that truly is educated, knows the right questions to ask and knows when they're being told the truth

or a story. Honestly, among other consumers who ask these questions, I don't believe that most even listen to the answers. I think they have just been programmed to ask the question and then go on to the next thing. And that's why this greenwashing has been so successful because people hear what they want to hear.

"Before this interview, I took your questions, created my own little questionnaire, and sent it out to a hundred Sit 'n Sleep sales people to get their feedback. More than half of them responded with one line responses, such as, 'No need' or 'No one asks'. Others said, 'We have latex, and when someone asks we go to a latex as pretty much a natural solution.' Of course latex is a manufactured product that has a polyurethane foam core. We're not telling people it's all natural, but we do say it's as close to a natural product that we have, and most customers are fine with that.

"My point of view is that our customers are more concerned with top of bed. We sell a lot of organic sheets, pillows and all-natural encasements because that's where their skin surface touches. And those are products that are affordable and have organic claims that are far easier to prove than for a mattress. They are also more affordable."

Darlene Staub, who owns the Natural Sleep Shop, Cranberry Twp., PA, selling all organic mattresses and organic bedding, agrees. "We also have a line of nursery furniture that's non-toxic finished furniture, and then we carry another line that's GOTS certified organic nursery bedding," she says. "We've had competitors come into our store to see what we have and

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OH-NATURAL!

what we do. I think right now the attitude is that we're not really cutting into their market enough for them to care."

Says GoodBed.com's Michael Magnuson, "Selling organic products is a very tricky thing for a traditional mattress store, because only a minority of customers walk in the door with an interest in organic or natural mattresses. For the rest of the customers, the easiest way to convince them to take an interest in an organic line-up is to talk to them about the potential health and safety benefits. The challenge is: how

"A lot of what we sell here in this country is banned in the European Union. I've found that people who come from Europe want purer, healthier choices because that's what they're accustomed to."

-Darlene Staub, Natural Sleep Shop

do you do this successfully without undermining the other products on your sales floor?

"In the food industry, they have addressed this issue primarily through simple price stratification. Most grocery products now come in a range of options, with the organic options almost always being more expensive than the non-organic. To consumers, Product A is "healthy but expensive," while Product B is "inexpensive but maybe not as healthy". Consumers then self-select based on their sensitivity to price and health considerations.

"For mattresses, it doesn't break down this simply. Product A is "healthy but expensive," but what does that make Product B, which is also expensive but not organic or natural? "Expensive and maybe not as healthy" doesn't make for a great selling proposition. Meanwhile, in more cases than not, Product B is what the consumer walked in the door thinking they wanted, and thus would be much easier to sell to them. Therein lies the dilemma.

"From the retailer's standpoint," he concludes, "there are three logical ways around this. The first and most obvious is to sell organic or natural products through separate channels, so they are not competing on the same sales floor with traditional products. The second is that when they are on the same sales floor, try to stratify by price so the organic or natural products are more expensive than traditional options. The third is to increase the percentage of people that walk in the door wanting an organic or natural mattress. Practically speaking, this would take a concerted, highly focused education effort to build awareness about the benefits of these products."

SSA's Dale Read, is also onboard with the idea that there is resistance among some major bedding retailers to embrace the natural/organic segment and label their products because,

"They like the concept, but if they adopt it, they feel they are automatically admitting that 90 percent of the beds on their floors have problems, aren't healthy and aren't safe. My reply is that it is all up to them how they train their RSA's. They don't need to bring up the subject unless a customer says they are concerned about their kids, or that they've been reading about upholstery fires lately in California." He says that if the product is adequately labeled, they don't need to explain all of the contents. "They can just point to a little contents label on the bed. That's why the SSA has been promoting our BedFax contents labeling program, and also a four-level environmental program content labeling requiring that manufacturers produce evidence of bio-based percentages of materials or have certain certifications. It's an easy sale if you've got a label that says a mattress has, for example, fifteen percent bio-based content. An RSA doesn't have to be a genius to say that a mattress is made with less petroleum and that it won't off-gas, or put bad stuff into their home. That doesn't mean they automatically condemn every other SKU." More about labeling and certifications will be discussed in the next installment.

BUYING MOTIVATIONS

What are the major motivators that cause consumers to shop specifically for mattresses with natural or organic content?

Owner of the Natural Sleep Shop, Darlene Staub says, quite often the main reason people visit her store, is that they've become ill from sleeping on their synthetic foam beds.

"A lot of us, myself included," she tells Furniture World readers, "came to this conclusion by the process of elimination. We had air quality testing done in the house, and the room with the mattress had the highest level of



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"The FTC Green Guide

says that if you make a claim in the green area, eco, natural, whatever, you must substantiate it. You must tell the consumer what you mean."

-Dale Read, Specialty Sleep Association



VOC's. So I narrowed it down that way. And then by removing it, I felt better. Several of our customers started having migraines right after they started sleeping on a memory foam mattress. I think that more people are reacting to chemicals that are being put into mattresses now, and so we see a lot of shoppers that have become chemically sensitive. They seek us out to buy something that's more whole and pure. And, many of them tell us that sleeping on something that's pure and organic has made the biggest difference. They don't have all the allergic reactions, the migraines, the body aches, and everything that can be associated with toxins found in other mattresses.

"Plus, there's so much research coming out now showing the links between the levels of toxins in our environment and the increase in autism, ADHD. There are increases in Parkinson's now linked to mercury. People are just becoming a lot more aware of what's in their environment and the long-term effects.

"Some of our customers who are chemically sensitive shopped the major retailers first and told us they could hardly remain in those stores. They had difficulty tolerating the chemical smell.

We also see a lot of people that already live an organic lifestyle and just want that choice for their children or for themselves when they buy a mattress. But we also have customers who have become sick and then they adopt an organic lifestyle in everything that they do."

Staub also commented on the research her customers do before start-

ing to shop. "Perhaps three-fourths of our customers have come in after having done a lot of research on their own, through their own networking and online research.

"The major retailers do a great job with marketing, spending a huge amount of money on advertising. That's something we can't do being a small, independent business. So most of our shoppers are people who have searched the internet for organic mattresses, or who have linked to us from the website of our major mattress supplier."

When asked about the internet preparation of his customers, John Muccino at The Organic Mattress was quick to give a percentage. "100 percent, he says. "It's all online. If you're going to run a special you need to do it online." The result of online education in advance of walking into the store he says is, "We don't sell them. We just show them the different options and they lie on the ten different mattresses, find out the one they like. They sell themselves. It's totally laid back, here's the way it works. I bring them in to the store, I show them an A, B, C, D, E, F, G mattresses. I explain to them this one is nearly firm, semi-firm, single-piece, multi-piece, then I go downstairs and read my newspaper tell them to lie around and call me if they need me. I do not stand over a bed when people lie on it and I think that's gotta be an intimidating and very uncomfortable feeling to be honest with you."

CATEGORY GROWTH

Given the general interest in healthy

lifestyles, why aren't most consumers making more of a fuss about what's in their mattresses? Why isn't the market for natural and organic mattresses in the USA much larger? Before moving on to answer this question, let's review what we know about the market.

- There is general agreement among most of the people interviewed for this article that there is interest among consumers regarding products that can be described as natural or organic.
- Research has shown that bedding purchasers say they are willing to pay more for products that have components they believe to be safe and healthy for their families.
- A majority of consumers don't come into major stores looking for natural or organic bedding as their primary consideration.
- A majority of larger retailers have chosen not to emphasize the category in their advertising or on their sales floors.
- The internet is replete with well-researched as well as anecdotal information related to the materials used in bedding and the health risks. A quick search yields lists of chemicals commonly found in mattresses along with research reports and first-person anecdotes from people who report getting headaches, rashes, sinus problems breathing insufficiency, ringing in their ears, dizziness and flu-like symptoms from their new mattresses, accompanied by warnings about cancer, autoimmune and other hazards.

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OH-NATURAL!

Now, let's take a look at some of the issues that have influenced the development of this segment. These include the fact that it's a maturing marketplace, as well as greenwashing, labeling, the need for transparency, consumer behavior and certifications.

An immature US market? Retailer Darlene Staub believes that US born consumers seem to be less aware of the organic bedding options compared with Europeans who have moved into her trading area. European countries have been more aggressive in banning chemical additives and certain processes in the production of consumer durables and food items. "I think this situation is slowly going to change," she says. "We have a very large inter-

national business in our area and many of their employees shop in our store. A lot of what is sold here in this country is banned in the European Union. I've found that people who come from Europe often want purer, healthier choices because that's what they've been accustomed to in their home countries. We are going to see the major manufacturers change, but the problem is, it will be a huge change for them because producing natural mattresses and storing them next to synthetic foam mattresses ruins the purity of them.

"Our customers are becoming more educated about health as a whole. They are coming to realize that having good health is not only what they eat, although that's a huge part of it. It's

also what they are breathing, what they sleep on and wear. We are affected by the chemicals in everything around us, and this is especially true for small children and infants."

Greenwashing- An Important issue:

"Greenwashing on websites is still fairly prevalent," says SSA's Dale Read. "There is a huge, broad gap of claims, certifications, products, etc., all under the umbrella of natural eco-friendly, better-for-you products.

"It's not nearly as common as it used to be when I first got all enamored with this topic and said it should be a mission for the Specialty Sleep Association (SSA). That's because the recent down economy dealt a real blow to a whole bunch of companies who were market-

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"Ingesting fast food

can make people feel ill, a clear signal that they might not have made the best choice. When it comes to mattresses, the choice and the research is less clear to them. They may not even know that there is a choice."



ing and selling green, making all sorts of claims about soy memory foam and other ingredients. And the truth is that all polyurethane beds, whether memory foam or standard polyurethane, are made up of approximately 67% oil, or polyol of one kind or another, and 33% isocyanates. And you're never going to get rid of 33% isocyanates no matter how much of the oil is transferred from petroleum to soy or castor or palm oil or another renewable oil source."

"There's a lot of misuse of the words natural and organic," Helen Sullivan, told Furniture World. She's the Communications Counsel for CertiPUR-US®, a not-for-profit organization that tests and certifies flexible polyurethane foams to ensure they meet specific criteria for indoor emissions, content, and physical performance. "I've even seen mattresses marketed as 'chemical-free.' It's important to be science-based and credible and we are very careful about that. Those who participate in the CertiPUR-US program must sign an agreement to adhere to our terms of use, which include specifics about claims that can and cannot be made."

The Natural Sleep Shop's Darlene Staub agrees. "I do think there is a lot of greenwashing going on in the market lately. Retailers slap the word organic or eco-something on a mattress and people think they're getting a pure product. We have a "big box" chain around here that sells an infant mattress. They list it as an organic infant crib mattress, but if you read the fine print, you find out that it is made of polyurethane foam with a vinyl coating, and a very thin layer of certified organ-

ic cotton over top. My view is that it is pointless to put organic cotton on top of all those toxin-filled materials. But unfortunately, when customers are surfing their website, the biggest bolded phrase is, of course, 'organic crib mattress'. Unknowing young parents are ordering these products and believe what they've purchased is something pure and safe for their child. So, I think there needs to be a lot more honesty and integrity in the market. Consumers

need to be made aware of the third-party certifications that can assure their purchase is as pure and organic as they expected. In our store, we share the many independent certifications that Savvy Rest and our other products have earned from the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), Greenguard, OTCO and many other independent companies to assure what they are purchasing is a high quality and organic product."



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"I hear customers on the phone fighting with some retailer, somewhere else in the country, trying to return a mattress that doesn't live up to expectations. It's an online world." -John Muccino, *The Organic Mattress*

It is "buyer beware" for consumers who believe greenwashing claims. "We go in to people's houses quite frequently," John Muccino recalls, "and see mattresses that people bought online before they shopped with us. I hear them on the phone fighting with some retailer, somewhere else in the country, trying to return a mattress that doesn't live up to expectations. It's an online world. People want to sit at home and buy things. A mattress, in my opinion, is like a diamond ring, how could you ever buy it online? But people do."

"If the government ever decides to step up enforcement, it's going to be a big wake-up day," adds Dale Read.

"You still see people making claims that a product is renewable, or say what it's made out of without any percentages listed and without certifications posted or other proof. The FTC green guide says that if you make a claim in the green area, eco, natural, whatever, you must substantiate it. You must tell the consumer what you mean. Essentially the FTC is saying that manufacturers and retailers must tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and not leave anything out. The FTC came down very hard, on a lot of retailers in the bamboo cellulose-based rayon textile area."

"You're going to see a flurry of F.T.C. actions in the next 18 months, warns OMI's Walt Bader."

Whether made through willful deception or inadvertently through a lack of due diligence, unsubstantiated, incomplete and deceptive claims have had an effect on the industry.

"No doubt there is a lot of confusion

amongst consumers when it comes to mattresses in general," observes GoodBed.com's Michael Magnuson. "But when you then couple this with the amount of confusion that exists with regards to organic products, and the amount of greenwashing that goes on amongst manufacturers and retailers, the confusion and frustration reaches epic proportions. I've even heard some of the most green-minded consumers throw up their arms when it comes to this category, because there is so much conflicting information out there."

Consumer Behavior. The Fast Food

Effect: People say they are interested in eating healthy, but most don't want to or can't afford to pay double for their organic broccoli. And, when push comes to shove, they may decide that a Big Mac is a tastier choice than the organic broccoli anyway. In the food world, bacon, donuts, fast food and 64 ounce sodas rule! This, in spite of clear, widely accepted research that shows established links between food choices and eventual health risks such as heart disease, diabetes and obesity. Sometimes a choice made today gives more credence to immediate concerns over possible long-term effects.

Is the organic bedding choice much different? Certainly it's less clear in minds of consumers. Like organic food, fewer organic mattresses are available at lower price points. The Organic Mattress' John Muccino says he has seen price as a big factor in recent years. "I'm going to say," he tells us, "it's because consumers can go out and buy a mattress for \$599. I thought if we could deal with the masses instead of the classes I would be all set.

But I'm convinced that most organic mattress stores are going to end up being boutique type stores dealing with higher end financial people earning six figures or more."

And, just as it's not possible to make Cheetos that are natural and healthy and taste exactly like Cheetos, it's not possible to get that memory foam feel without using memory foam.

Finally, people may feel ill after choosing to ingest fast foods, a signal that it might not have been the best choice, but when it comes to mattresses, the choice, and the research is less clear to them. In fact, they may not even know that there is a choice. A quality new mattress feels great and has advantages whether it comes from one side of the natural organic divide or the other.

CONCLUSION

So what's a smart furniture retailer to do? As we mentioned at the start of this article, it probably depends on whether you are a major bedding retailer, an independent, or a niche player. Just as we've seen recent movement in the natural food market with aggressive moves by chains like Whole Foods, there may be a similar opportunity in our industry; sales and profit potential which will be the topic of the next installment in this series.

NEXT ISSUE

In the next issue Furniture World will look at organic certifications and product labeling. We will also investigate a number of ideas retailers can use to grow the category, including sales techniques and marketing approaches.

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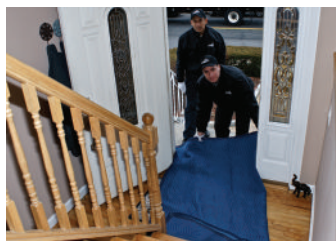
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REPAIR SOLUTIONS

Quick and easy repair for matte finishes solutions -- that aren't.

Peter Schlosser

Sometimes a quick and easy solution turns out to be a problem in the end. Take, for example, matte finish furniture. Easily finished, it requires very little skill to create the topcoat: Shoot it, heat it, put it in a box. That's the simplified version, of course, but consider what it takes to create a high sheen, at least in my shop:

- *After the color has been completed (staining, toning, glazing, shading, sealing) I apply three coats of a high-solids gloss lacquer.*
- *Once the lacquer cures, I wet sand it with 1000-grit paper and paraffin oil to even the finish.*
- *Three additional coats of high-sheen lacquer are applied.*
- *I wet sand the final coat with 1000-grit paper again, hand-sanding with a block to make sure there are no unlevel places.*
- *The finish is machine-compounded with a foam pad and a high-speed buffer, then cleaned with naphtha.*
- *The final finish is buffed with a sheep's wool pad on a high-speed buffer, and wiped to remove dust.*

Whew! This is how most fine furniture was finished (albeit more efficiently and quickly in a factory) before the "Chinese revolution." However, what was a boom to manufacturers

has been an absolute nightmare for retailers.

Now, I've heard plenty of repair technicians bemoan gloss finishes, overwhelmingly because of the fact that they don't know how to repair them. Understandable, matte finishes began in earnest in the early 1990s, as I recall, so many techs were trained to repair nothing but. The problem is, I've consulted plenty of retailers in my career, and these techs don't really understand how to repair matte finishes, either!

A few questions for a tech to answer:

Question #1: Can you use steel wool to rub out a scratched matte finish?

Answer: No. Matte finishes are not rubbed. You can rub them out to eliminate their depth, per se, but you must relacquer the top to eliminate the

wool scratches.

Question #2: Can you buff out a scratch in a matte finish, even a light one?

Answer: No. Matte finishes are not buffed. You must relacquer.

Question #3: Can you spot touch-up a matte finish using aerosol lacquers?

Answer: Rarely. Most aerosols leave a halo when applied, revealing the repaired area.

Question #4: Can you relacquer with aerosol cans?

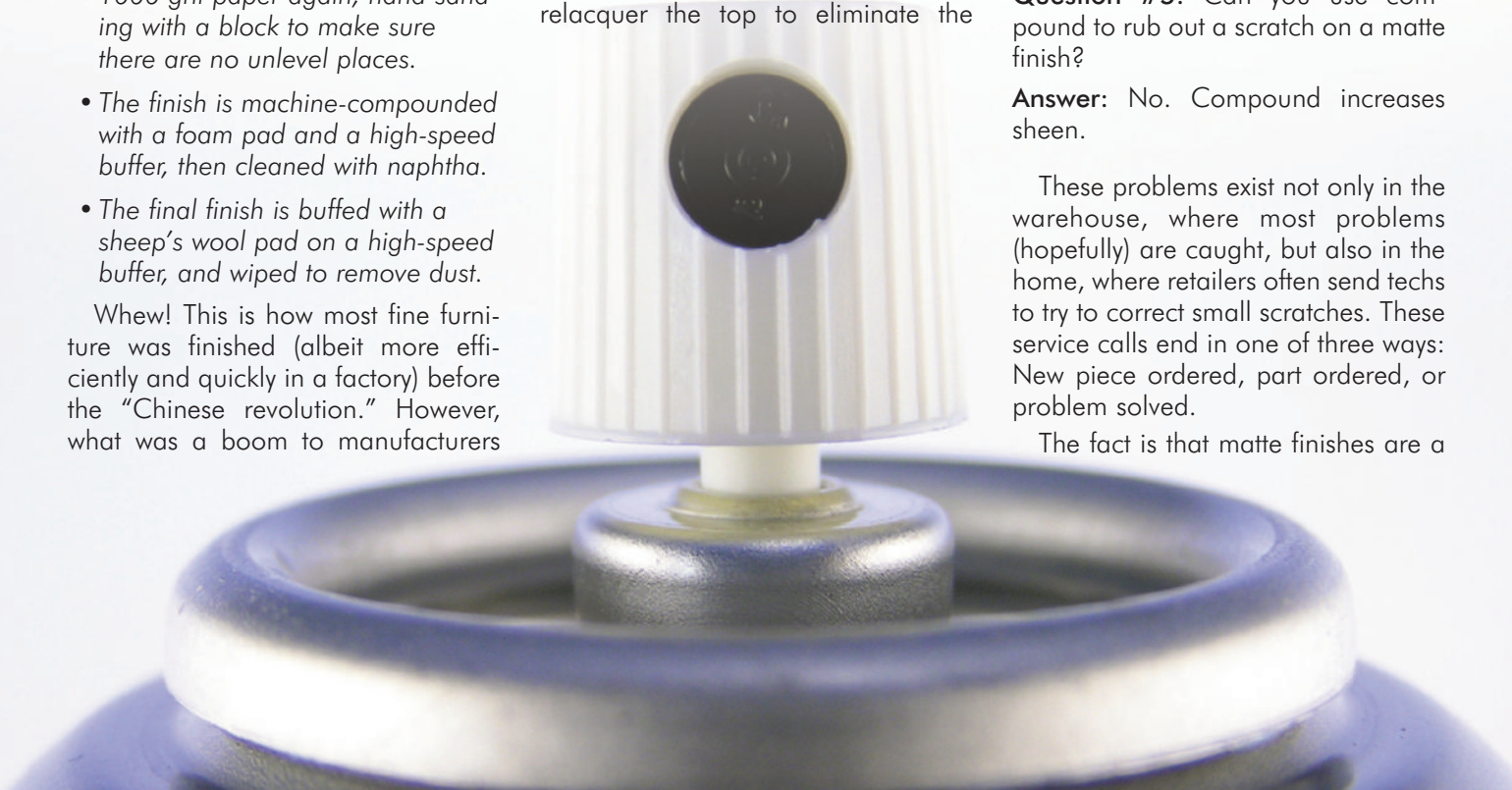
Answer: Typically, not to the same quality. Place two new tables next to each other, and relacquer one with aerosols. Unless they are 100% identical, the repair is not perfect. Period.

Question #5: Can you use compound to rub out a scratch on a matte finish?

Answer: No. Compound increases sheen.

These problems exist not only in the warehouse, where most problems (hopefully) are caught, but also in the home, where retailers often send techs to try to correct small scratches. These service calls end in one of three ways: New piece ordered, part ordered, or problem solved.

The fact is that matte finishes are a



problem for our industry. While they are quick to apply, they are difficult to repair and often disappoint the customer. The most glaring example of this assertion is the conundrum a retailer faces when presented with a scratched dining table. I have seen case after case where the customer takes final delivery of a dining table in perfect condition, only to call back with a service request when the finish becomes scratched, usually by something benign like a placemat or dish. Really? Not all manufacturers use conversion varnish or UV, which is harder but not impervious to damage.

To make matters worse, the only way to completely correct these finishes back to factory-new condition is to relacquer them using a cup gun or pressure pot, in a spray booth, that which woefully few retailers have invested... like having a car dealership without a garage.

The one-two punch to the retailer without a booth is...

- Lots of distressed or clearance inventory.
- Lots of dissatisfied customers having to wait for replacement stock or parts.
- Lots of service calls.
- Amateur-looking repair attempts by techs who, with a booth, could be making perfect repairs.

I've seen retailers fight this issue tooth and nail but the fact remains, if you want to push matte finish furniture (and most retailers do) then you must be able to completely relacquer using a cup gun or pressure pot. The alternative is to sell higher-end furnishings with higher sheens, which can be repaired with steel wool, buffing, wet sanding and compound, and are far

"Matte Finishes

are a problem for our industry. While they are quick to apply, they are difficult to repair and often disappoint the customer."

easier to repair than their matte finish cousins.

If you insist on using aerosols for relacquering, try to keep their use at a minimum, and choose a specific set of

materials that are designed to make invisible repairs with little effort. Among them:

- Blush eliminator... Essentially a can of lacquer without the solids, this



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formulation softens the original finish, allows it to level, then evaporates without significantly changing the sheen, if at all. It is ideal for "angel kiss" scratches or very light packing marks.

- Very high-grit (1000-grit) sandpaper... Use a block and some oil or water to sand out very fine scratches that won't disappear with blush eliminator. You will still have to relacquer.

"Question #3: Can you spot touch-up a matte finish using aerosol lacquers?"

- Low solids lacquer with excellent atomization... I use only one: Touch-Up Solutions' Premium Blend Low Solids Lacquer (0314 series). If you have to make a burn-in, I would suggest Touch-Up Solutions' Pre-Catalyzed lacquers with good flow-out (0328 series).

It is absolutely critical to note that very few of us can accurately measure sheen reflectivity without a meter. Lacquer is sold according to, among other criteria, its sheen, or reflectivity—how much light it reflects. The higher the number, the higher the reflectivity. Typically the scale runs from a five-sheen (dead flat) to a ninety-sheen (gloss). But this factor can be deceiving when choosing a topcoat for the piece you are repairing. The vast majority of matte finish furniture has a sheen ranging from twenty to thirty-five. Remember that

adding lacquer will change the sheen of the piece because you are covering up the original finish!

If you are at all concerned about your clearance issues or have a backlog of damaged stock because your tech staff is ill-trained to correct these problems, consider contacting your finish supplier for help, or use a furniture repair consultant who can come on-site and train your staff one-on-one.

Peter Schlosser is an independent furniture repair consultant who lives in Morganton, North Carolina. Questions about any aspect of furniture repair in retail settings can be directed to him care of editor@furninfo.com or by calling 828-408-3162. He has seventeen years' experience in the industry in both retail and manufacturing environments.

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CONNECT!

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Rene' Johnston-Gingrich

One of our major objectives at retail is to connect with customers. What creates connection? Chemistry? Commonalities? Other alliterative factors? When it's there we know it, but can we develop it? Connection doesn't always happen easily. Think of the people in your life now that you were not so sure about the first time you met them. The truth is that the connection sales professionals make with customers is only one part (albeit a very important part) of the equation.

Store owners and managers ask a lot from sales people and one of their primary jobs is to be sure to set them up for success. They are tasked with creating a store space that is inviting and full of quality merchandise sales

associates will be proud to sell. They must also make strategic moves in marketing and promotion to bring in the right customers who identify with the store's brand identity and merchandise.

Customer Connection is multifaceted. Let's explore connecting on all of these three levels, the store image, marketing message, and the personal connection brought about by our sales team's charm and expertise.

THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS IMAGE IS EVERYTHING

If sales people are to have a chance at consistently connecting with their customers, the store environment has to be appropriate. Store attributes that

affect connection include the store's visual appearance (first impression) inside and out. What does your facility say about your business? Is it clean? Is it well kept? Is it intimidating or welcoming? What do you want your customers to feel and experience when they drive up and then walk in the door?

The experience your customer has inside your store is multi-sensory. We tend to focus on the visual but we also need to remember that scents encountered in the space and sounds that customers hear also play an important role in their perception of your business. Scent is the sense most closely connected to emotion. It is important that the space be free of any offensive odors (chemicals, overpowering per-

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"Salespeople should not have to unscramble convoluted marketing messages on the store's behalf."

fumes, etc.). A little research can help you to decide how to properly incorporate scent into your space. Likewise, choose background music or background sounds that are appropriate and work to further the image you are trying to put forward.

The interior of the showroom (heavy emphasis on the merchandise mix and visual display) should also reflect your brand messaging. Envision your ideal customer. Then envision the type of space they would feel comfortable in and enjoy spending their time. Work to make the two compatible.

A cohesive exterior and interior design is an important part of your messaging that powerfully reinforces your image and brand message throughout your facility. Your building both inside and out should look like someone who cares, lives (works) there and that they are living in the current century. Periodic updates are a must in a fashion-oriented industry.

Simply put, when a customer is pulling up to or looking around your space, they should be able to sense, without question, exactly what it is

your store has to offer and what it stands for.

Marketing Message: Clarity allows you to choose ideal customers instead of chasing not so ideal customers.

Marketing and promotion should be a perfect reflection of your store's goals and values. To succeed, your approach needs to be current and effective. Again, designed to connect with customers.

Recently quoted on the website entrepreneur.com, David Ryan Polgar, an attorney, professor and creative consultant stated "Lasting relationships result from a matching-up of values." In short, your company values equal value and your marketing message should reflect that. You'll also want to be very clear about your ideal customers.

Ideal Customers: Who are your ideal customers and how do you best reach them? In crafting your marketing strategy, put effort into attracting the right customer. Be sure you are sending clear messages so customers walk in

with clear expectations. Yes, it is the sales person's job to help expand shoppers' understanding of what your store has to offer, but they should not have to unscramble convoluted marketing messages on the store's behalf.

When you are clear about your marketing message and base it on your company values, your sales force and customers will connect easily. For example, if you feature mostly high-end furnishings you will want your marketing message to reflect that. This clarity in messaging will help you to avoid chasing not so ideal clients. It will also help your sales associates to prequalify buying prospects and speak to them in a language that facilitates sales. The marketing philosophies of Lisa Manyon as seen in "Inc. Magazine" state that marketing is all about relationships, by acknowledging the challenge of your customer, offering a solution, and extending a friendly invitation to do business with you, your sales team will build relationships and make sales. This is precisely why Manyon says "The revenue is in the relationship."

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CONNECT!

SALES TEAM'S ROLE

Now for the all-important connection between sales professional and customer. A true sales professional carries the expectation that he or she will work to connect with every customer. There are many strategies and techniques sales professionals can utilize to increase the chances for effective communication and a genuine connection. In doing so, and not just going through the motions, sales team members will maximize selling opportunities. Below are five strategies that work to further that connection.

CONNECT WITH CUSTOMERS FIVE WAYS

1. Find common ground. One technique to increase opportunities for connection is mirroring or pacing. This technique is often misunderstood to be copying the other person's gestures and becoming this person. When done effectively, pacing involves subtle changes in your own non-verbal communication in an

effort to be more similar. It can be as simple as matching their speed of movement and reflecting their level of intensity.

For more information on this topic you may want to check out Harry Mills' book, *Artful Persuasion: How to Command Attention, Change Minds and Influence People*.

2. Ask key questions regarding function, tastes, preferences, and lifestyle.

- Ask open ended questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no.
- Ask clarifying questions. If a customer expresses that he or she likes something ask why do they like it? What do they like about it?
- Use follow up questions: Ask follow up questions to be certain you understand who your customer really is.

3. Sketch rooms: Drawing a rough sketch and jotting down the important details will allow you to col-

lect a great deal of needed information. It will also help to create a bond as the customer realizes you care on a level they did not experience when shopping the competition.

Here are just a few of the benefits of sketching.

- *Technical and functional planning saves your customer time and money. Sketching allows you to prevent the customer from making costly mistakes involving pieces that are too large for the room or pieces that won't function properly due to lack of electrical access.*
- *Taking the time to gather information in this way communicates that your store cares about giving individualized attention to customers. This will not soon be forgotten.*
- *Sketching will save you time and provide vital information needed to offer the right solutions. Many sales professionals worry that they don't have time to sketch customers' rooms. I would challenge that notion. In fact, when you go through the sketching process with*

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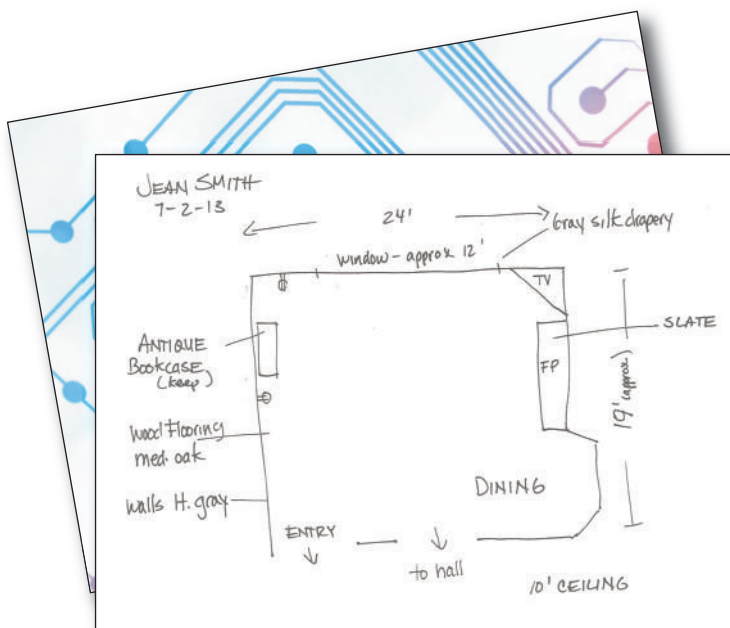
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When you go through the sketching process with a customer, you are better able to present solutions based on accurate, personalized information and the likelihood of success is much increased.

a customer, the sales person is better able to present solutions based on accurate, personalized information and the likelihood of success is much increased.

- Sketching sets you apart from the competition. Sketching adds a personal element and helps build relationships, taking the level of selling in your store a notch higher.

4. Reflect: Be sure the solutions you present represent the design preferences your customers express. This is where listening is KEY. What is your customer's style, formal or informal, contemporary or traditional? Sales people should have a basic understanding of design fundamentals. If you can't show customers contemporary when they ask for it, they

will be out of there in an instant.

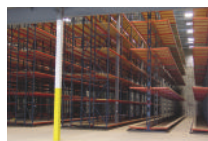
5. Follow up: Stay in touch with past and potential customers. Use an efficient Customer Relationship Management System to ensure referrals and repeat business. Combine this with a low tech approach such as sending postcards to a different group of valued customers once a week.

As with any worthwhile endeavor, the sales process has to be done with passion and authenticity. When you come from a genuine place of customer care and work to meet customer needs, you will set yourself and your store apart from the competition. This increases sales results organically and establishes an authentic connection with customers to increase sales

success. When customers' needs are met, the payoffs are extraordinary, making the selling process easier and more comfortable for all involved. Loyal customers and referral business will be created. This is further proof that "the revenue is in the relationship."

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

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

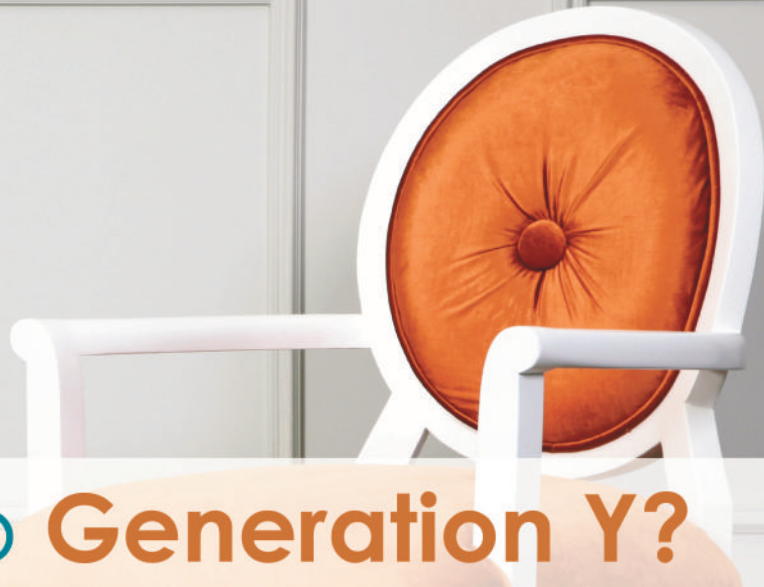


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MATTRESS-



Seven ways to adjust your sales and marketing to take advantage of a new reality.

by Gordon Hecht

"Give the Lady what she wants"
—Marshall Field

Mattress Manufacturers and Retailers, Welcome to the 21st Century! While Bedding Sales have been one of the bright spots in our Furniture business, sales growth lags behind other consumables. This is because most consumers don't cherish the idea of having to purchase a new mattress, nor are they proactive in taking steps to gain a restorative night's sleep—despite the fact that many of them sleep in substandard beds and sleep-walk their way through their day.

Sure, our industry has tried to educate the buying public on the benefits of great sleep and how our products can help to relieve pain and increase one's overall well-being. However noble our efforts have been; mattress shopping ranks low on consumer's

favorite products to shop for; certainly below automobiles, appliances, cookware, and cell phones. The last I heard, mattress shopping sits somewhere between pre-need funeral plans and root canals!

Manufacturers and retailers have made mattress shopping a chore. Our perception is that our competition is between the "S" and "T" Brands on the manufacturing side, and between the Mattress Specialty stores, Big Box and Wholesale Clubs, and traditional Furniture stores on the retail side. In fact, our true competitors are the brands and products that did not exist 20 years ago—outside of our business. They simply are more fun and much easier to shop for. While that new King-Size may never be as glamorous as the latest iPhone or Lexus Hybrid, we must change the way we do business in order to fit into her way of shopping.

If you want to improve your business, then think like a customer. In my retail life I judged policies and programs on this simple scale: Is it "Commission Friendly" or "Customer Friendly"? Commission Friendly policies are logical and create a false short term profit, but ultimately will destroy business as those policies do not encourage continual return business or personal recommendations.

Here are ways we need to change our business views. Some are quite radical, but all streamline the process or increase the value perception of our products.

1 The Name Game: Shop for anything named Apple, Toyota, or Kindle. Whether you look online or in brick and mortar stores, the name is the same. Comparisons are easy and the consumer only has to decide where to invest their money. It seems

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"Besides adding needlessly to the cost of the product, this "customer unfriendly" addition of frustration is #1 on your shoppers' hit list of why they dislike mattress shopping."



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"Love it or hate it recycling used mattresses is going to become a reality. As an industry, retail and manufacturer, we need to get ahead of this now and take the lead."

that Bedding is one of the few products that have scores of names for similar products from the same manufacturer. Besides adding needlessly to the cost of the product, this "customer unfriendly" addition of frustration is #1 on your shoppers' hit list of why they dislike mattress shopping. Retailers believe they have something "exclusive", but if your competition is as savvy as you think they are, they are prepared to match up your "S"

name to their "S" name. Manufacturers would like to reduce this non-value added cost, and retailers gain no advantage. Let's end it today! You may have noticed that the fastest growing brands over the last 10 years use just ONE model name per model. (To my friends at the "S" Brands, I don't mean to single you out. The name game applies to almost all brands A-Z)

2. Twenty-five Years to Life: It sounds like a sentence for a crime, and when we stress outrageous warranties that don't reflect the realistic lifespan of our product we are, in fact, sentencing our customers to years of poor sleep and wrong expectations. Warranty times topped out in the 1980's to 30 years, then dropped to a more sensible 10, and have climbed back to 25 in the last 24 months. Prorated periods result in prorated sleep and mattress owners hanging on to beds far longer than the comfort life.

Long warranties are a half-truth that makes our product presentation non-believable and lowers our credibility. Last year I visited retail stores more than 200 times. I ask the RSAs if their shoppers would trade a 25 year warranty for a lower warranty along with a lower price. To a person, almost all RSAs say that shoppers want MONEY NOW over a promise tomorrow.

Retailers, you need to call on your suppliers to create sensible warranties that are believable. Along with that call, you need to support your suppliers through the change. Manufacturers, drop the warranty and drop your cost to your retailers. Give them a reason to believe.

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MATTRESS-7

3. I'll Sleep Better If You Buy This Bed: Think like a customer. The next time you need to replace your HVAC units, buy a suit, or book a hotel room, do you want the salesperson to sell you the item that is "right" for you, or the item that pays them the most money? Right at the top of "Commission Friendly" violations is Spiff or PM programs. They simply do not make the needle move, and are a high priced short-term lease on a RSA's attention. Above all, spiffs are a major cause of customer returns. And if your store has a no-return policy, know this... neither your bed nor your customer will return.

Today's shopper is smart. They know when they are being pushed towards a bed with Push Money attached to it. Drop the spiffs and show the right bed to right customer.

Your RSAs will tell you that they need spiffs to survive! However, in a large (200+ RSAs) sales organization I work with, annual spiff earnings averaged \$30 a month over a 12 month fiscal year. Check your team's earnings for 2013 and see how much of your money is being rebated to your sales team. Chances are it may not be a lot different!

4. It's Not Easy Being Green: Today's shopper wants to know how GREEN or environmentally conscience YOU are. OK, this may be the same shopper who throws away two plastic water bottles while she shops your store, but she still wants you to do no harm to Mother Earth. As an industry, we have moved a shade greener. We still need to deal with that 800 pound gorilla in the room, mattress recycling.

Love it or hate it, recycling used mattresses is going to become a reality. As an industry, retail and manufacturer, we need to get ahead of this now and take the lead. There are lots of usable parts in those old beds that don't need to be clogging up the landfill. Find the innovative entrepreneurs in your organization that can make recycling pay for you. The companies that can create this, promote it, and sell it will see sales growth that

will exceed what 100 year warranties and \$100 spiffs can bring.

5. We'll Never Win the Race to Zero: On my many store visits I ask RSAs to pinpoint the price that their shoppers believe a good queen size mattress set should cost. The numbers seem to always range between \$499 and \$599. Yet today, the cost of a good bed starts in the low four-figure range. Why the dispar-

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"Sex is used

to sell everything including beer, weight loss schemes, cosmetics, and probably peanut butter. However, our product is where a lot of 'It' happens, and we rarely bring up the subject."

ity? Essentially the blame lies with US! As retailers beat each other's brains out promoting \$299-\$399-\$499 and manufacturers scramble to de-spec their products. The net result is NOBODY WINS. after covering true costs retailers and manufacturers lose money on every sale, and the shopper gets a bed that is neither comfortable,

supportive, nor durable.

Some stores hide their promotional beds in the back corner of the store, others promote low price queen sets and display them as twin sets, both of which create an embarrassing test-rest (not Customer friendly). Other stores use ugly covers-provided by their suppliers, make delivery difficult,

or move the shopper up through scare tactics.

I am all for promoting HOT prices, but don't BEG people to shop and then DARE them to buy. When you promote, don't downgrade the shopping experience. Further, if you want to do 60-75% of your business in upper end and premium bedding, why not invest 60-75% of your advertising space and message on the value of better bedding and the benefits those beds provide. For manufacturers, check out the net bottom line return on your low end bedding. You probably need to ship 15 of those to realize the same dollars as one medium or high end set. It's a losing proposition, and you don't need it to service your retailers. Cheap low end beds are a bad drug-Just Say No!

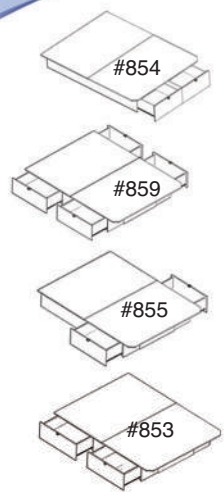
6. Let's Talk About "It"! The "It" is the thing that few in our business want to talk about, S-E-X! Sex is used to sell everything including beer, weight loss schemes, cosmetics, and probably peanut butter. However, our product is where a lot of "It" happens, and we rarely bring up the subject. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, appearing at the top are our physiological needs including breathing, food, water, sleep and sex.

If sex sells and it happens on our product we need to promote this. Will we offend some people? Probably, but like my friend Retailer Carson Rohw told me, "If our store gives away free Ice Cream Sundaes, someone will show up who is lactose intolerant!"



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A computer monitor is the central focus, displaying a menu with the following items: Inventory Control System, Accounts Receivable, Accounts Payable, General Ledger, Customer Service, Pricing List, Payroll, and Tax Activities. The monitor is on a stand, and a keyboard and mouse are visible in the foreground. The background is a collage of business-related terms in various colors and sizes, including 'management', 'interaction', 'Don', 'sensitivity', 'preferred', 'transaction', and 'world'.

"Spiffs are a major cause of customer returns. And, if your store has a no-return policy, know this... neither your bed nor your customer will return!"

The message has to be factual, believable, and FUN! Your Marketing Gurus can tell you if the subtle approach or overt trumpeting is the way to advertise this. Maybe both will work-and SHE, your shopper will be listening. If you don't believe me, look at who is shopping in the family planning aisle at your local Wal-Mart, and what they can find there.

Retailers--let your suppliers know that they need to take the lead on this one-but YOU have to back them up locally when the backlash comes!

7. United You Stand: You can change this business. Adopt a healthy dissatisfaction for the status quo and be ready to smash a few touchstones. Support, planning, and loyalty is essential between those on the wholesale side and those in retail. The transformation will get uncomfortable, but that just means we are too comfortable on using 20th Century standards to build our 21st Century business. In this century Mattress Shopping needs to be easy, fun, with a touch of spice!

Gordon Hecht: Gordon Hecht is a 39 year veteran of the Home Furnishing business starting as a Delivery Helper in Las Vegas, NV. Following a successful sales, store management, and multi-store management career he joined Ashley Furniture Industries. In his role as National Director of Sales for Ashley Sleep Gordon helps Retailers improve Bedding Sales through training, merchandising and display. He lives in Columbus, OH with his wife Michelle.

If you are having a meeting for 12 people and get a baker's dozen of donuts or bagels contact Gordon at Ghecht@ashleyfurniture.com.

FURNITURE WORLD

TIPS

RETAIL RECRUITING TIP: by Bill O'Malley

If you are not promoting a Career Center on your website, you are missing a great opportunity to have a constant stream of candidates seeking out your company as a potential employer. First and foremost, Chauncey Archer, Owner/Founder of Sticky IT, a full service web design company suggests, "be clear and concise when you're thinking about how to title your job site, for example: Career Opportunities vs. Jobs". In Archer's view, he tells his clients to "think of a website like you're reading a billboard at 65 mph". As further proof, Simply Hired (www.simplyhired.com) found in a study that there is now evidence of a 5 second rule or window of engagement for job seekers when viewing a page. This metric reinforces that you have little time to get and keep one's attention. The other key piece to a successful website that attracts job seekers is mobile optimization.

So here are some recommendations for making your website relevant and fresh for Job Seekers:

- Does your website pop! Is it bold; colorful and fun in other words...is it relevant, sticky with great content.
- Test your website to see if it's Mobile Optimized (test it on your IPAD, Samsung Galaxy and Smartphone) - If it's slow and the pages aren't in line with the mobile device screen call a web design firm skilled at creating a Mobile friendly site: there are (3) most common types of design typically used to optimize a site for mobile use and they include: Responsive web design, Dedicated mobile site and RESS.
- Does your website design incorporate the three-click rule in the design of website navigation? Can the user of a website find any information for example (Careers with Job Postings) or (Contact Us including an address and phone #) with no more than three mouse clicks. Think of the site from a user perspective and not based on providing every detail about your company or operation.
- Can a Job Seeker find information including: About Us, Mission/Culture, Job Postings (including location), How to apply, Plus Benefits summary overview?

About The Author: Bill O'Malley is Managing Partner of Connector Team a Recruiting firm for Home Furnishings and Retail headquartered in Salt Lake City. See all of Bill's articles and contact information at www.furninfo.com/series/TalentAcquisition.

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RETAIL BOTTLENECKS

How to stop the retail chaos by avoiding operational bottlenecks and productivity constraints.

by David McMahon

Have you ever wondered why some businesses seem to run smoothly while others live in a constant state of chaos? I see this all the time in the field.

Some operations churn along like well-oiled machines. They produce consistently decent sales volume for their space. They can handle all their customer traffic properly. Managers are proactive. Purchase orders are placed and received without issue. Deliveries go off without a hitch. Inventory counts are always right. Accounts payable is current. Financial statements are correct and timely each month. Customer service issues seldom occur and when they do, the customer comes out happy in the end.

Employees truly enjoy their workplace. Cash flow is good.

Other operations live by the seat of their pants. They move from fighting one fire to the next. Managers are reactive. They spend their time and energy focusing on the biggest problem of the day. Retail traffic and sales projections are a mystery. Sometimes there are not enough trained salespeople to handle the customer load properly. Other times salespeople just sit around staring at the door. Purchase orders occasionally arrive wrong. Merchandise on the floor is old and inventory quantities are often wrong. Damages occur and customer service issues are a problem. There are many complaints to deal with. Payables get behind. Financial statements and management reports are unreliable. Employees are stressed. Cash flow is poor.

The difference between operations that run smoothly and those that are chaotic is often the number and severity of operational bottlenecks. A bottleneck is a slowdown in business operations in one or more areas. Work piles up in the bottleneck area which negatively affects downstream business functions due to the less than optimal management of workflow.

Bottleneck Example: A client of ours was having trouble serving customers properly because their salespeople

didn't have access to quality inventory information. Salespeople would actually call the warehouse to check on stock availability. Then the warehouse had to physically look for stock and call the salesperson back! Many customers would just leave. The result was that both sales and the warehouse employees had to do more work with fewer sales for the business. Can you guess the cause? It was bottlenecks in inventory control and IT communications. This led to issues downstream in the sales department.

Bottlenecks are caused by productivity constraints. A constraint is some inefficiency in process or ineffective use of resources. The inefficiency in the example above was caused by poor inventory control. Warehouse personnel transferred merchandise across multiple locations without following proper procedures in the store's IT system. This problem was

"Constraints and bottlenecks add to operational costs by causing the application of time and money to the wrong places."

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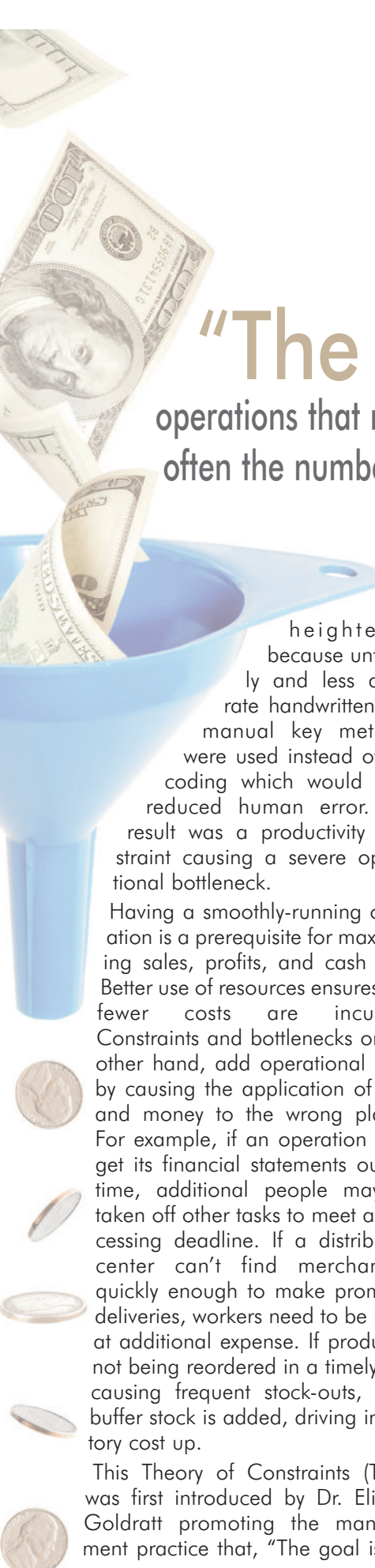
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"The difference between, operations that run smoothly and those that are chaotic is often the number and severity of operational bottlenecks."

heightened because untimely and less accurate handwritten and manual key methods were used instead of bar coding which would have reduced human error. The result was a productivity constraint causing a severe operational bottleneck.

Having a smoothly-running operation is a prerequisite for maximizing sales, profits, and cash flow. Better use of resources ensures that fewer costs are incurred. Constraints and bottlenecks on the other hand, add operational costs by causing the application of time and money to the wrong places. For example, if an operation can't get its financial statements out on time, additional people may be taken off other tasks to meet a processing deadline. If a distribution center can't find merchandise quickly enough to make promised deliveries, workers need to be hired at additional expense. If product is not being reordered in a timely way causing frequent stock-outs, extra buffer stock is added, driving inventory cost up.

This Theory of Constraints (TOC) was first introduced by Dr. Eliyahu Goldratt promoting the management practice that, "The goal is not

to save money but to make money." The five basic premises for dealing with constraints to improve an organization are:

1. Find the constraint.
2. Figure out how to "exploit" or improve the constraint.
3. Subordinate everything else. Get all other areas of the organization to support the goal of improving the area.
4. Elevate the constraint. Execute the improvements necessary to break the bottleneck.
5. Review and monitor. If the constraint is still there, go back to step number one.

If the bottleneck is broken, look to other areas to improve. There is always a constraint to improve on.

SIGNS TO LOOK FOR

To assist you in finding operational bottlenecks check for some of the signs listed below.

Signs you may have a constraint or bottleneck that needs attention.

Sales:

- Too busy to follow-up with customers.
- Lots of idle time.

- Mistakes in data entry.
- Taking too long to enter sales orders.
- Poor or no CRM data: close rates x traffic x average ticket.
- Missing sales goals, repeatedly.
- No sales quotes or old sales quotes in the IT system.
- Lots of split commission sales.
- Excess discounting.
- Few add-ons to sale orders resulting in low average ticket.
- Too much time spent on customer service issues.
- Slow daily cash-out process.
- Unstructured and non-existent sales meeting.
- Complaining.

Purchasing:

- Poor merchandise mix.
- Over-inventory.
- Stock-outs of hot selling items.
- Poor lead times and transport issues.
- Unfavorable vendor terms.
- Costing issues – merchandise and freight-in.
- Margin drift.

Merchandise Management:

- Unorganized floor and display issues.
- Missing price points in the merchandise line-up.



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On September 5 & 6, 2013 the All American Furniture Expo is returning to the Lancaster Convention Center in Lancaster, PA for the 3rd annual trade show. Conveniently located in the Northeast in this beautiful, mid-sized city, the show is open to wholesale buyers only.

This year the Expo carries the theme "Strictly American Made," which emphasizes the fact that no overseas furniture will be exhibited at the show. Styles range from primitive to transitional, mission to modern, contemporary, and urban. At the end of the day buyers will know that they have previewed the best products in the handcrafted furniture industry.

Wanda Esh Gregg, All American Furniture Expo coordinator, gives this update. "With the addition of new exhibitors, such as Hallagan Fine Furniture, Johnston Benchworks and Fusion Design, we expect to have close to 100 different manufacturers this year. It will be a truly exciting and vibrant show featuring the debut of brand new product lines and offering a wider variety of American made, upholstered and hardwood furniture in the latest styles and finishes."

From its beginning, the All American Furniture Expo has been on the cutting edge of supporting American crafts people. The entire floor space of 46,000 square feet is solely dedicated to the exhibition of American made furniture. Thus, the Expo provides a forum for crafters, vendors, and buyers to share ideas and network with others who also have American made ideals at the core of their mission. For example, being able to speak directly to the manufacturer is a distinct advantage to retailers when they are working out the details of an order for furniture.

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. They give exceptional service and run a well-organized show. Most importantly, they help American crafts people succeed by insisting on the "Strictly American Made" guideline for this show.

All American Furniture Expo
Ph 717-393-6466 • Fx 717-295-2625
allamericanfurniture@comcast.net
www.AllAmericanFurnitureExpo.com

The All American Furniture Expo debuted as a separate trade show in 2011.
Since 2002 it had been a part of the spring Keystone Wholesale Show, which features American made home decor and crafts, lawn and garden items, and outdoor structures. Both shows are presented by
Keystone Wholesale Markets, Est 2002.
For more information on Keystone Wholesale Markets, visit www.KeystoneWholesaleMarkets.com



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RETAIL BOTTLENECKS

- Odd ball pricing.
- No group pricing.
- Too much old, non-selling merchandise on the floor.
- Everything is on sale or nothing is on sale.
- Merchandise that is not displayed anywhere, yet in-stock.

Inventory Control

- Employees manually hand writing things down and entering data later.
- Inventory out of location.
- Status mistakes.
- Quantity errors.
- Manual or hand written sold tags in the warehouse.
- Re-wrapped merchandise in the warehouse.

Distribution

- Large number of incoming customer calls.
- Backed-up incoming freight.

- High shipping and delivery costs with respect to incoming revenue.
- Returned merchandise.
- Service issues.
- Damages.
- Crowded docks.
- Large amount of undelivered and unscheduled sales orders.
- Slow picking and prep processes.
- Interdepartmental complaints.
- Routine less than full delivery trucks.
- Overuse of equipment and vehicles.

Accounting / Management

- Poor financial reporting.
- An inaccurate balance sheet.
- Inventory costing issues.
- Over use of spreadsheets.
- Blaming things on IT.
- Delivered sales still showing as written.
- Takes a long time to do commissions and payroll.
- Too much staff for sales volume.
- Month end is always a rush.
- Late financial statements.

- Poor reconciliation procedures.
- Creeping miscellaneous expense.
- High employee stress level and turnover.
- Constant issue resolution and firefighting.
- Poor average profitability overall.

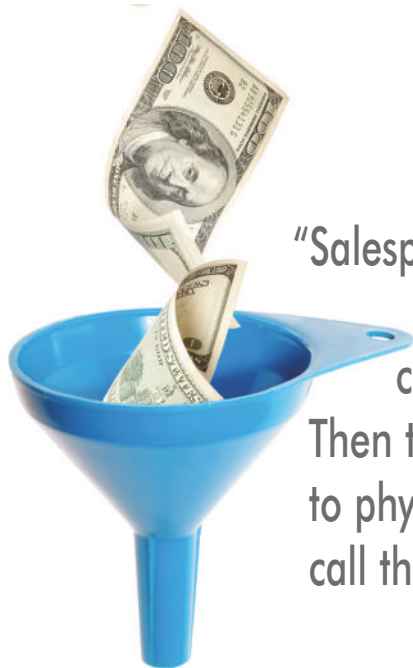
SOLUTIONS

Solutions to constraints must be tailored specifically to your organization. There is no one size fits all. Team dynamics and internal processes will vary from one business to the next. Personalities, abilities, IT, and management structure in your organization should be looked at to determine the best approach.

I believe in focusing on one thing at a time. It could be a mistake for you to try to improve several areas at once. After identifying the best area to focus on, define your strategy. Get all team members on-board. Define the specific tactics you plan to use to accomplish the desired results. Measure your progress, adjust and fine-tune until you succeed. Don't stop. Keep advancing. The best operations in the world commit to continuous improvement.

About David McMahon: David McMahon is a Certified Management Accountant and Management Consultant with PROFITconsulting, a division of PROFITsystems.

Questions about this or any of his articles archived on FURNITURE WORLD Magazine's information-rich website at www.furninfo.com/Authors/DavidMcMahon/6 can be directed to Davidm@profitsystems.com or call 800-888-5565.



"Salespeople would actually call the warehouse to check to check on stock availability. Then the warehouse had to physically look for stock and call the salesperson back!"

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OPERATIONS ✓ LIST

Dealing with receiving issues that compromise customer service and profitability.

by Dan Bolger

Do you recall the last time you spent time out on the receiving dock? In a half hour review, you may be surprised to learn there are problems that ultimately compromise customer service and profitability. The root causes may be your own internal processes, the trucking company that delivers your stock or your vendors. I encourage you to spend some time in the warehouse receiving area and observe the real problems your people are seeing.

You may find that although you had excellent procedures in place at one time, but there has been employee turnover without adequate training, employees have gotten lazy, or receiving volume has increased resulting in an understaffed situation.

It makes no difference if you are using a manual system or a state of the art order processing system. The challenges of running an effective receiving operation are the same as in pre-computer days. The long supply chain from off-shore manufacturing requires much more attention to ori-

gin packaging and handling. There appears to be an industry –wide disconnect between purchasing and receiving personnel. Your business is furniture retailing, not furniture repairing, but we continue to see far too many damages at receiving including concealed damage. Does anybody recognize that your customer service goals cannot possibly be met when so many damaged products arrive at your warehouse? As you observe each of the following items on the checklist, my suggestion is to grade each item from one 'Bad' to five 'Excellent' to identify opportunities for improvement. Then discuss each item with your management team and take appropriate action.

✓ **Staff Training:** Many receiving employees want to do a good job, yet have limited reading or language skills. The best training materials are very basic and intuitive. Check to make sure they can be understood by the people actually doing the work. If some of this work is being done by

day labor, it must be even simpler with additional controls.

✓ **Advance Shipping Notice and Purchase Order on File:** Whether electronic or manual, timely access to this information is more productive than blind receiving.

✓ **Dock Area Clear and Organized:** Having adequate space to segregate receiving by lot is essential for control and to minimize theft risks.

✓ **Arriving Truck Load Quality:** As trucks are backed up into

"Grade each item from one equals bad to five being excellent to identify opportunities for improvement."

- Staff training
- Advance shipping notice
- Purchase order on file.
- Dock area clear & organized
- Arriving truck load quality - neat.
- Obvious carton damage?
- Concealed damage?
- Merchandise received to dock.
- Merchandise transferred to storage.
- Daily dock report.

Proper receiving area is completely clear to provide good visibility to check products being received.





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Damaged frame: The leg is completely broken. Reorder of the complete item took over two weeks. Damaged Packaging: Upon opening carton, prior mishandling was obvious. Foam Corner Blocking: Carton was dropped somewhere along the supply chain causing the foam block to crack.

the dock, products should be stabilized. Fallen over cartons are a sure sign of potential damage. Load condition should be noted on the bill of lading.

✓ **Obvious Carton Damage?** Identify your processes to handle damages at receiving. Noting "received subject to inspection" does not protect your rights. It is necessary to note the specific indication of dam-

age and take photographs for possible claim filing. A worst case scenario is to receive special order merchandise, to call the customer for a delivery appointment, and then find there are problems. Your internal procedures should initiate timely action to insure customer satisfaction. If the damaged item is part of a larger order and you choose to make a split delivery, your out of pocket expense may exceed the margin on the entire sale.

✓ **Concealed Damage?** The standard time to file a concealed damage claim is 15 days and your efforts to collect are more difficult unless your internal handling is excellent.

✓ **Merchandise Received to Dock, Transferred to Storage, and Daily Dock Report:** If you start the day with a clear dock, receive to a dock location, and then



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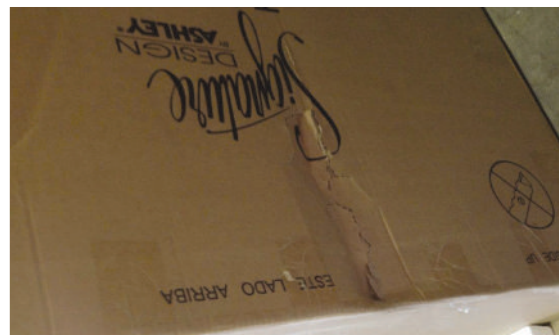
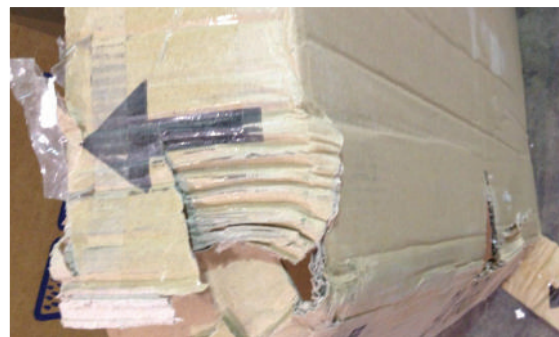
SEAFIE is brought to you by the organiser of the Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF).

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Carton Damage Images: Upper right, did the supplier actually ship it this way or was it the trucker? The creased carton, at right shows potential for interior damage. Check for interior damage immediately when there's a hole in a carton.

transfer to the storage location the same day, you have an opportunity to increase control. It's easier to review transactions from one specific day than to search for items received weeks ago.

Bottom line, reconciliation of the physical receiving processes to your company's financial records is essential. Take time to visit the dock and perform this mini checkup to identify potential weaknesses in your operation so you can resolve them or seek assistance for a thorough operations review.

About Dan Bolger: Contributing editor Dan Bolger of The Bolger Group helps companies achieve improved transportation, warehousing and logistics. Contact Dan Bolger care of Furniture World

Magazine at dbolger@furninfo.com or call him direct at 740-503-8875. For more information on transportation, logistics and furniture warehousing topics, go to Furniture World's website at <http://www.furninfo.com/Authors/DanBolger/2> to read all of Dan's operations articles.



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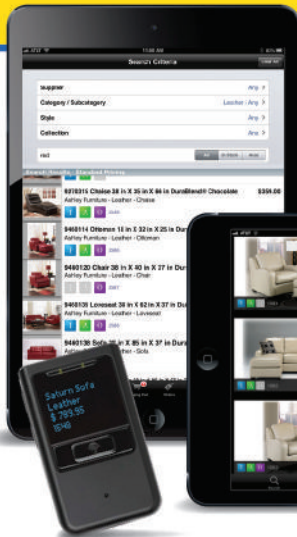
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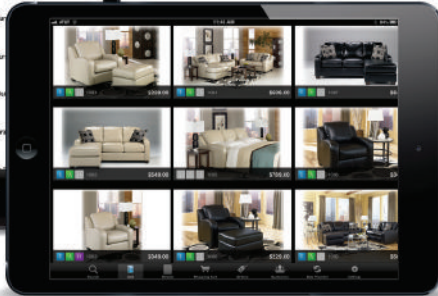
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