

VOLUME 146 NO. 5 SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER 2016

furniture WORLD

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How to Respond to Customer Objections

state-of-the-industry report

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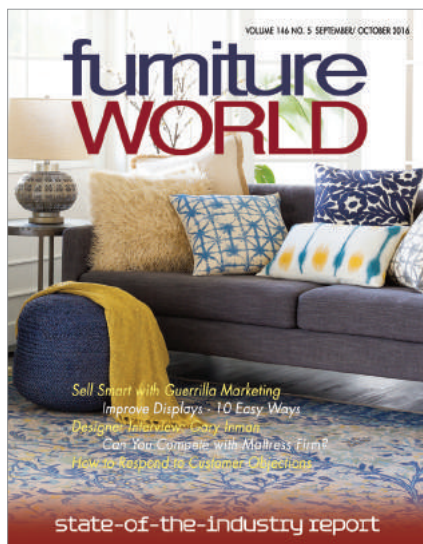
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FURNITURE WORLD MAGAZINE

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COVER: Rugs and textiles from Surya are shown in rich shades of indigo and golden-infused hues that harmonize to lend a sense of relaxed comfort to any space. Shown are the Kansai rug, Topics pouf, Tilda throw, Olney lamp, Kharaa pillow, Ellery pillow, Nebula pillow, Kumo pillow, and Pallavi pillow. For more information, see pages 6-7 in this issue, or visit www.surya.com.

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The Power of Coaching and Grit in Retail Sales Success

"The most successful retailers have been able through nurturing, to obtain and develop exceptional employees throughout all areas of their businesses - whether it be sales, administration or distribution," says Wayne McMahon in his "State-of-the-Industry" report in this issue. It's a common sense statement. Without competent people, a business can neither create value or execute policy. The question for thoughtful retail owners and managers must therefore be, "what are the best ways to nurture exceptional employees?"

There is no place where this question is more important at retail than on the sales floor. It's the place, Joe Capillo tells us in his One-On-One article (page 86), where "success still comes down to what happens between one salesperson and one customer."

It's in the sales arena, Joe suggests, that sales associates must receive correct teaching, (coaching) to bring low-earners up to average in a process of continuous improvement.

Success in applying Joe's prescription depends not only on the quality of coaching but also on (1) each salesperson's willingness to accept this coaching (not applying their own, personal winning formulas) and (2) their persistence in negotiating a personal learning curve without getting discouraged. This second attribute is what Angela Duckworth calls Grit in her TED Talk and book *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. She suggests that Grit is an attitude of passion and perseverance, viewing life as a marathon. Google her TED talk, which points at ways perseverance can be selected and coached. Also check out the thought provoking sales management/ sales education articles in this issue of Furniture World Magazine.

Russell Bienenstock
Editorial Director/CEO

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✓ State of THE INDUSTRY

Interview with David & Wayne McMahon

"We've gathered some decent data from clients and from industry studies done with the Home Furnishings Association."

Furniture World caught up with retail operational and financial advisers, David and Wayne McMahon of PROFITconsulting, just ahead of their Kaizen peer performance group meeting.

David is a popular editorial contributor to Furniture World Magazine. (All of his articles can be found in one place at <http://www.furninfo.com/Authors/List>.)

The father/son team answered a few questions about the state of the industry, where it might be going and how retailers can navigate change in the near and long term.

Question: Performance-wise what results have you seen with retailers and the industry as a whole?

Wayne: "We've gathered some decent data from our clients and from industry studies done with the Home Furnishings Association. Last year we brought back the *Retail Performance Report* which hadn't been published since 2008. There have been some interesting changes."

David: "Here are a few instances where there have been significant

improvements. Between 2008 and 2015, gross margin has grown from 45% to 47% on average, whereas top performers have grown to 51%. Net income in 2008 was actually reported as under 0.9% while last year the average was 4.75%, with top performers at 7.77%.

"We also saw a one-year sales growth in the industry of 5.6% on average and over 15% for the top retail performers.

"Average sale has had a big increase since 2008, going from \$1,100 to \$1,517 in 2015. The top 20% of performers we follow had

"Average sale has had a big increase since 2008, going from \$1,100 to \$1,517 in 2015. The top 20% of performers had \$2,193 average sale!"

EXECUTIVE CONTACTS

Editorial Director, CEO

Russell Bienenstock (russ@furninfo.com)

Publisher

Barton Bienenstock (barton@furninfo.com)

Advertising Sales Director

Gary Siegel (gary@furninfo.com)

Advertising Sales Manager

Mark Testa (mark@furninfo.com)

Art/ Design Editor

Barbara Bienenstock (barbara@furninfo.com)

Retail Feature Editor

Janet Holt-Johnstone (janet@furninfo.com)

Special Projects Editor

Melody Doering (melody@furninfo.com)

Digital Projects Editor

Nic Ledoux (nic@furninfo.com)

Comptroller

Gifford Dorival (gifford@furninfo.com)

IT Manager

Armanda Turney (armanda@furninfo.com)

Circulation Manager

Rich Jarrett (rich@furninfo.com)

Consulting Advisor

Thelma Mason Davis

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

David Benbow - Bedding & Mattress Sales

Dan Bolger - Warehousing/ Trucking

Joe Capillo - Sales Management

Jeff Giagnocavo - Retail Systems

Gordon Hecht - Retail Observer

Rene Johnston-Gingrich - Design Education

Peter Marino - Sales Education

David McMahon - Operations & Finance

Larry Mullins - Development/ Advertising

Peter Schlosser - Furniture Repair



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"Between 2008 and 2015

gross margin has grown from 45% to 47% on average whereas top performers have grown to 51%."

\$2,193 average sale!

"The last one I'll mention is GMROI. Back in 2008 it was reported at \$2.28. Last year our industry study found retailers produced \$2.62 while the top 20% reported over \$3.13. A 34 cent increase in GMROI equates to \$340,000 gross margin dollars for an operation with \$1 million in inventory, so the increase between 2008 and 2015 is significant.

"We studied many other industry metrics but these are some highlights. Overall retailers seem to be performing better and better."

Question: Why have the metrics improved?

David: "I think it has to do with a combination of factors. Retailers are becoming more educated, they have dedicated industry partners, they have quicker access to data, they know how to measure, and they know how to adjust their tactics to make improvements. The best out there are learning from others. The strong are becoming stronger, and weaker operations are going away.

"Performance differences among retailers tend to be regional during recessions, as well as during times like right now where there's low unemployment. Depending on where a retail operation is, the challenges it faces, and how it is running its business, I have seen over 20% growth and 20% decline. These performance differences were largely affected by

how each operation adjusted its strategy, considering local economic and competitive factors. Overall there are a lot of challenges, but I would advise any retailer to just focus on their specific situation, whatever part of the world they are in."

Question: What are the most important advancements our industry is experiencing?

Wayne: "Probably the greatest advancements are in the sphere of marketing. The internet has led to an enormous amount of both competition as well as opportunities for retailer's to communicate with customers in multiple, highly efficient and measurable ways."

David: "We have seen advancements on the technical side in every business area. For example, integration has advanced among the various software systems through the cloud. Independent and isolated systems are starting to talk to each other. You now have integrated POS systems, marketing systems, accounting systems, delivery management and CRM systems. They are all tied into retail sites, vendor sites, and web-media sites. Everything is becoming more integrated in order to help businesses meet the high expectations of today's connected consumer. I see this trend continuing to advance with integration becoming easier, cheaper and more seamless. On the way to the

future, we will see inflexible products go away, and new, adaptive and dynamic technologies emerge. As I mentioned, things are becoming faster. People are experiencing information overload. Time is becoming the most valuable resource. Technologies and methods to capture potential and existing customers' time will be a growth area."

Question: What are the most successful retailers doing?

Wayne: "The most successful retailers have been able, through nurturing, to obtain and develop exceptional employees throughout all areas of their businesses - whether it be sales, administration or distribution. Those exceptional employees are the reason why successful businesses have been able to prosper."

David: "Yes, finding good people is probably the number one challenge retailers talk about. Those that can overcome this challenge will generally get ahead of their competition.

"The best retailers provide an atmosphere where good people want to work. I believe that people attract people like themselves. So, if you want a fun, energetic, hardworking, results oriented atmosphere, you need to get people with those types of attitudes, train them in your products and services and remove those who do not share the same attitude. You need your business to drive the top line and

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"Net income reported

in 2008 was actually 0.9%, while last year the average was 4.75% with top performers at 7.77%."

attain high margins in order to attract, develop and keep employees.

"Also, the businesses that are getting ahead of the competition are the ones that measure where they are today and try to make themselves better day-in and day-out. These are the kinds of retailers that join performance groups. They engage with others to get insight, to look at and grow their businesses. They are believers in training and development. They don't sit still. Those that do sit still are the ones who will continue to have trouble."

Wayne: "Correct. Those successful retailers are always looking for ways to advance. Continual improvement in business operations leads to success."

Question: *What are the warning signs, the canaries in the mines so to speak that Furniture World readers should be on the lookout for?*

Wayne: "Certainly there are many challenges that negatively affect retailers. Some of the warning signs can be a reduction in traffic, a decline in sales, failure to retain good people, or lack of control over key expenses and excess inventory."

David: "When a company has a decline in sales volume, management must pause and ask if it is really a problem

or a symptom of a bigger issue? A decline in sales is never the whole story. Retailing is complex. Aside from external factors, just about any area of a business can impact sales.

"Organizations need to simultaneously grow their top-line and their margins. Lack of growth, declining margins and volume always mean trouble. You cannot operate a business successfully in the current retail reality by cutting expenses. That just doesn't work. Operations need to be LEAN, but that doesn't mean they should be cheap. It is necessary to spend money to grow. Dollars should be invested in carefully considered ways that translate into growth, and those dollars come from being consistently profitable and keeping inventory, in the proper pro-

"Managers who see a consistent downward trend or stagnation in some performance measure, need to dig into it."

State of THE INDUSTRY

portion to sales volume.

"A declining topline and sluggish margins with inventory that is either rising or staying the same, means that cash flow issues will follow shortly."

Question: *Do you have some recommended solutions to those challenges? How can retail owners and managers stay ahead of the curve?*

Wayne: "Companies experiencing declining sales and so on, should look to the sales equation. Pay attention to verified traffic coming through the door. Look at traffic conversion, average sales and the root causes of declines. Then take the right steps to fix them fast! Retailers need to summon the courage to realize gross margins that are necessary to support a business and generate a profit. The metrics need to be in place to ensure they have quality inventory that is not excessive. Under no circumstance can merchandise be allowed to sit in stock, aging and not producing any return on investment."

David: "Retailers need to consistently check the pulse of their businesses. Reviewing key performance indicators and business processes is not something that should be done in response to some chaotic event. Avoid a culture of chaos management at all costs."

"Managers who see a consistent downward trend or stagnation in some performance measure, need to dig into it. When a retailer says, 'My sales are up' or 'my sales are down', that really means little, because it's the 'Why' that matters most. It is hard to fix or replicate a hunch. What caused an upturn or downturn

is what's important, and once real reasons are known, actions can be executed to improve results.

"For example, if cash flow is declining while sales and margins remain decent, it might be discovered that inventory to sales is rising. And, with further digging in, it may be seen that dogs are not going out faster than new merchandise is being received. The solution might be to improve the markdown system, implement a better open to buy and flow best sellers.

"Doing nothing, or not even realizing that there is opportunity for correc-

tive action, is what causes many businesses to unknowingly underachieve."

Question: *Any final words of advice for our readers?*

Wayne: "In the 25 years that I have been involved with the retail home furnishings industry, family-owned businesses have faced increasing competitive challenges from top 100 stores. Many independents experienced difficult issues during the recession, and those who did not innovate and adapt, declined or disappeared. Strong inde-

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"Finding good people is probably the number one challenge retailers talk about. Those that can overcome this challenge will generally get ahead of their competition."

pendents, however, have grown in both sales and profitability. There has also been significant changes with the growth of manufacturer-sponsored, franchise-type operations. Certainly the most successful of these has been the Ashley HomeStores.

"To reiterate, management should always be looking to improve. The art of continual, ongoing and never-ending improvement in the business leads to success. This has been proven time and time again. We encourage businesses to follow that approach religiously."

David: "Yes I agree. Technology-wise, we've seen the rapid growth of the internet, ERP systems, the flow of information and the cloud. People are now completely wired in. Society has seemingly become faster. That has been a big shift. The companies that are doing well are meeting the challenges of keeping up with changes in technology, supply chain management and in society.

"To add to this, It is important that

independent business people know that they are not in it alone. Don't isolate yourself. There are a lot of smart and experienced people out there. Seek to leverage knowledge from others, whether it be peer stores, industry associations, or professional consultants who serve to help others in your industry."

About David McMahon and Wayne McMahon: David McMahon, CSCP, CMA, EA is Certified Supply Chain Professional and Certified Management Accountant. Wayne McMahon, CMA, CPA is a Certified Management and Certified Professional Accountant. Together they are VP's of Consulting and Performance Groups for PROFITsystems, a HighJump company.

David and Wayne work with their performance group and business consulting clients anywhere in the world, visiting operations, exploring ways to operate better and grow profitability. Their focus can be in any part of an organization, from standard operations, to selling systems, to inventory

management to financial planning and forecasting. They analyze, prioritize and define actions pursue continual improvement and ongoing success."

They can be reached at david.mcmahon@highjump.com and wayne.mcmahon@highjump.com.

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NEW OWNERSHIP

How to grow your business by turning employee leaders into owners.

by Gordon Hecht

Whether you choose to grow within a market, or to expand statewide, nationally, or internationally, your business must continue to expand to survive.

The trouble with growth, be it moving to a second store, a new market, or across state lines, is the loss of the business culture that made the first store successful. Think about the shifting major players in our industry. If you check out a list of the “big boys” 15 years ago compared with today, you will see more line-up changes than George Steinbrenner’s New York Yankees in the 1980s and 1990s! Our own furniture and bedding players who lost out, didn’t fail for lack of sales or lack of capital. It was most often the lack of a sustained culture that created consistent quality experiences over time.

Smaller businesses usually achieve this culture balance by placing a family member or owner in each new location. For the most part only owners can have that vested interest in seeing that each selling opportunity is maximized, every invested dollar is stretched to the fullest, and every business crisis is resolved by making the customer “right”, even when the customer isn’t right! It’s a FACT that customers love to spend money when they are dealing directly with the owner!

Managers vs. Leaders

If you weren’t lucky enough to be born into a family with eight or more siblings (or even cousins) you won’t be able to depend on having family members in each store. It is, therefore, up to you to develop the new owners of your satellite locations. My Everlovin’ Bride once told

“For the most part only owners can have that vested interest in seeing that each selling opportunity is maximized, every invested dollar is stretched to the fullest, and every business crisis is resolved the right way.”



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Under

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me that there is a difference between managers and leaders. Sure, you can train store managers and they will **MANAGE** your business. But owners become leaders who can **LEAD** your business to success. Making the decision to offer employees an ownership stake in your business can be difficult; nobody likes to give up control of their business or assets. However, when planned right, creating a path to partial ownership can give you benefits that will grow your business and give it life far beyond your working years. Imagine having 10 people (or 100 people) on your team that would make decisions predicated on the long term satisfaction of your customers and your bottom line. Stated simply, owners understand that free stuff isn't free. Every shopper is a paid-in-advance asset, good news travels fast, and bad news travels faster. Owners know how to wisely manage the exceptions to create profit.

Leaders who become owners know when to bend or even break the rules. I got a note a few weeks back about an associate in an Upstate New York mattress shop that decided to close the store on a Saturday afternoon. Here's the story... he received a call from a shopper who suffered an injury that prevented him from climbing upstairs to his bedroom. He needed a bed, pronto! That store associate took ownership of the situation, packed the sleep set into his personal pick-up truck, closed the store for an hour, and personally delivered the bed. In so doing, he also delivered a customer for life to his company. To paraphrase the customer's comments,

"I wonder what the (Big Box) store would have... done"!

Think about the great retail and service experiences that you have enjoyed! Whether it is the store clerk who knows just where to find the perfect item for you, the hotel manager who upgrades your room just "because", or the restaurant where they know you by name, they all have something in common. They were most likely due to people who took ownership of their portion of the business and practiced customer service as the art it should be.

Turning over The Keys

When you turn your key leaders into owners, they will take action to build and preserve your business. They will develop the best in each associate, or move damaging personalities out. They will treat your shoppers like gold, and your customers like diamonds. Your leaders will understand

that the competitor down the street is your business rival (aka enemy), and that proprietary information needs to be kept secret. They will seek to improve your business by improving themselves; learning more so they can accomplish more. Further, they will seek to reduce costs and operating expenses. Whether times are lean or robust, reducing costs and improving quality are sure-fire ways to build profits.

Are there valued people on your team whose departure for another career would seriously affect your business' continuity? These are the individuals you can trust to take care of the store, the warehouse keys, and to keep your trade secrets to themselves. Chances are they would be less likely to leave if they had a true ownership role. Whether you carve out a one-percent stake per person or a 10-15 percent share for all of your employees, you can **REWARD** and **RETAIN** them with that minority ownership.

"Think about the great retail and service experiences you have enjoyed!"

They all had something in common. They were most likely due to people who took ownership of their portion of the business and practiced customer service as the art it should be."

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"Whether you carve out

a one-percent stake per person or a 10-15% share for all employees, you can REWARD and RETAIN them with that minority ownership."

A Wise Investment?

Yes, there is a monetary and emotional cost to sharing ownership in a business, especially if you have spent years, tears and toil keeping it viable. Depending on the size of your empire the investment can be thousands or even millions of dollars, but maintaining your operation always requires wise investments. Smart operators know

when the time is right to spend money on new computer systems, trucks, store remodels and locations, as well as bearing the cost of bringing in a new supplier. Just as those investments are made to build your business, investments in owners and leaders need to be made as well. Chances are your people will be around longer than the latest IT Operating System or that new Flippable Extra Firm Pillow Top Super King mattress line.

Make the decision to post the UNDER NEW OWNERSHIP sign in your business. Consult your financial adviser to create a plan that works well for you. Be the Leader of Leaders and watch your business prosper.

About Gordon Hecht: Gordon Hecht is a Growth and Development Manager for National Bedding Company's America's Mattress stores, over 400 mostly locally owned and operated bedding stores across the country selling Serta-branded and America's Mattress-branded mattresses. He has been recognized for outstanding sales and management achievement with several organizations including Ashley Furniture HomeStores, Drexel-Heritage, RB Furniture, Reliable Stores, and Sofa Express. He has served as Store Manager, Multi-unit manager and National Director of Sales.

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

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Built-In Exit Plan

Creating owners also gives you a personal exit plan from your business. Many retailers face closing their stores when no other family members have an interest. This can result in a loss of jobs for people you care about and another empty storefront on Main Street. Developing tomorrow's owners TODAY can keep your business viable far into the future while providing local jobs and opportunities.



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Top 10 List

STORE DESIGN MADE EASY

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

“There are reasons to be optimistic. But just when polls and pundits tell us we’re ‘doing nicely’, that’s often the best time to take a really close look at ourselves and do an in-depth performance appraisal.”

As of the writing of this article, economic gurus tell us the economy’s trending upwards with slow growth and positive consumer confidence, not withstanding election year concerns.

This past summer we’ve experienced the best housing market in a decade, actually topping a more than six per cent rise over last year. There’s an unstoppable surging movement amongst Baby Boomers, GenXers and Millennials. And, there are massive lifestyle changes implicit in changing demographics over the next couple of decades, greater eclecticism, and a strong desire among the furnishings-buying public to individualize environments. Unemployment continues to decline. A much larger segment of the population will be working from their homes, generating many new home-centered services. Furniture industry leaders predict robust consumer demand for the unique, the different, the exciting.

There are reasons to be optimistic. But just when polls and pundits tell us we’re “doing nicely” thank you, that’s often the best time to take a really close look at ourselves and do an in-depth performance appraisal. It can be our wake-up call for the new

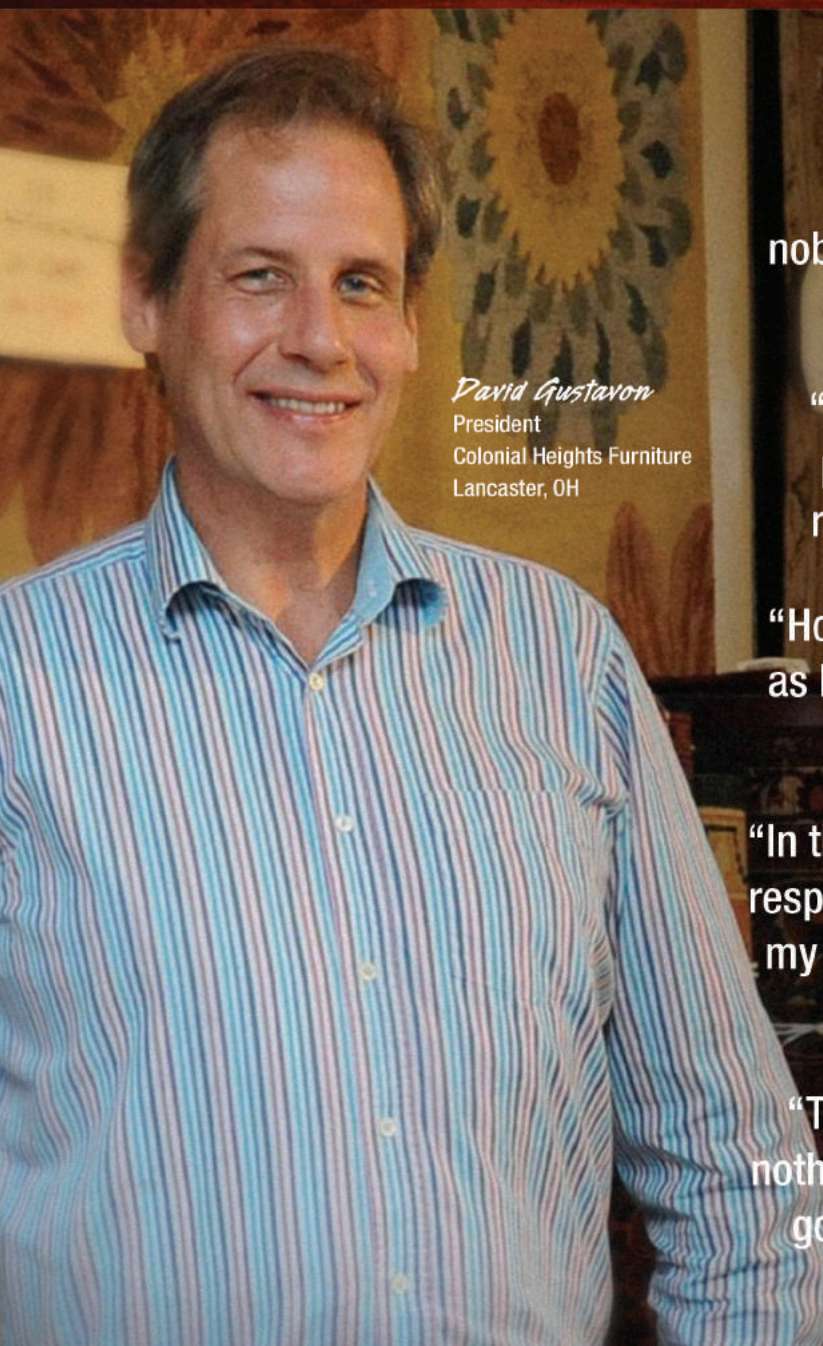
era beckoning! Questions, if everything’s so great, why, for some retailers, is showroom traffic just creeping along and when customers do come in they’re gone again in less than 15 minutes? Why aren’t websites drawing more activity and action, and why don’t those enticing inventories spark customer interest?

It’s in “exciting times” like these that we should get out our thinking caps. And who better to respond, interpret and guide than Miss Connie Post Benton, gifted with not only a sound knowledge base but an inborn, can-nily insightful sense of what’s around the corner? “By the pricking of my thumbs, something lively this way comes!”¹ She’s well qualified to direct a bit of soul searching, help interpret and define basic nitty-gritty problems where they exist, and clear the way to morph over and around obstacles. As CEO of Affordable Design Solutions, she’s responsible for initiating the glamorous, sales-oriented “look” of more than 20 million square feet of retail and wholesale space.

Top 10 List

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"There is no excuse

for your furniture not being spotless, without blemish or having a missing part. NO EXCUSES!"

biggest problems in retail stores, especially those with a bit of vintage", and "the ideal solutions if they're on a budget", or are "ready for a big renovation", Miss Connie offers the following issues home furnishings retailers face. Here, are the top 10 common problems, close to home for too many furniture retailers:

1. "Under capitalization in preparation for changing times, is a huge

problem. Waiting too long to change so that it becomes very expensive and hard to swallow.

2. "The use of dirty worn old carpets remaining in position all over the entire store! (Yes, people really do let this happen!) Remember that we're living in an era when few retailers use or should use wall-to-wall carpets in their stores. Every design magazine shows beautiful hard surfaces in photos with the focus on really attractive and profit-generating area rugs. Check out HGTV and you'll see what buyers are looking for. NOT carpet! (However, area rugs, the WOW factor, yes!)

3. "A huge problem for some retailers, they didn't move their stores with city growth! Be on the alert!

4. "And there are retailers who have not addressed the front of their buildings. America's Research Britt Beemer says the front of your building represents 56 per cent of your company's brand identity. I would say it represents 100 per cent of your brand

identity!

5. "Another problem could be your own front door! And the first 1000 square feet of your store. The customers' first and last impression of your store. What does your front door say to your customer?

6. "Not having a visual merchandiser on your floor, even part time. This can be a huge, often-overlooked problem. Stores look untidy very quickly if you are doing any business – pictures off the walls, no lamps on tables, the décor just doesn't match the latest sofa dropped into an empty spot on the floor! Be aware that there are design students everywhere, pent-up housewives wanting a career and something to do. There's always someone relatively inexpensive out there to help you. Hire them!

7. "Not changing out samples. Allowing drawers, handles, pillows to be missing or damaged on the floor. Yikes! This single thing irks me so much! There is no excuse for your

"America's Research Britt Beemer says the front of your building represents 56 per cent of your company's brand identity. I would say it represents 100 per cent of your brand identity!"

Sneak peek at a new design for Ashley Select store Connie proposed for Bill Johnson, Moores Furniture in Albuquerque TX.



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Connie Post with Dave Coll the Creative Director of Connie Post Global Media, and Barney Vissor of Furniture Row (center) working on plans for his 300,000 sq.ft. showroom in Denver, CO.

"There are design students everywhere, pent-up housewives wanting a career and something to do. **There's always someone relatively inexpensive out there to help you. Hire them!**"



Inspiration can be found everywhere. Retailers should be on the lookout for affordable, unusual décor and color. Pictured is the creative use of ceiling medallions (often used to hang chandeliers) in the Barbatella restaurant in Naples, FL.

furniture not being spotless, without blemish or having a missing part. NO EXCUSES.

8. "Out-dated logos! Holding on to tired tradition in a modern world. When the barn needs painting, I say paint it! Now! There is way too much competition to appear dated and sad in a MODERN world.

9. "Not adding fashion and colorful upholstery on at least four to six collections on your floor! If one more person tells me 'It doesn't sell!' you may have to bail me out of jail! Fashion statements set the tone for the rest of the shopping experience, reinforce that you're trendy and have new ideas and new product. The customer may decide on a beige sofa AGAIN but they'll need colorful accents to be on trend. No woman alive wants

something old-fashioned in her house unless she is an antiques dealer!

10. "Absolutely the biggest issue in our industry is complacency. Some retailers go to conferences, but only a few attend those great seminars offered at Market for new ideas, new thinking, nor do they spend research time on the web, browsing shelter magazines, seeing what their customers are seeing, shopping new lines, looking for the NEW. Because NEW always WINS!"

10 Design Solutions

Here are 10 big and small easy retail solutions:

- "Rope! Yes, really! Rope is your friend and can be used for more

than tying up stuff! For example, a rope wall!

- "The fabulous flexibility of movable walls for modern, stunning change. Inexpensive, quick, highly effective.
- "You cannot go wrong with HGTV color paints by Sherwin Williams. The show is a hit and the colors are trusted. Look for Functional Gray, Silver Mist, Buff and Lemongrass. Enlighten your customers! Co-brand and add chips to the wall so people can paint their walls at home!
- "Create those dynamite lifestyle vignettes – living room, dining room, bedroom – and decorate them heavily with your best foot forward! Place them close to the front of your store for a great designer look. Yes, departmental-



Metropolitan Home

LAZZARO LEATHER

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Popular HGTV colors by Sherwin Williams: Functional Gray SW 7024, Silver mist SW7621, Buff SW7683, and Lemongrass SW7732.



Pictured are accessory pods by Connie @IMAX. A great front door display for guests

"The customer may decide on a beige sofa AGAIN but they'll need colorful accents to be on trend. No woman alive wants something old-fashioned in her house unless she is an antiques dealer!"

ization is good for ease of shopping, but you need to 'spotlight' in these special areas to give your customer something to talk about, something to take her breath away!

- "Go vertical with products to mix it up a bit... or a lot! Seriously, stack accent chests, put a bench or chairs on top of tables, and accessorize like Pottery Barn does it and more!
- "Change your fluorescent lighting to color-corrective bulbs. You will see an immediate dramatic difference and so will your customers! Honestly!
- "Paint the outside of your building and give it, and yourself, a whole new look! Spark their imagination!
- "Pallets are in everyone's warehouses today. Drag those things up front and display chairs on them in their natural state for a great urban look! Even better, paint them stark white for a fresh new look in the spring!
- "And old shutters! Shop for them at your re-sale store. Yes, you read

right! Habitat for Humanity has them all the time. Nail them to the wall, or create movable walls. Then paint them in a rainbow of hot fashion colors!

- "The biggest issue with retailers today is getting people in the door. Reinvention is the only sure way to get people to notice their businesses, starting with the outside in, changing up merchandising strategies, differentiating themselves in big ways from others, entertaining them once they get there. And structuring an aggressive marketing campaign!"

Miss Connie adds, "Many retailers today do not tap into the emotional places of the heart with their marketing. Tell customers 'beautiful will change my life', that they will love 'coming home' to their gorgeous new living room, that their kids and husband will appreciate them more. Now that taps into the soul of the female consumer. My personal dream is to be their voice, to be a conduit of change for the industry, create retail with surprises... and in the most affordable way!"

Over the decades, an assortment of enterprising retailers, each outstanding in their own way, have turned their challenges to opportunities.

That's Entertainment

Jordan's Home Furnishings: "My all time favorite project! Jordan's Home Furnishings, New England. Barry and Eliot Tatelman! Their principal need? A whole new impossible-to-ignore direction, a truly unique approach to marketing and presentation. Their MOM, Motion Odyssey Movie addition, and their many Monster promotions and tightly targeted fantasy, were the answers. Their Grand Opening created the largest traffic jam ever recorded on Route 24! The lessons? Pull out all the stops! Take a deep breath and go for it! Dare to be different!"

Family Values

Brown Squirrel: Preston Mathews says that Miss Connie "partnered" with him to produce the extreme changes that "honored his father's memory".

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“Cardi’s Solution included colorful graphics, a man surfing on blue water, beach scenes, indoor visualizations plus an industrial warehouse-looking apartment for urban furniture and décor. Millennial magnets!”

“An amazing man,” said Miss Connie. “Preston aspires to be very different from others in his market. He wanted to identify and create links with the history and legends of his fascinating community. Including building a replica of a mini-log cabin within Brown Squirrel together with a contrasting city urban loft! We’re continuing to develop his dream with the second phase of his aggressive multi stage reinvention.”

The Boulevard: “The question posed by the Wittwers’ was, how to retain pioneer Mormon values, heritage and wonderful family life, and combine that with recognition of today’s culture? The Boulevard is in a railroad region so, of course, we designed a large in-store train engine emerging from its tunnel with a bell for kids to ring, and a station ticket booth masquerading as their service counter! And Cedar City’s

annual Shakespearean Festival is celebrated with a large theater entrance flanked by costumed mannequins in their recliner/motion area.”

Design To The Next Level

HOM and Gabbert’s: “Rod Johansen at HOM and Gabbert’s basically said, that he needed to go to the ‘next level’ in the design of the new prototype HOM store, stepping it up even more for the new Gabbert’s high end store in Little Canada, Michigan. Strong architectural designs define each area, 35 foot ceilings, 20 foot fireplace, three large circular red rotundas down the middle. The décor focus duplicated rooms of Architectural Digest stars, Giorgio Armani, Patrick Demsey, Ralph Lauren.”

A Millennial Magnet

Cardi’s Furniture and Mattresses: “Brothers Nick, Ron and Peter Cardi’s need was to create the new prototype design for future Cardi’s stores. The ‘problem’, devising an emphatic invitation for Millennials, a store ‘that screams Millennials’! With huge, oversized, very colorful graphics, a man surfing on blue water, beach scenes, indoor visualizations – a sense of life and energy. And a true-to-size beach house under a sky blue ceiling at the entrance to reflect the cape area. Plus an industrial warehouse-looking apartment for urban furniture and décor. Millennial magnets!”

Moving On Up

FurnitureLand Delaware: “A great project, the challenge for Larry Barnes was to grow the business, particularly mattresses. We moved the department up front and center, trading with the dining department. Mattress sales grew from 11 per cent to 22 per cent immediately. Then a carefully planned over all update of the entry area changing to lifestyle vignettes and upholstery reinvented to feel more coastal, added up to huge increases in overall business. Larry is now renovating the exterior which will represent and influence (as we know!) 56 per cent of his marketing brand identity for the future!”

Adding On

Coconis Furniture: “The unique mind-twister for Randy Coconis and family was the building, a wonderful old fashioned pole building on the inside. But very expensive to insulate and HVAC. Problem! The solution, we added to both ends of the existing building making it very long and linear, and Randy agreed to add an area for outdoor furniture in the front, upgraded the door entry of glass, with a champagne metal roof. The customer can see from end to end on entering the store, faux wood aisles, beams, large open fireplace, and huge lifestyle photos of people enjoying lounging behind the recliner department beckon the customer to investigate and escape! It was a study on how to get

“Miss Connie adds,
‘Many retailers today
do not tap into the
emotional places of
the heart with their
marketing.’”

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the most from a building.”

Store Facelift

Lacks Valley Furniture: “Over the years, Lee Aaronson’s flagship Gallery store had lost its luster. A revival problem! The solution, to begin with an exterior facelift, then continue inside for a complete store redo! Thus two extreme concepts have been presented to change the outside and there was unanimous decision in favor of the one I love most! A work in progress, each opportunity for update and change for the modern world will be confronted and solved by the Lacks’ Team of owners, buyers, the visual folk and management on presentation.”

Retail Rescue

Slone Brothers: “A first visit to Louis

“We’re living in an era when few retailers use or should use wall-to-wall carpets in their stores.”

and Michael Slone’s central Florida store revealed old duct work, hanging insulation and a store crying out for rescue! The need was for complete rejuvenation. The changes proposed were dramatic, faux walls were added, and a copper-look roof tower for added visibility from the road, a sexy new wood door, slate floor entry and canvas awning. Inside, modern fireplaces, faux vinyl wood flooring throughout, poetry on the walls! and brick veneer for a cool urban area. Also a Stickley Gallery that boosted sales. A very large problem, with sweeping answers. Recently, after seven years, the brothers are planning an update to the exterior colors of their building for a fresh look. They want to

be perceived as new again!”

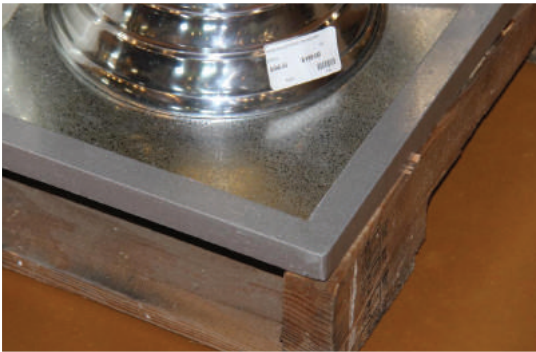
Conclusion

Performance appraisals, formal or informal, require passion, focus, imagination and more than a soupçon of honest thought, documentation and evaluation. They need our own check-lists to re-engineer, flex and deal with inevitable economic climate change.

¹ Macbeth, act 4, scene 1 (page 22, right hand column).



Drag pallets out of the warehouse, bring them up front and display chairs on them in their natural state for a great urban look!



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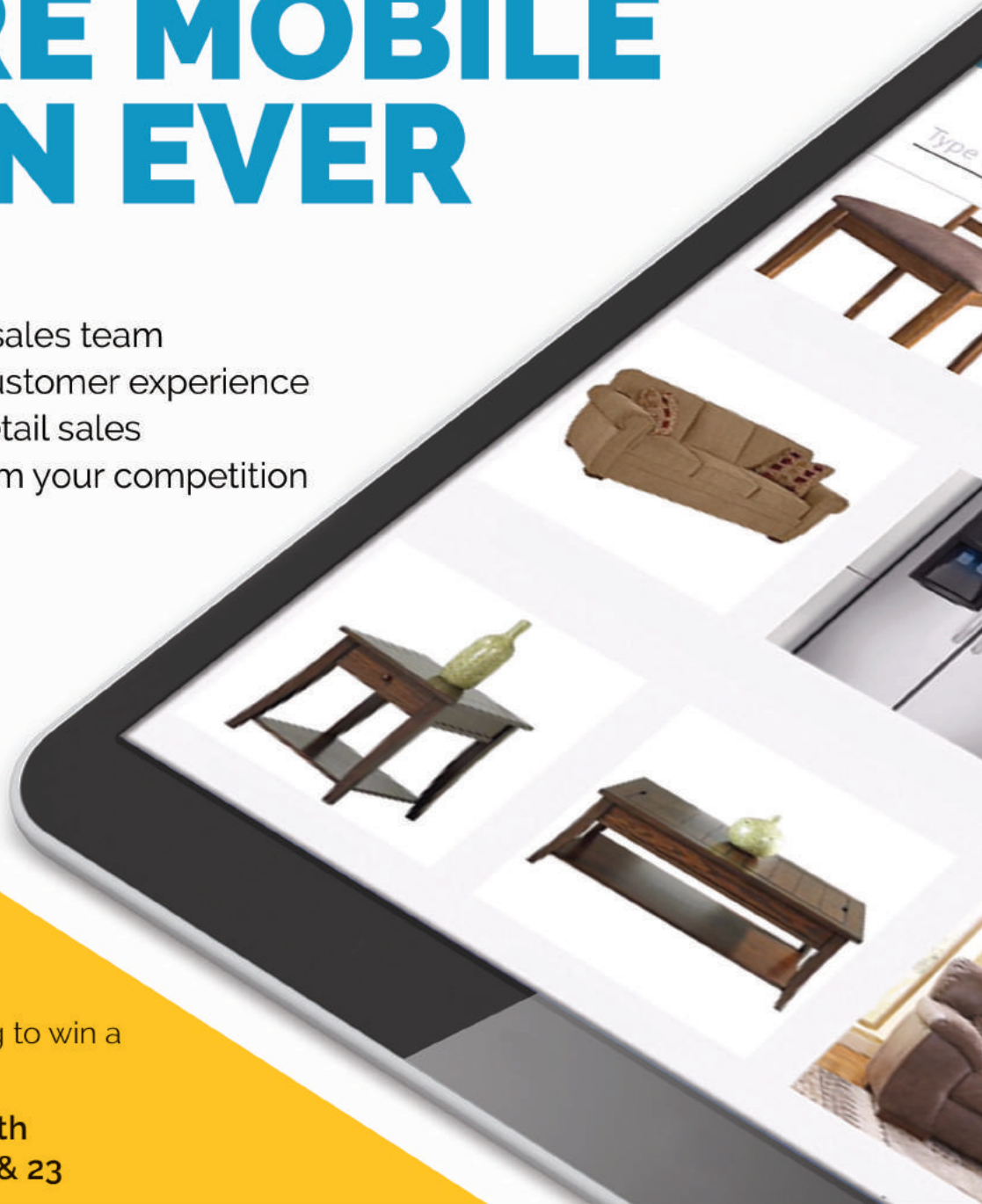
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An interview with Gary Inman about design, consumer & retail trends.

by Melody Dorival

// seek out beauty and inspiration in the objects, buildings, and people that surround me. I am pleased to share the treasures I find with you."

-Gary Inman

Gary Inman's degrees and advanced studies in fashion, textile and costume history, art history, and architectural history inform his work as a furniture designer, author, educator and lecturer. He has been a national spokesperson for the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID), has appeared on the A&E series *America's Castles*, the PBS series *Mansions and Monuments*, as well as the Design Life Network, Editor-At-Large, High Point Market TV, and with Design Tourist. His work has been published in *Verandah*, *House Beautiful*, *Elle Decor*, *The Washington Post*, *Southern Accents*, *Traditional Home*, *Hotel Design*, *Home & Design* and many others. A Style Spotter and Instagram Tastemaker at recent High Point Markets, he is the creator and editor of *The Art of Fine Living*, a blog advocating fine design as elemental to our lives.

Gary is on the board of directors of the Bienenstock Furniture Library in High Point. He also makes time for his "day job" as vice president of Hospitality with the design firm Baskervill working with a team of over 40 designers.

Design Influences

Considering Inman's wide range of educational pursuits, we asked who and what influence his work. "In terms of people," he replied, "there are probably three or four people that have had an enormous impact on the way I think about design. My mentor, Lucien Therrian, has definitely had a lasting influence, along with Andrea Palladio and Thomas Jefferson because of their disciplined intellects, and French Art Deco designer Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann. Every piece I design, even if the goal is to design a very modern piece, has to have a foundation of proportion and symmetry. Those kinds of bones of design are still there, coming through the classical tradition.

"And from the fashion side, Coco Chanel has been a tremendous inspiration. Like Palladio, everything with her is balanced and harmonious. It's edited down to the necessary essence of the design. There's not a lot of fluff or frivolity with Chanel, just a clear statement, which is why her style has prospered and survived for so long.



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Inman says retailers should make an effort to display art and architectural elements to differentiate stores regionally. Pictured is artist Brandie Grogan's mosaic-style piece, which Kalisher showed as part of a curated art package for the Kingsmill Conference Center near Jamestown, VA. The piece reflects Colonial Jamestown's nearly 400-year history of glass making.

"When I travel I look for interesting buildings, museums, and historic houses to tour. I incorporate a lot of art and architectural history into what I do. Film and fashion are also very powerful influences. Fashion shapes people's taste... it's there all the time. We see it in magazines, on blogs, social media, and in film. Even if they aren't intentionally following fashion, people are still exposed to it. They see what celebrities wear on award shows, and it leads the trends in home furnishings design. This year, for example, at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute Ball, it was interesting to see the big theme of the evening was silver and metallics. Copper has mostly come and gone, and brass has had its heyday again. But silver was the big story and that's going to translate into home furnishings in interesting ways."

The Retail Design Landscape

With such easy access to information, we wanted to know how that has changed how designers work. "When I came out of design school," Inman said, "I was really eager to partner

with an older designer, someone who had a proven track record and a good portfolio. I wanted to offer myself up as someone to be developed, educated, and really taught how to do design.

"Designers have traditionally been innovators and explorers, but the Internet has truncated that process. Many designers develop their entire scheme on the computer. Mill trips, antiquing, connoisseurship, working the major trade shows has waned with the new generation. Although there are exceptions here and there, for the most part, younger designers feel like they have access to all the necessary information online; that they can bring the world to their desks, and that their expertise comes from being able to use those online sources.

"The Internet changed everything. It gives my clients access to many of the same products that I am able to see when I go to market. On the retail side, brands like Williams Sonoma, Restoration Hardware, and even Pottery Barn, as well as some of the big box retailers, have really upped their design game. They've become, to a degree, competition for residential designers by offering quick design services as part of their product offering. They've hired creative people to manage their online presence, their cataloging, so that everything looks lifestyle oriented. In addition, they've added a lot more in terms of design content, when compared to even five years ago. The big change for our industry is that these huge retailers are bringing good design to consumers at all different economic levels. And these designs follow current trends."

What Consumers Want

Since the Internet is so efficient at broadcasting style trends, Furniture World wanted to know if there has been a shift in what consumers want. "Absolutely," Inman replied without reservation. "Today's home furnishings consumers want something that feels unique, individual, and personal. This presents a real challenge for furniture designers and manufacturers who have their own vision for a collection. There has to be a starting place.

"Pieces are created to have a certain look, convey beauty, and serve certain functions – but consumers want to be able to tweak things in a thousand different ways. Some manufacturers, such as Hickory Chair, have been able to respond to this desire, embrace it, and make it one of their strengths by offering unlimited finishes, the ability

"Brands like Williams Sonoma, Restoration Hardware, and even Pottery Barn...

have become, to a degree, competition for residential designers by offering quick design services."

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“No matter the specific style they end up choosing, they’re looking for ways to have a unique experience of their life, whether it’s the way they’re dressing, or the way they’re traveling, or how they’re decorating their homes.”

to change sizes, colors, and use the customer’s own hardware and fabrics. There is a lot more customization than there’s ever been before in my career. In the past, major manufacturers introduced collections that could stay in their lines for multiple seasons.

“Today people seem to have a yearning to define their personal brand, to craft their identity. I believe it’s a reaction to a feeling of same-

ness that’s been brought about by technology. Even with the younger generation, I hear it over, and over again. No matter the specific style they end up choosing, they’re looking for ways to have a unique experience of their life, whether it’s the way they’re dressing, or the way they’re traveling, or how they’re decorating their homes. They want to feel like individuals, and with so much connectivity and so much sameness, it is very hard to do that.

“The trend, especially for younger consumers, is that they don’t want anything that feels contrived, planned, or is too much like a collection, or suite. Those attributes make it harder for them to feel like they are crafting their lives in a unique, creative and esoteric way. It is important for the industry to know that is their perception.

“Consumers today have more eclectic preferences; they want to look

well-traveled and cultivated. Perhaps words like ‘collected’ and ‘curated’ are overused, but they do capture the aspiration. The impact on the furniture business has been profound. Collections have to appear less coordinated – there is a penchant for the quirky and unique – but the issue is that furniture companies need to have core SKUs that drive their revenue. I believe the secret is to offer many finish options, allowing a high degree of customization in terms of color, scale, and even hardware. The struggle for ‘individuality’ in an over-connected world cannot be overstated.

Gary says that his work designing boutique hotels for major hotel brands reflects residential design in that consumers are looking for the “unique, the storied, the experiential.” Pictured below is a guest room designed for a luxury lifestyle brand. It includes local art and furnishings that reflect the trend toward regionalism.

Using Social Media

Having heard how the Internet allows for easy dissemination of styles and designs, Furniture World asked





Mr. Inman how this visibility has informed his web presence. "The biggest change I have noticed is the impact social media has had on the interview process. Over the past three years, I never encounter a client that does not have a sense of knowing me and my design process. With so much content readily available, clients have already shaped their opinions before we meet. For the most part it is positive, though some clients can feel somewhat intimidated at first.

"Online archives, like Pinterest, have benefited the process of creating concept studies. I have 70,000 pins that I use constantly and share with colleagues and clients. My blog, The Art of Fine

Living, forces me to focus ideas and share insights with potential clients. I find it changes the dynamics of interviews. The blog is a great brand-building tool, and for someone who enjoys panels and lectures, it is a wonderful way to get your point of view in front of people.

"Social media is a way for all of us to earn credibility. Stores like Serena and Lily, who do a big online business, as well as having five brick and mortar locations, do such a good job of telling their story that it's easy to get a real sense of what they are about. Customers feel like they know these women personally. The secret to doing this effectively is always about creating content

The Carrie Wardrobe and the Cary Gentleman's chest are great examples of story telling of the type that can be used by home furnishings retailers. The "Carrie" was inspired by Sarah Jessica Parker's character, Carrie Bradshaw from the popular series, "Sex in the City". The "Cary Gentleman's Chest" is inspired by Cary Grant and is all about the sartorial art of dressing the man. Gary wrote a blog about these pieces at www.garyinman.com. The text also tells a back story about his own house, its architecture and his own practical need to design these pieces.

"Retailers must create context

and a coherent narrative to help consumers translate what they see in the showroom to their lifestyle, thereby improving sales."

and context.

"We've noticed in our own social networking around architecture and hotels, that people love it when we share our process, our back-story with them. They, in turn, share the information with their social media networks and make comments. People seem to connect to that kind of information on a personal level. We might post sketches and talk about a current project that we're excited about. It becomes a driver of enthusiasm and interest in our firm and our website.

"People are hungry for a story. That's the power of social media. It provides a platform to share your story free of charge. And all you have to do is make the time to share interesting content. The return will be so much larger than expected."

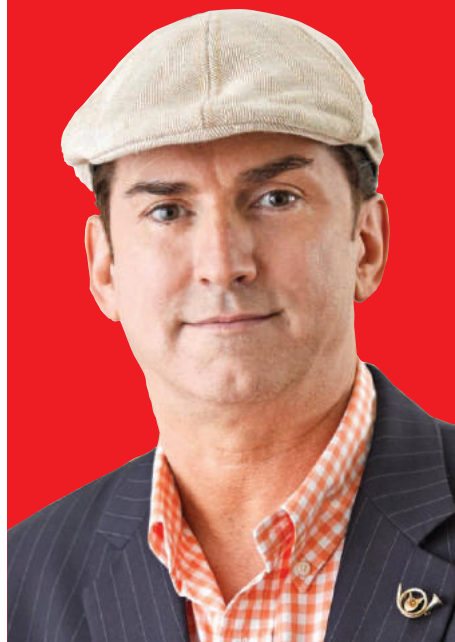
Skillful Communication

Furniture World wondered about how the furniture industry could com-

municate how the furnishings we sell address the aspirations, lifestyle, and needs of the consumer. "Our industry can do a much better job of telling stories about the collections and pieces they sell," Inman responded. "People like to share stories, both in person and via social media, about what they are thinking, about travel, why they choose one hotel over another, or this car, or that piece of clothing. There are motivations behind all of these choices, and we should be creating stories, vignettes, and tapping into lifestyles that customers can aspire to. Retailers must create context and a coherent narrative to help consumers translate what they see in the showroom to their lifestyle, thereby improving sales.

"I encourage retailers to hire legitimate designers to round out their teams. Designers bring a skill-set that is not necessarily found in sales staff. Retailers then have an opportunity to build a story around the persona and body of work of a designer. They can

At right, images from Inman's Serenity and Tranquility rooms designed when he was a Principal with Glavé & Holmes Architecture. He says, "Life can be difficult. People are looking for ways to mitigate that, whether it's yoga and meditation, or creating a space that calms, quiets and heals. My work tends to address this need."





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John Thomas Furniture)

"...lots of new types of plaids now, and florals are back in a huge way. On the surface that's surprising, but they're being done in a fresh way."

create their own 'celebrities' much the way restaurants benefit from 'celebrity chefs' and engage those designers to help sell product and add value to the store's brand.

"That being said, there are far too many bad collections by 'celebrities' who have no credentials or even marketable taste. It is the worst thing we can do to the credibility of

our industry. We should reward real designers with opportunities and we should never sacrifice our standards for quality design.

"The customer who is looking for furnishings with a dynamic, energized, and youthful feel, can be attracted through skillful visual merchandising, branding, and advertising. This must be reflected in the way products and collections are described in print and online, as well as how sales associates talk about these items. All the elements must work together to create an experiential sense that says to consumers, 'This is who I am, this is who I want to be.'

"Manufacturers, too, can benefit from forming relationships with furniture designers by shar-

ing sales reports, consumer feedback, and production issues or obstacles so the product designer can mitigate these forces through thoughtful design. It is very easy to design in a vacuum, thinking only of aesthetics and trends. Manufacturers can help couch the relationship in reality. Communication is key!

"A dynamic interactive communication matrix is the greatest opportunity. Understanding consumer behavior, desires, fears, and responding in a timely and respectful manner will assure longevity and profitability. Hotels have pioneered this effort in recent years and have teams that are watching guest comments in real time. It affords hotels and resorts the chance to correct a problem, assure a positive review and recommendations to other travelers. Although furniture production cycles are much longer, this same process needs to occur."

Tell Furnishings Stories

We were intrigued with a quote of Mr. Inman's: "Great design should convey the story of the person living in the space. Layers of meaning is always exciting." We wanted to know how

Trends: Florals

Inman says that florals are back, being done in a fresh way with "a lot more negative background, larger scale images floating on pure, clean backgrounds."

Images compliments of Into the Garden by Madcap Cottage for Robert Allen @ Home.



Furniture World readers could think about this from a product selection, messaging, and visual display point of view.

"Retailers need to present a story and a context for furniture and accessory items," Inman replied. "This is not terribly difficult to do today with advances in customized interior graphics. Do it right and suddenly you've created a feeling, an aspiration, a story that resonates with many people who want to think that what is presented represents the lifestyle they're leading. And they're going to be inclined to purchase and to buy into that."

"The way designers, manufacturers and retailers craft stories around furnishings is incredibly important, and helps to make customers believe that they are looking at something that is more than just a sofa or credenza. That's why every piece I design has a name, a little persona or story. It's something that people like and remember. The art of story-telling can transcend function and cost. There are intangible qualities that can have a profound effect on how people feel about a piece or a design."

"Retailers should be looking for ways to create that vision. Case in point: retailers who visited Baker Furniture at the last High Point Market saw the Jean-Louis Deniot Collection – an immersive environment. Visitors entered his part of the showroom through a long tunnel. It felt almost like being born again; emerging on the other side into a space entirely driven by his design aesthetic and world view. The display told a story that brought together culture, dance, music, and furnishings. It suggested a lifestyle many would aspire to. If I were a retailer, and had the capacity to do it, I would want to figure out a way to create immersive

environments like this in order to get consumers engaged and excited.

"Louis Shanks Fine Home Furnishings in Austin, Texas has done an excellent job in this regard. As customers move through that store, they have different experiences. Management understands their target customers and has created areas geared toward these people, with a focus on age brackets, lifestyles and housing situations."

"Home furnishings retailers could benefit by sharing their back stories because people are fascinated by the back-story and by process. I have begun to share images of concept boards and sketches on current projects that always create a dialogue with friends, colleagues, and poten-

tial clients. I recently won a commission because the client read my blog and loved 'my passion.' They knew they wanted someone like that to create their home. I always find kindred spirits when I share a lecture, write an article or a blog, or share images on Pinterest and Instagram. Even very simple things, such as throwing down a stack of wallpapers that just arrived and writing a clever sentence in an Instagram post takes little time, but furthers the story."

What Can Retailers Learn From Boutique Hotels

We invited Mr. Inman to compare what is happening with consumers



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"Trends are not authentic

unless they truly resonate. Using family heirlooms, treasures collected when traveling, local or regional art, and favorite colors, textures and lines are the keys designers and retailers can use to help create a very personal home."

who are looking to furnish their homes and his work designing furnishings for hotels on the commercial side of his business. "About 10 percent of my work is high-end residential design," he responded. "At Baskervill, we do a tremendous amount of work for hotels and resorts, which makes up most of the rest of the business that I'm involved with.

"All the major hotel brands are looking for boutique properties. They are also responding to a consumer desire for the unique, the storied, the experiential. In that regard, there are definite overlaps with what consumers are looking for in terms of lifestyle and the process of entertaining. In some regards, hospitality offers more freedom, particularly boutique design. Hotels are moving faster than they ever have before, with designs being on-trend or leading trends. Because hotels have to commit to an aesthetic for five to seven years, they do a lot of research, working with firms like Baskervill, to create concepts. Marriott's AC Hotels and Moxy Hotels are two of the new lifestyle-brands that are doing very well.

"Residential clients expect to get longer use from their investment in home furnishings, but influence does flow in both directions. With the paradigm shift to 'Lifestyle' hotels, design tends to be at the forefront. Theatricality, lighting effects, dramatic color stories, curated art packages are some ways to add layers of meaning to the experience of a great hotel."

Design Philosophy

Given the tall order of creating the feel of bespoke furnishings, we wondered about Inman's design philosophy. He answered succinctly, "I try to make everything I design reflect the grace and tranquility I aspire to find in my own life. That's true whether a design is for a hotel, furniture collection, accessories, lighting or rugs. I am an advocate of relaxed elegance using classical principals of scale and proportion, fashion colors and textures. I believe that we are all looking for serenity, healing, and ease of living. Formality and complicated entertaining simply don't work today.

"Many furniture buyers are looking to create an oasis – a serene, nurturing place. Hotel guests are looking for a similar experience when they travel or vacation. Life can be difficult. People are looking for ways to mitigate that, whether it's yoga and meditation, or creating a space that calms, quiets and heals. My work tends to address this need."

Style And Merchandising Trends

We were eager to know how Mr. Inman saw styles in home furnishings developing. He began by talking about the consumer. "A great consumer shift is underway. As Baby Boomers address the physical changes that come with aging, they are downsizing,

right sizing, and reevaluating their lifestyles. Millennials, on the other hand, are just wired differently and tend to value experience over material luxury. They don't want to live in big houses like their parents. I believe that we are going to see tremendous changes in storage systems, automation as a way to move and access furniture, and customized ergonomics in seating and sleeping."

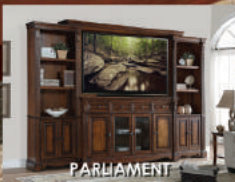
Regionalism: "I have noticed a growing interest in regionalism. Retailers primarily buy from companies that manufacture goods produced in Asia. There are long lead times that work against a need for local and authentic expression. Paying attention to this trend has fundamentally changed the way we're working on the hotel side of our business, because no one wants to take a big-box approach anymore. They want something that feels personalized to their location. That's been a big issue for hotels to come to terms with. It's probably harder for major furniture manufacturers to do that because they are often forced to commit to whole collections.

"In the past I've told consumers to listen to their own inner voice – nothing works better than authenticity. Consumers should follow their own taste and lifestyle in making design choices. Trends are not authentic unless they truly resonate. Family heirlooms, treasures collected when traveling, local or regional art, and favorite colors, textures and lines are the key s designers and retailers can use to help

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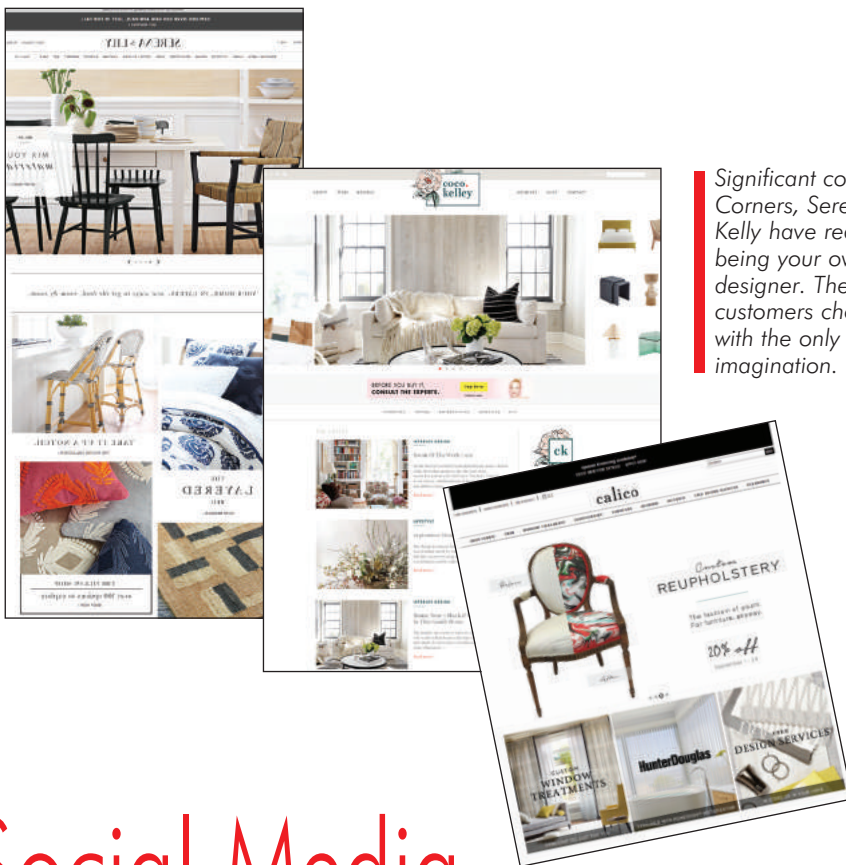


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Significant companies like Calico Corners, Serena and Lily, and Coco Kelly have really embraced the idea of being your own decorator, your own designer. They are all about giving customers choices and flexibility, with the only limitation being their imagination.

"Social Media

is a way for all of us to earn credibility. Stores like Serena and Lily, who do a big online business, as well as having five brick and mortar locations, do such a good job of telling their story that it's easy to get a real sense of what they are about."

create a very personal home. Retailers can make an effort to pick and choose unique pieces that make sense for their brand and their customer base to address this trend."

Color: "Color is changing much faster than ever before. I can tell you that gray is the new neutral, and that there is a big anti-beige trend. Blue and white are the strongest color families. Blue has been holding strong for much longer than anyone ever thought it would. Blue has a huge positive emotional effect on people. Colors like red, pink, and orange typically are not going to become dominant colors – they're accents."

"I think there's an awful lot of fluff published and written about color. I've become more skeptical of those color trend reports than I used to be."

"I go to all the markets, read every fashion magazine and believe that if Furniture World readers pay attention to what's happening in fashion, they will have a good idea where color sensibilities are trending. Home furnishings follow those trends to some extent. If retailers know the neutral and dominant base colors and have a sense of how to incorporate interesting accents, they will have a good idea of what customers will be buying."

Texture: "Texture has become huge,

in both residential home furnishings and hotel design. People want fabrics that are tactile, that feel and look luxurious. Velvet has had a tremendous comeback. We are using thousands and thousands of yards of all different types of velvets – burnout velvets, cut velvets, embossed velvets. They feel luxurious, have a nap and a sheen that picks up the light."

Pattern: "Paisley is having a resurgence. I'm often surprised at what starts to show up in the trends. There are lots of new types of plaids now, and florals are back in a huge way. On the surface that's surprising, but they're being done in a fresh way. There is a lot more negative background, larger scale images floating on pure, clean backgrounds. Patterns have been modernized to fit with the current time."

Flexibility: "Another big trend we see is furniture pieces that are flexible in their purpose and have innovative storage options. Some of the designs being developed are actually quite brilliant. Automated furniture can convert a room from a bedroom to a studio space or sitting space. I think this trend might follow the path we saw with communication apps like Twitter. When it first came along, there were early adapters, but it seemed a little silly, and most people thought it wasn't going to go anywhere. And then, suddenly, it became a phenomenon. I



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"Blue and white are the strongest color families. Paisley is having a resurgence and Velvet has had a tremendous comeback."

think there's going to be a shift in that direction, not only because of young people, but also Baby Boomers who are downsizing and want to live a simpler life with fewer, easier-to-maintain possessions. For people with physical limitations, I think that there will be more furniture that includes adaptive technology to meet their needs."

being your own decorator, your own designer. They are all about giving customers choices and flexibility, with the only limitation being their imagination."

Sustainability: "On the horizon is greater emphasis on sustainability, design with a back story – where, who and even why."

Visual Merchandising: "Visual merchandising has never been more important than now. If I were a retailer, I would have a good team of visual merchandisers who stay on top of what's happening. They would be thinking of ways to create vignettes to display what people are seeing in blogs, magazines, and films. That way, when consumers come into the store they could see that the store is in the fashion business and is on top of the trends. Clever visual merchandisers can really breathe new life into slow-moving merchandise. There are plenty of ways to do a quick re-boot of displays, like changing up wall colors to give the floor a new look and a fresh start."

Customization: "The more manufacturers can build customization into their design, the better. Production times vary, and there is frustration on the part of designers when new introductions take six months to ship to their clients. And few clients are willing to wait that long."

"On the manufacturing side, almost everyone that I work with now, Hickory Chair, Mitchell Gold, Century, Baker, are providing multiple choices within a given range. Technologies, such as digital printing on fabrics, is something we are doing on the hotel side. Almost any pattern that we want can be printed digitally and in a cost-effective way. We will see more of that on the residential furniture side as well. For carpet companies, there's a lot more flexibility than there's ever been."

"Significant companies like Calico Corners, Serena and Lily, and Coco Kelly have really embraced the idea of

Current Projects

Finally, Furniture World asked about Inman's current projects. "Right now," he answered intriguingly, "I am working on a large country estate and a luxury resort, plus an exciting project on the residential design side, but I can't say more about that right now." We are looking forward to it.

For more about Gary Inman visit www.garyinman.com.

Pictured (top) is a wallpaper pattern called Medallion Paisley, a modern take on a paisley using a traditional layout. The Bellwood Bench (middle) is upholstered in Mykonos Key, a signature Greek Key pattern and the Sonoma Headboard (bottom) is upholstered in a bold, geometric pattern. Images compliments of Thibaut Wallpaper, Fabrics & Furniture.





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I OBJECT!

Responding correctly to customer objections is a powerful & productive sales skill.

by David Benbow

// **F**or many Retail Sales Associates customer objections are the most dreaded part of the sales job."

The RSA who hates and fears objections and allows objections to foil his presentation will have a very short and unhappy career in sales.

This article is the first in a series on the subject of how retailers can and should handle objections to any purchase, especially in the mattress department. Today, we'll talk about objections conceptually, and discuss a couple of common objections in the last few paragraphs. In upcoming articles, we'll talk in more detail about specific objections and suggestions as to how to handle them.

What Do We Mean By "Objections?"

Let's start by looking up the word "objection" in the dictionary. An easy, short definition goes like this: "an expression of opposition, disapproval, disagreement, or dislike." Customer objections come in all shapes, forms and flavors. In this article, we will analyze types of customer objections, when they happen, why they happen, and how the RSA can actually use customer objections to help make the sale.

Most of us have probably seen TV

courtroom dramas where some prosecuting attorney examines a witness using outrageous lines of questioning and suddenly the opposing attorney jumps up indignantly and protests to the judge, "I object, your honor!" Then the judge decides which lawyer is right and which is wrong.

Something similar frequently happens in a sales encounter between RSA and customer. Except in the sales encounter, the objection has no arbitrator like the judge. In the sales "court," the RSA has to be the judge. The RSA must be able to interpret and decide, "Did I hear or see an objection?" Some objections are obvious, some are not. Some objections are only perceived through the RSA's interpretation of the customer's facial expressions or body language. The professional RSA must constantly monitor the attitude of the customer and observe when the customer is making an overt or even covert objection to the proceedings.

In fact, we will find that recognizing, interpreting and understanding objections; then responding correctly and professionally is one of the most powerful and productive sales skills any RSA can acquire and cultivate. This skill can also be among the most difficult to attain. And, how do you

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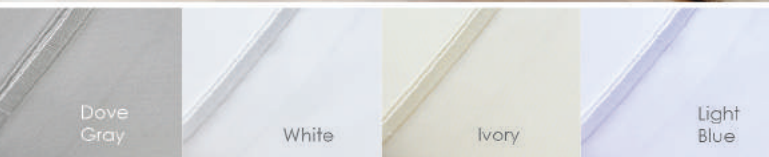
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"John F. Lawhon said,
objections should be regarded as requests for more information. Peter Marino suggested that many common objections should be considered as buying signals."

practice handling objections? Nobody said it was easy.

Why Do Objections Happen?

Many sales trainers and sales experts believe that the number of objections that an RSA will encounter in a sales presentation is inversely proportional to how good a job he did in the Greeting, Qualifying, Selection and Presentation Steps of the Sale. Let's break this down and see what that means in plain English.

John F. Lawhon, in his book *Selling Retail*, opined that if the RSA did a masterful job of (1) Greeting (2) Qualifying (3) Selecting and (4) Presenting, the RSA would only rarely get an objection from the customer in the closing step. After all, if you know exactly what the customer needs and

wants, and you have the product in your store that will satisfy those needs, what objection could the customer possibly make?

Of course, we all know that things rarely work that easily, but the following point is well made; the better the RSA does his job in ALL steps of the sale, the fewer serious objections will be expressed by the customer. (Note: Refer to *Furniture World's* on-line archives for my previous articles on the first four Steps of the Sale.)

When Do Most Objections Occur?

Objections can happen any time in the sales process. Witness this common occurrence. Customer walks in the front door.

RSA: "How can we help you today?"

Customer (or "up", in this case): "I'm just looking."

That's an objection, isn't it? (Peter Marino, in his book *Winning Bragging Rights*, went into detail about how the "I'm just looking" response is also a "buying signal.")

Most of the time, however, objections will occur during the closing sequence. The closing sequence is when the RSA begins to press the customer, in a pleasant way, of course, to make a decision. Many customers resist the pressure to make a decision, especially when it means spending hard-earned money. This resistance becomes fertile ground for objections to spring up.

What Do Objections Really Mean?

To invoke John F. Lawhon again, he said "objections should be regarded as requests for more information." Peter Marino suggested that many common objections should be considered as buying signals.

Some sales trainers might not completely agree with either of these statements, but the professional RSA is wise to think of objections as something more than stumbling blocks ruining every sales opportunity.

Most customer objections are devices to slow down the sales process; to relieve the pressure that an RSA is exerting to make the sale; to avoid making a decision, etc. Some objections, however, are real. The RSA must learn which are real and which are just delays or stalls.

Here are some examples of real objections:

- "We don't have any money or credit."
- "We can't take delivery until we close on our new house."
- "The beds you are showing me are too hard."
- "A king size bed will not go up the staircase in my house."
- "My living room is too small for a big sofa and two end tables."

These people probably really mean what they say. The RSA is wise to respect real objections.

Of course, the RSA is wise to also respect made up objections and

"The professional RSA must constantly monitor the attitude of the customer and observe when the customer is making an overt or even covert objection."



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"Of course, the RSA is wise to also respect made up objections and should never dismiss or ridicule any objection."

should never dismiss or ridicule any objection.

Not All Objections Are Alike

Objections can come in two basic varieties; voiced and unvoiced. Within these two basic varieties, there are several subdivisions. Right now, let's look at some unvoiced objections.

I'm not a psychologist, so what you are reading here are my no-so-scholarly observations and opinions. According to what I have observed, unvoiced objections primarily fall into two basic sub-divisions; body language and facial expressions. Both of these are rich sources of; buying signals and or objections. The alert RSA

must be on the lookout for both. As already mentioned above, objections can be considered as "requests for more information," and/or "buying signals."

A common unvoiced objection is what I refer to as the "hesitation," or "delay," or "stall." The customer just will not give a response, positive or negative, to the RSA. There can be many reasons for the customer's attitude. He/she might just be trying to slow down an aggressive RSA. He might be just thinking about it. Who knows? One way to handle this would be for the RSA to slow down, and begin to re-qualify or probe the customer's mind. Ask more questions. If you can't figure out what the customer is thinking, ask him or her, in an inter-

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Let me make a brief point about the RSA asking questions. Do not be afraid to pose questions to the "up" at any stage of the sales process. We covered probing and questions in the Qualifying Step of the Sale, but, in an article about Objections, it bears repeating. Any and all serious Objections, either verbal or non-verbal, must be searched out by the RSA, and the only way I know of to search out the real meaning of Objections is to ask more questions. So, you could say, any Objection by the customer automatically puts the RSA back into the Qualifying step. In a way, you could say the sales process is like a dance. It consists of several steps, many of which are repeated over and over, as needed.

Can The RSA Ever Object?

Everyone in sales seems to think

"A common unvoiced objection is what I refer to as the hesitation or delay or stall. **The customer just will not give a response, positive or negative, to the RSA.**"

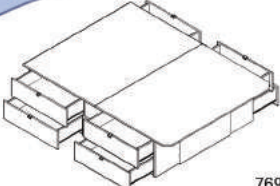
that objections are the sole province of the customer. I beg to differ. In my career as a salesman, I have objected to customer behavior on quite a number of occasions. When I say "customer behavior," I'm not necessarily referring to grown-ups jumping on the beds, although I have seen that, as well. I will give one example of a legitimate RSA objection that happened to me many years ago in a sleep shop in Southern California. I was working the

floor by myself one early afternoon. A couple came in to look at a new mattress. They were wrapped up in each other to the point where I was having trouble getting their attention. They were walking around, pushing on beds, giggling, and barely slowing down as they cruised each aisle of the showroom. Needless to say, I did not have control of the sale, and I was starting to get a little annoyed. Finally, as they went down the last aisle and



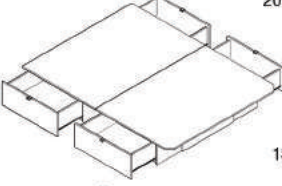
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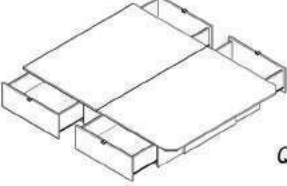
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"Don't let the up bully you,

It's your store, after all. Sometimes, you have to object to get their attention.
Gain control."

approached the door, the man, not even looking at me, tossed me the ultimate objection; "Well, obviously, your prices are too high. We're going to look somewhere else." It wasn't easy to control my irritation, but I thought to myself, "I've got nothing to lose here. I'm not going to let this guy get away with this without some kind of fight. I'm going to hit back with my own objection!"

So I said, "How would you know what our prices are? You haven't listened to a word I've said since you walked in the door. If you'd paid any attention at all, you would have heard that we guarantee the best price. Now, do you need a mattress or not? If you do, then listen to me for a minute and we'll find one for you." Ten minutes later, they walked out the door with receipt in hand, and we delivered them a queen set that night.

My point is this. Don't let the up bully you. It's your store, after all. Sometimes, you have to "object" to get their attention. Gain control. When the RSA has control of the sale, the customer will have a lot fewer objections.

What the guy in the above story said, essentially, was; "We're leaving. You have high prices. We're not coming back." As an RSA, I had two choices. Let him walk, and be angry and frustrated the rest of the day, or challenge him with my own objection, make the sale, and write about it in Furniture World twenty-five years later.

Interpreting Objections

A lot of objections need interpre-

tation. The customer's objection may have some hidden meaning or no meaning at all. Not all objections can be taken literally. The customer may just be desperate for a way out of an uncomfortable situation. For any and all objections, the RSA must figure out what the customer really means. In fact, many lost sales can be chalked up to the RSA's failure to truly understand a customer's objection. The best way to really understand the customer's objection is to acknowledge the objection (meaning: repeat it back to the customer) and ask for clarification.

Acknowledging Objections

Most objections need to be acknowledged by the RSA. Notice that I said "most." If the customer says, "We want to look around some more," what does the RSA do? Stand there mute, hand them his card, and wave bye-bye? That's what a lot of RSAs do. That's why there is such great opportunity for the professional RSA who really is good at his job. Most of your competition is handing out cards, waving good-bye.

Acknowledging the customer's objection is often nothing more than (1) repeating the objection back to the customer, so that the customer knows you understood the objection and (2) indirectly asking the customer what is his (real) reason for the objection. All this should be done tactfully and inoffensively, of course.

For example, an RSA's possible response to the above objection might go like this; "I think it is a good idea to be thorough when looking for some-

thing as important as a new mattress set. Let me ask you this. I know you said you like the feel and the price of the set I showed you here. Have you shopped anywhere else before you came here?" Wait for the answer. He's not leaving yet. You are finding out more information. If he's already shopped several places and likes your deal the best, you may already have everything you need to close the sale. If yours is the first store he's shopped, then there is another, different dialogue to follow to convince him that there is no need to shop further. Suggest to him that he's already found the deal he's looking for.

To review: The RSA acknowledged his need to be thorough (look around some more.) Then, the RSA raised the question of "Why is it really necessary to look around some more?" "Haven't you found a bed you like at a price you are satisfied with?" The implied question is, "What more are you hoping to find?" In other words, if I may quote some old Bob Dylan lyr-

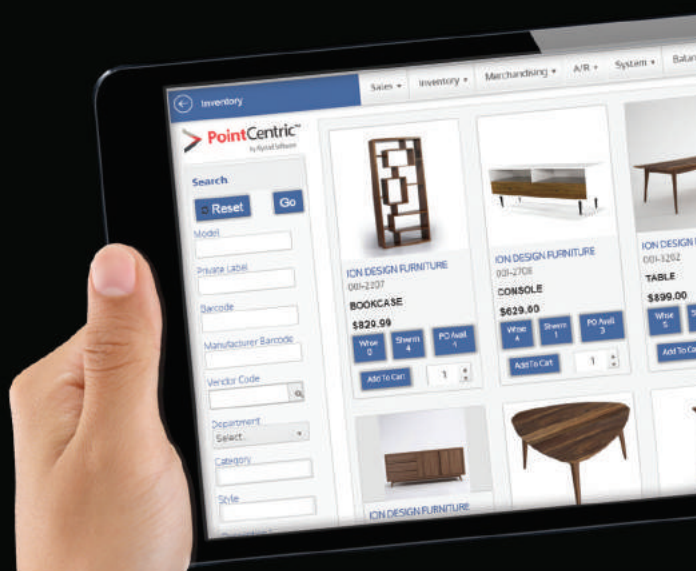
"If the customer says, 'We want to look around some more,' what does the RSA do? Stand there mute, hand them his card, and wave bye-bye?"

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I OBJECT!

ics, “Why wait any longer for the one you love, when he’s standing in front of you?” (Incidentally, in that song, Bob Dylan happened to be talking about mattresses and furniture.)

Not all objections need to be acknowledged; most do, but not all. Some un-serious, flippant, casual, even insulting remarks from the customer can probably be ignored. In fact, some are better ignored than responded to.

An Objection We Hear Every Day: “I’m Just Looking.”

These are probably the most often repeated three words heard between the walls of home furnishings establishments. Why do we so often hear, “I’m just looking?” I’d like to suggest that those three words are the logical response to the greeting, “May I help you?” A weak greeting earns a weak response and objection. Too often the weak greeting is also followed by silence from the RSA. The up then walks around the store for a few minutes, walks out (maybe with a card), and then goes on her way, with nobody in the store any wiser as to why she walked in to begin with.

Maybe a better greeting would have drawn a better response. For more information on the Meet and Greet, see my article on that subject in the Furniture World on-line archives.

Many customers, however, will respond with “I’m just looking,” no matter how good the RSA’s greeting is. What do you do, then?

I refer to this kind of customer as the Aloof Customer. There is a chapter in my book, *How to Win the Battle For Mattress Sales, The Bed Seller’s Manual* on an effective way to answer this response.

Let’s analyze “I’m just looking” from both Lawhon’s and Marino’s perspectives.

Mr. Lawhon said objections were requests for more information. Is “I’m just looking” a request for more information? Although not phrased that way, certainly the RSA could hear it that way. She’s looking for something. She may know what she’s looking for. She may not. Even if she has an idea of what she wants, she may not know where to find it. Even though she did not request it in so many words, the customer clearly needs and wants more information.

Peter Marino said objections should be considered as “buying signals.”

Most sales trainers like to be a lot more specific about buying signals than merely a statement of “I’m just looking.” However, as Dr. Marino points out, the very fact that she is in the store at all is a buying signal.

So, whether request for information or buying signal, the mute RSA is pretty useless, is he not?

What to do, then? Have you ever noticed that a lot of public places, such as museums, shopping malls, hotels, etc., have information and/or reception desks? Most furniture stores do not. If the furniture store had a reception area, do you think many first time customers might approach the receptionist to get more information about the store before trekking the acres of showroom floor? Now, I’m not suggesting reception desks for stores. What I’m suggesting is that the

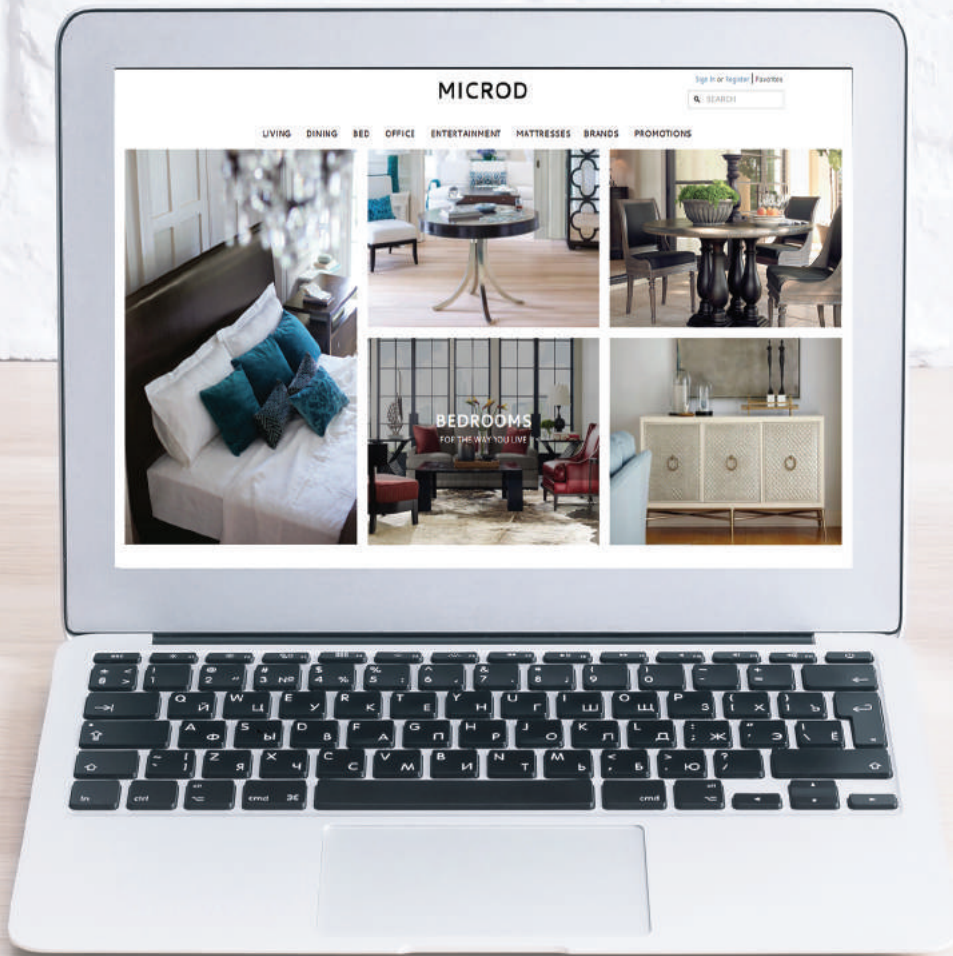
“Why do we so often hear, ‘I’m just looking?’ I’d like to suggest that those three words are the logical response to the greeting, ‘May I help you?’ A weak greeting earns a weak response and objection.”



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CUSTOMER OBJECTIONS

greeting RSA, if he has failed to get the customer's attention with a strong greeting, might respond to the "I'm just looking" by becoming an acting receptionist or information assistant. For example:

RSA: "How are you today, how can we

help you?"

Up: "I'm just looking."

RSA: "Thanks for coming in. We've got a lot to look at. Is this your first time in the store?"

Up: "Yes." (or, "No.")

RSA: "This is a big store and they've been re-merchandising a lot of the store, so it may look different from the last time you were in (if it's not your first visit.) We also have a lot of new furniture that just came in. Sometimes things are hard to find. If you'll give me an idea of what you are thinking about, I'll be happy to take you there, and I can answer any questions along the way. We also have some great bargains in our clearance center in the back of the store."

Re-word it however you like, but the point is to be friendly and helpful and try to get acquainted with the customer and gain control of the sale. Notice too that the RSA tried to redeem himself by invoking a couple of "general

benefit statements," which he failed to do with his weak greeting.

Summary

In the next installment of this series, we will list and discuss some of the most commonly heard customer objections.

Objections are a naturally occurring part of the sale. They happen all the time; to every RSA, no matter how old or young. They happen to grizzled veterans and rookies alike.

Learn how to handle them. Do not let objections de-rail your sale.

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

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

"Any objection by the customer automatically puts the RSA back into the Qualifying step. You could say the process is like a dance. It consists of several steps, many of which are repeated over and over, as needed."

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Best Selling DESIGN



Classy Art

Print under glass with 3" MDF scratch resistant frame and double mat. Measures 34"x40." Approximate retail \$99.00. Contact information on page 128.

Arthur W. Brown

The Nicola Wall System is available in Maple and Oak and twelve colors. Shown in Regal Style with Federal Crown. Base cabinet dimensions are 96"wide, 84"high, 18" deep. Hutches are 12" deep. Contact information on page 128.



Fashion Bed

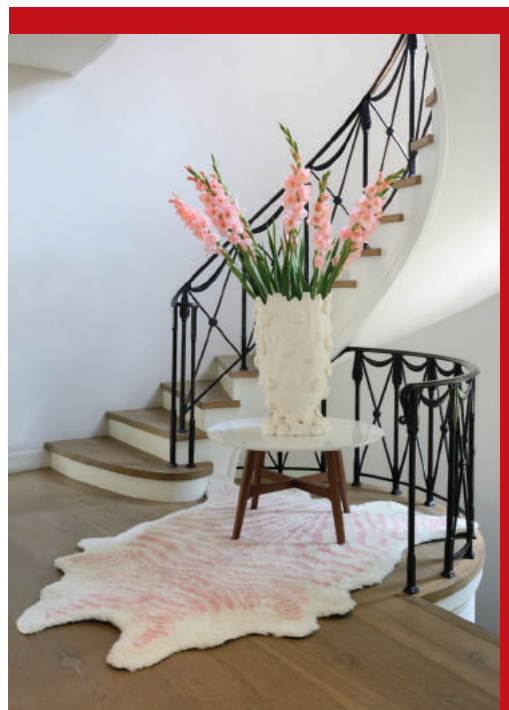
The Oliver bed offers contemporary styling and convenient storage all in one piece. The sleek headboard is upholstered in a Gravel Grey fabric, a great neutral for any décor. Underneath, two long side drawers provide ample room for storing items. Available in Queen, King, and California King sizes. Contact information on page 128.



Muniz

Sculpture in turquoise and violet is 27" tall. Available in other color combinations.

Contact information on page 128.



Momeni

The Domesticated Pink Zebra rug is part of the new Novogratz by Momeni collaboration. Hand tufted of soft polyester, the design draws inspiration from the iconic Wes Anderson style of soft pastels and animal prints.

Contact information on page 128.



Cochrane

Two tone drop leaf table and slat back chairs are available in many finishes and combinations

Contact information on page 128.

Lane Venture

The Cooper collection brings Scandinavian design to the outdoors. The weltless seat and back cushions convey a modern aesthetic. Box seat cushions are notched and tailored around the arm to secure the cushions. Tapered teak arms are complemented by the contrasting dark brown synthetic wicker.

Contact information on page 128.



Best Selling DESIGN

Nourison

Silver Cloud, a crystal clear stream in pure icy tones of grey, sand, white and slate, flows freely between rocky banks. This rug is hand tufted and woven with iridescent fibers.

Contact information on page 128.



Nouveau Concept

The AV671 comes already assembled. This 52" width promotional priced TV unit includes storage drawers and a glass door for electronic components. Available in several trendy finishes.

Contact information on page 128.



Omnia

The artfully simple silhouette of the new Pasadena sofa exemplifies sophistication and high style. Available in various configurations and a huge number of sensational cover choices.

Contact information on page 128.



Moe's

The Messinki Entertainment Unit is made of solid Mango with Brass hardware. Dimensions are 53.9" wide by 13.8" deep by 25.2" high. Contact information on page 128.



Crosley

From a full line of nostalgic electronics this turntable is a great impulse buy and a unique traffic item for furniture retailers. Contact information on page 128.

Klaussner

Music City is contemporary in design, relaxed in comfort, and stylish in its finish. A fresh new twist on today's contemporary living. Contact information on page 128.



Momeni M2

Leather Frame Mirror has a high-luster nickel finish framed with tan leather and silver hardware accents. Depth is 7". Contact information on page 128.



Best Selling

DESIGN



Bramble

The Nouveau Foyer Table features a solid wood top with ornamental hand-carvings. Available in a multitude of finishes. Contact information on page 128.



Kas Rugs

The Seville Collection of vintage traditional patterns is machine-woven in Turkey of 100% heat-set polypropylene frisee yarn, with a plush 1/2" pile. Contact information on page 128.



Zimmerman Chair

New dining group made in solid Cherry and Maple with dozens of special order finish options. Contact information on page 128.



Legends

The Storehouse Collection is crafted from various species of solids and veneers. It is finished in a Smoked Grey finish. Designed for today's electronics, its features are thoughtfully blended into the design.

Contact information on page 128.



Dimplex

The Elliotts' sculpted architectural lines are softened by a subtle curve that follows the length of the fireplace for a bold, yet elegant look. Cleverly concealed drawers provide ample storage while the Prism Series Linear Electric Fireplace provides the finishing touch.

Contact information on page 128.

Donco

Twin Tent Loft bed with slide is shown in a light espresso finish, with a blue tent kit. Made of solid Pine, it also comes in a white finish. Several other tent fabric options are available.

Contact information on page 128.



Jaipur

The Cubist Storage Unit is part of the new Urban Composition Collection of solid Mango wood with strips of reclaimed Teak and Sal wood-all on an Iron frame. Items feature shelves and working drawers useful for storage, display, as room dividers, etc.

Contact information on page 128.

Best Selling DESIGN



CordaRoy's

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

Contact information on page 128.



Capel Rugs

The colorful new Simply Gabbeh collection is hand loomed in India of 100% wool. This bold collection comes in seven uniquely designed colorways: granite, turquoise, taos blue, red clay, stucco, adobe and multi. Sizes include: 3'x 5', 5'x 8', 8'x 10', 9'x 12'. A 5'x 8' rug may retail for \$599.

Contact information on page 128.



Canadel

The Champlain Collection is inspired by early colonial craft techniques with straight-forward lines and colors that allow the beauty of the wood to shine through. The eleven step antiquing process means that no two pieces are alike.

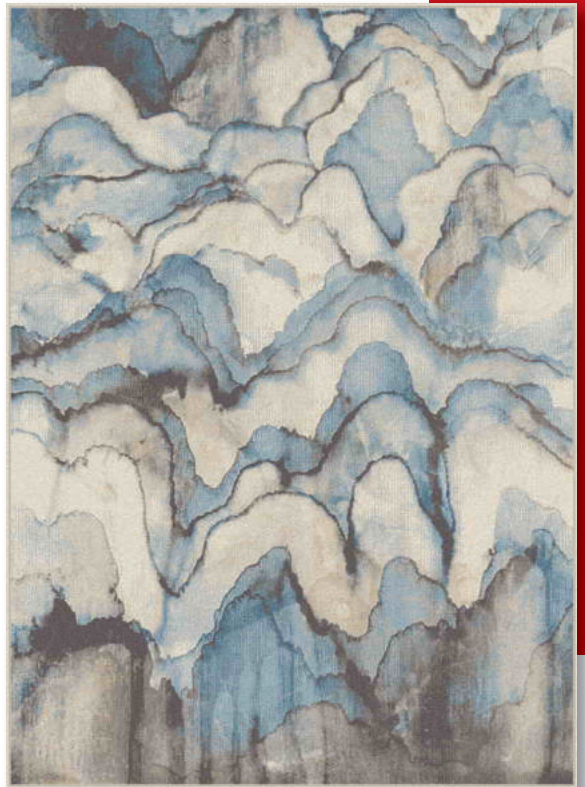
Contact information on page 128.



Surya

The Emma table lamp has a marbled mercury glass body in a contemporary bulb shape. The crisp linen drum shade brings a sophisticated, luxe look that is at once modern and timeless. Dimensions: 16"W x 26.5"H.

Contact information on page 128.



Tayse Rugs

Inspired by subtle hues from nature, this blue and gray watercolor design features marbled tones of cream, navy, charcoal, light blue, gray, and beige. Machine-made of naturally stain-resistant, ultra-soft polyester yarn, with jute backing for a substantial feel.

Contact information on page 128.



Lazzaro

Juliette, with rounded and rectangular forms, features several batches of nail head trim, used sparingly so the shapes truly shine.

Contact information on page 128.

Maxwood

The Matrix Low Loft Blue, Red, Grey Curtain Dresser. Matrix beds can be reconfigured, adjusted and added to as the child's needs change.

Contact information on page 128.



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GUERRILLA MARKETING

Sell More

Part 2: Sell more with less investment.

By Larry Mullins

There is a marketing crisis in retail furniture stores nationwide that money just can't solve.

So, What's The Issue?

Your customers are not paying attention to your marketing messages! No one is.

The Big Boxes are spending more and more for their advertising and getting less and less return. If you are attempting to follow their method of intrusive marketing, even if you have deep pockets, your ROI is also doomed to decline.

So, what is intrusive marketing? It is old-fashioned marketing. It is any kind of marketing that attempts to capture clients' attention away from whatever they might be doing. Every waking moment is seen by some business somewhere as an opportunity to interrupt a prospect and strive to capture their attention. TV and radio commercials are the most intrusive. Signs and internet spam add to the relentless assault of overpowering clutter that has made traditional consumer advertising almost worthless. So, how have the Big Boxes responded to the clutter situation? By interrupting even more! It is estimated the average consumer is exposed to at least 3,500 messages each day. Most are:

- Not anticipated.
- Unwelcome.

- Impersonal.
- Irrelevant.

Most of the money spent on creating and delivering these messages is simply a waste.

Revolutionary New Concept

If you are like most independent home furnishings retailers, you have time tested ideas about marketing home furnishings and mattresses. Most of your marketing has been, and still is intrusive. I want you to clear the decks

"Intrusive advertising is the relentless assault of overpowering clutter that has made traditional consumer advertising almost worthless."

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"With the same investment or less, you can make more money, increase market share, and have lots more fun."

of those ideas and get you to suspend disbelief while I present you with a tested and proven marketing formula that does work. I will show you how, with the same investment, or less, you can make more money, increase market share, and have lots more fun. The internet has changed everything about marketing at retail. You can now leverage the internet to use the full energy of your Hometown Advantage.

Don't worry. It won't be far out or difficult.

Enter Seth Godin & Permission Marketing

What I will attempt to do is marry what are currently the two most powerful concepts in retailing home furnishings: Jay Conrad Levinson's Guerrilla Marketing with Seth Godin's Permission Marketing. This synthesis has proven to be a "silver bullet" for furniture retailers.

Seth Godin is a leading expert, perhaps the leading expert, on the art of Permission Marketing and the author of the book: *Permission Marketing: Turning Strangers into Friends and Friends into Customers*. Jay Levinson, the father of Guerrilla Marketing, has embraced Permission Marketing, adding it to his arsenal of Guerrilla Marketing tools. Jay writes: "It changed my entire outlook about marketing and can change the beauty of your bottom line."

Permission Marketing is the modern day skill that makes the point:

"Modern technology makes it possible for customers to once again become involved in the marketing process."

How It Works at Leather by Design

Jeff Cohen is the owner and CEO of Leather by Design of Saint Augustine, Florida. I chose to interview Jeff for this article because he makes social media work with overwhelming success... greater success than any other furniture entrepreneur I know.

I came to Jeff's store for my appointment an hour before it opened. Jeff began by telling me how valuable Facebook is. "There is no downside," he said. "All you need is to make your content on your store's Facebook page have the following four characteristics."

1. Something the customer anticipates.
2. Something welcomed by the customer.
3. Something that is personal.
4. Something that is relevant to him or her.

Then Jeff opened his Facebook account to his business page. A customer's comment immediately popped up.

Brenda: "I look at that couch and

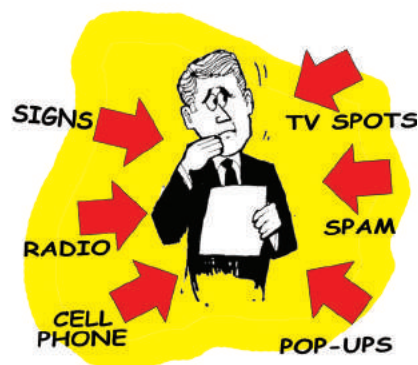
don't see any comfort the way it's made..."

I looked at Jeff. "You're going to get rid of that one?"

"Not at all," he replied. He then responded.

Leather By Design: "Brenda, I get that some 'modern' furniture looks good, but is not comfortable, but when we go to Market to choose the styles that go on our floor... COMFORT overrides everything else. The Alula is more

"It is estimated the average consumer is exposed to at least 3,500 messages each day, most of which are not anticipated, unwelcome, impersonal, irrelevant."



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comfortable for normal and smaller body types. The cushion is of medium density and the depth is not too deep. The arm may look modern but sitting there on either side, you can nest real cozy inside the arm. Not every sofa is going to be comfortable to all body types but we would love for you to come in and try the Alula or any of the other styles we feature. Brenda, since I'm a huge fan of Brenda Lee, I'll personally sing 'I'm Sorry' if I can't find

you a comfortable sofa that fits you! We love the fact that you took the time to comment!!! Thanks."

Brenda: "Lol thank you!"

Jeff responded to Brenda within minutes after she made her original comment. So, if you want to turn strangers into friends and friends into customers, this is how it is done. Simple, but you have to know your stuff. It took Jeff about five minutes to compose his reply. That's all the time it took to turn a stranger into a "fan". In that five minutes Jeff established himself (for Brenda and likely many of her friends) as a preeminent, trusted source for home furnishings information in the St. Augustine marketing area. It takes patience to develop strangers into friends and friends into customers. But new customers are worth their weight in gold. It takes Jeff about a half hour about twice a week or so to keep up content on his Facebook page. Every furniture entrepreneur has that much downtime.

"It takes a little time," Jeff said. But best of all, it can cost as little as zero. Social media is productive when you do it right."

Evidence-Based Advertising ... The New Paradigm

You have a tremendous Hometown Advantage over the big boxes. Jay Levinson: "Modern technology gives small business a blatantly unfair advantage over the big boxes because it allows them to think and act big without having to spend big. The greatest boon to Guerrilla Marketing has been the affordable, powerful, easy-to-use technology of today. I hate to use the word 'empower,' but technology definitely empowers small businesses. Technology is the game-changer that is revolutionizing small businesses. Now small business owners can dream extravagant new dreams and attain them in surprisingly brief time periods."

If you are a tech-shy independent retailer, you are needlessly throwing away your Hometown Advantage. Your most powerful secret weapon against the Big Boxes is technology. Most corporate chains employ nervous IT department fiefdoms and will not allow franchises to host their own websites, or handle their own local

"Jeff Cohen and his associates embrace the mission of helping clients achieve their goals and improve their lives. Many stores say things like that, but Jeff adds a 'secret sauce.' The secret sauce is him."

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Leather by Design's Operations Manager asked for permission to photograph the room of a client after he delivered and arranged furniture. Permission was given to post the photo to Facebook. Former clients began proudly posting photos of their own rooms from Leather by Design.

social media accounts. This is the prevailing policy, even though these same IT departments are constantly overwhelmed with other priorities and cannot help individual franchises. As a result, local Big Box franchises are helpless while savvy independents grin as they use today's simple technology to press their overwhelming Hometown Advantage. Levinson points out that modern technology is so inexpensive that you can invest for a low four-figure sum what in 1982 amounted to a medium six figure sum.

Modern technology has removed the ceiling and opened up a whole new world of opportunity for smaller businesses. Jay wrote: "Now you can connect with allies everywhere, 'being connected' has never been so low cost and yet so high in value. Guerrillas can now be online, with the power of instant email, and the enormous supremacy of the World Wide Web."

What to Do Now

It all begins with your own Facebook account of course. By this time most retailers have one and know it's free to set up and start posting. However, strongly consider "boosting" your posts. Jay Bojan's article in the July/August issue of *Furniture World* (Going Hyper-Local) noted, "Boosting a post, page or website allows companies to reach a larger audience by defining a

target audience outside of their current fans and followers, for a fee. In general, boosting is one of the most cost effective advertising techniques in use today. It costs a fraction of traditional advertising fees and is extremely effective at building audiences."

If you are like me you will need tech help setting this all up. Not necessarily by a black belt marketer, that's your job. But there are lots of young lions and lionesses around who are Facebook savvy and reasonably priced. They would love to be involved. The process of promoting your Facebook presence should never stop. Much of what you need to do is add content. (Gulp.)

Not to worry. Seth Godin suggests that product information (such as Jeff provided in his response to Brenda) is an excellent incentive to attract prospects. The trick is for you to gain permission to market to more and more of your hometown niche. Learn this trick and watch your bottom line explode. Briefly, you offer a client an enticement to accept your advertising messages. The enticement could be in the form of free information on decorating or care for leather furnishings, or perhaps membership in a special club. All you ask for in return is permission to market your goods to these people. Nothing else.

Jeff's Operations Manager, Steve Lent, photographed the room of a

client after he arranged the furniture, which Jeff promptly posted on his Facebook page. An astonishing reaction resulted. Former clients began proudly posting photos of their own rooms from Leather by Design!

Technology offers the opportunity for smaller furniture stores to gain local credibility, speed, and power in an age when local "credibility is crucial, speed is revered, and power comes from being part of a networking team that includes customers." Jay Levinson added: "If you are Guerrilla Marketing with technology you are headed in the right direction. If you are Guerrilla Marketing without technology you are not Guerrilla Marketing at all."

Don't Forget To Add Your "Secret Sauce"

There is one additional ingredient that is critical to your success. You.

You cannot delegate the culture of your company. Jeff Cohen is fanatic about customer service. Each associ-

"Credibility is crucial, speed is revered, and power comes from being part of a networking team that includes customers."

GUERRILLA MARKETING *Sell More*

ate of Leather by Design shares this passion.

Peter Drucker was arguably the greatest business genius of our era. Drucker once wrote:

"In a few hundred years, when the history of our time will be written from a long-term perspective, it is likely that the most important event historians will see is not technology, not the Internet, not e-commerce. It is an unprecedented change in the human condition. For the first time—literally—substantial and rapidly growing numbers of people have choices. For the first time, they will have to manage themselves.

And society is totally unprepared for it."

That is why you must be deeply engaged in the creation of your new Permission Marketing culture. This kind of engagement is not for timid souls. These are uncertain, difficult times. Your associates will look to you for inspiration and encouragement. You are the secret sauce that makes Permission Marketing work.

About Larry Mullins: Larry Mullins has acquired 30+ years of experience on the front lines of furniture marketing. His mainstream executive experience, his creative work with modern pro-

motion specialists, and his mastery of timeless advertising principles have established him as one of the foremost experts in home furnishings marketing. Larry's turnkey Mega-Impact programs produce results for everything from cash raising events to profitable exit strategies. His newest, Internet Leverage Strategies have achieved record-breaking increases in sales and profits in recent months.

Larry is founder and CEO of UltraSales, Inc. Call for a free, no-obligation consultation. He can be reached directly at 904.794.9212 or email him at: Larry@LarryMullins.com.

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THE 800 POUND GORILLA IN YOUR BEDS

Making sense of Mattress Firm at 3,500 locations.

by Jeff Giagnocavo

"My advice is if you don't want to get steam-rolled, you need to get out of the way!"

Perhaps the title of this article should read "The 1,600 Pound Gorilla in Your Bed." Why? Because the 800 pound Gorilla I'm referring to is Mattress Firm. They were bought in August by Steinhoff for more than double their current share price at the time the deal was closed.

Both the purchase and purchase price sent shock-waves through the mattress industry creating many, many questions.

Most wondered who is this company? Steinhoff International holdings has 7,500 retail locations throughout Europe and South Africa and is often called the Ikea of South Africa. Look them up on Wikipedia there is a wealth of information there.

How in the world could they afford to pay a two times multiple and what is next? The answer is yet to be revealed, but my best guess is that Steinhoff's experience in vertically integrated companies will pay immense dividends here. What I do like most is that this purchase price shows immense commitment on Steinhoff's part to make their investment in Mattress Firm a successful one.

Unlike "vultures" that have come and gone in our industry, this investment could be a good one for the bedding industry as a whole, over the long term. With 3,500 retail locations, Mattress Firm will be promoting heavily and efficiently, potentially increasing demand and creating a rising tide that smart, competitive mattress retailers might float their boats on. And, let's face it, Mattress Firm was big before the purchase of Sleepy's and the subsequent sale to Steinhoff. How much worse can it be?

On the other hand, some say Mattress Firm will be awful for our industry. They say they will steam

"This purchase price shows immense commitment on Steinhoff's part to make their investment in Mattress Firm a successful one."

A Good Or Bad Thing?

Here's a potential bright side.



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"Some Say,

Mattress Firm will steam roll the local competition, put up stores next to local competitors and intentionally run independents out of business."

roll the local competition, put up stores next to local competitors and intentionally run independents out of business. They also say that Mattress Firm's immense negotiating power will drive down manufacturers' margins, have undue control over their distribution options/ policies and drive some out of business.

Truth be told, if I held an office in the C-suite level of Mattress Firm HQ I'd likely do the same thing, it is business after all, it's likely you would too, if in the same shoes.

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How To Avoid Getting Steam Rolled?

How will the rest of us compete? First of all, I recommend that everyone realize that if Mattress Firm doesn't make any huge mistakes, there won't be anything we can do as a group to stem the tide of this immense national competitor.

If you don't want to be steam-rolled, my advice is to get out of the way! Being smaller and more local means you can be nimble and should be able and willing to turn on a dime. Stop competing toe to toe. Competing with Mattress Firm head to head on price and product is like Barney Fife stepping into the ring with Mohammed Ali. We know the end result.

If you are one of those independent retailers that frequently skips going to shows, make sure you attend at least one major and one minor shopping market each and every year. This is one simple way to stay ahead of your competition regardless of how big they are. Find the products your competitors won't have so you can offer something unique and of value. There is no shortage of great mattress programs out there to put on your floor. Manufacturers who don't sell Mattress Firm (through choice or bad luck) will be looking for your business.

Remember, there is no reason why you need to be the low price leader in your market. No one is telling you to hang that poster in the window adver-

tising \$189 queen sets, then \$169 queen sets in response to their \$179 offer.

The essence of local business is specialized service, unique products and individualized solutions. Here are my insights on how Mattress Firm will impact the industry and what independent retailers can do about it.

#1 - Tell Your Story.

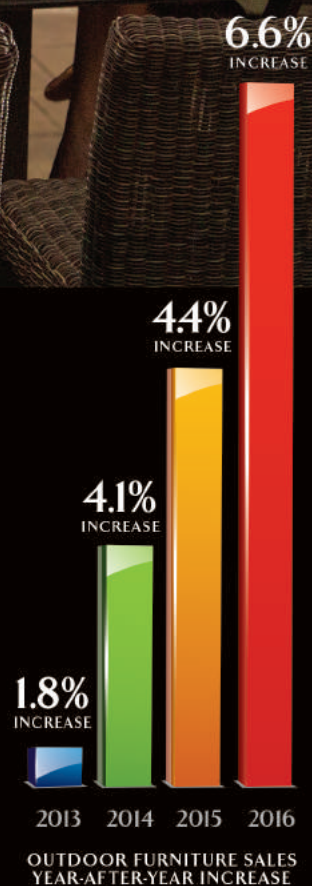
Your story is unique to you, however, if you think your story is comprised of any of the following three points, you are mistaken.

- We've been in business for 25 years! Someone who has been in business for 26 years wins.
- We have the best Price Guarantee! Someone with an "incredible will not be beat guarantee" will one-up you.
- We have all the Top Name Brands! Everyone can make this same claim. It's not unique.

"Let your customers tell your story for you, up front and center!"



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"Does your website match the story you wish to tell?"

Often I see nothing but price and product images.
How does that help anyone?"

Your story IS your story. Unique to you and one that cannot be replicated.

In my stores, our promise is to help you wake up happy and pain free. We will fit you and your sleep needs to our sleep solutions so that you can wake up refreshed and ready to face the day.

#2 - Make Your Story Shareable

What touch points in your sales process are ones that can be easily communicated by your customer to potential new prospects for your store? What experience is in store for them, and is so impactful they can't help but tell others about their experience with you and your store?

Here is a small list of shareable moments that your satisfied customers can talk about, so that others will be attracted to doing business with you. These are the kinds of comments you

should already be receiving.

- "Unlike the other guys, there was no pressure. They let me take my time!"
- "They worked with me to understand my needs."
- "The salesperson gave me a well thought out presentation of my options."
- "There were amazing sheets, pillows, protectors etc."
- "Delivery was on time and the delivery people were professional and courteous in my home."
- "I loved the thank you bag and cake pops as a parting gift on delivery."
- "I really appreciated the extreme care in helping us make the right selection. The mattress is every-

thing I hoped it would be."

- "I was afraid of making a mistake, but they gave me the confidence to know I wasn't making one, and they were right."
- "I will send everyone I know here!"

#3 - Your Story: Easily Found and Understood

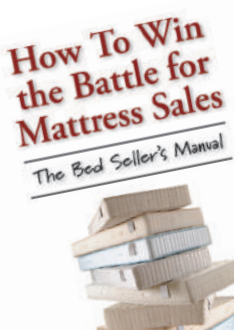
How long has it been since you updated your website? Is your website mobile-friendly and responsive? How many reviews do you have? How many handwritten thank you cards and notes have been sent back to you, and are you showcasing them?

Your story is best told and most engaging when you aren't the one telling it. When you tell your story, it's just viewed as advertising.

In contrast, when your story is told by past customers for you, it's compelling, powerful, and says you are the right choice for their needs and wants.

Today 75% of furniture and mattress shoppers begin their search online. What does your online story and front door (your website) say about your store and business.

Does your website match the story



"The Best Overall Resource For Mattress Sales Professionals!"
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THE 800 POUND GORILLA

you wish to tell? Often I see nothing but price and product images. How does that help anyone? You've no doubt read that price is often third to fifth on the list of important key factors in making a purchase yet, as an industry, we have decided to always make price first.

Why not show those reviews and thank you cards first. Let your customers tell your story for you, up front and center! How about offering helpful information curated from your decades of experience helping people to make the right purchase.

The internet is the information superhighway. Isn't it time you got in the driving lanes and made a

contribution, instead of just sitting on the shoulder waiting for your customer to notice you.

Co-Exist & Succeed

Independent mattress retailers and furniture retailers can co-exist and succeed with Mattress Firm in their market. Even if they do grow to 5,000 store locations, there is a path to success. Your success will be found in how well you communicate and have others tell your story for you.

About Jeff Giagnocavo: Jeff Giagnocavo and Ben McClure co-own Gardner's Mattress & More in Lancaster, PA a multi unit destination boutique mattress store. They also co authored the books "Mega Mattress Margins" and "Retail is Dead".

Jeff Giagnocavo also helps retailers that sell face to face, harness the power of information based selling and drive more ready to buy now customers through the front door of their businesses.

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

Questions can also be directed to Jeff care of editor@furninfo.com.

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Sales
✓

ONE ON ONE

The salesperson / customer interaction.

by Joe Capillo

From single store, operations to furniture giants of our world, success still comes down to what happens between one salesperson and one customer."

The strategic view

There are thousands of sales managers who spend too much time teaching salespeople how to do things right, rather than how to do the right things. The missing link is clear: there is hardly ever a clearly written, well taught-out and coached selling strategy, also known as a Customer Engagement Strategy, that establishes the basis for all sales training, coaching, and execution.

For a customer engagement strategy to be successful, your salespeople have to buy in to your processes. If you have, for example, 10 salespeople on staff, and each has a different selling strategy, it makes the role of sales manager almost impossible to perform. Certainly, you will have 10 diverse skill-sets, but problems will inevitably arise from the fact that:

- Each salesperson will deliver a different customer experience.
- Each salesperson will have their own winning formula he or she believes is better than their co-workers, and also better than the sales manager's stated engagement strategy (if any).
- Sales goal setting and sales coaching will be less effective.

This points to the need to develop and follow a comprehensive selling system that incorporates the following three elements:

1. **Have a strategy** – written, known and followed by everyone.
2. **Get the metrics** – live in the numbers. Use BABTA thinking: Below Average Brought to Average.
3. **Use the salespeople's goals** – they'll get you to your goals.

Dealing with the Metrics

On my first day in the furniture industry as an Ethan Allen store manager for an independent owner in Norwalk, CT, I was told by Nathan Ancel, then the owner and Chairman of Ethan Allen, that I had two things to worry about – Close Ratio and Average Sale. "We'll take care of the rest" he said. They did, and this piece of wisdom is as true today for furniture retailers as it was back then.

On page 89 is an example of real store performance data (metrics), the kind that should guide sales management. In the first chart are the results of 1,385 customer engagements over a one month period. Salespeople are ranked by their Average Sale value.

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At the end of the day,
your home should really
be a reflection of who
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"The best news is that to achieve this 24% increase in sales, you don't need additional customers, advertising dollars, or fixed expenses."

The second chart shows what the results would have been if those people who performed below average in Close Ratio and/or Average Sale had performed at the average level for the team in each metric.

The first chart shows historical data for 12 salespeople. The second chart answers the Sales Manager's question, "what if" we set a goal and devote resources to bring under-performing sales associates up to the average for the group?

The answer in this example is a more than 24% increase in both Sales

and Revenue Per Up. The best news is that to achieve this increase in sales, no additional customers or advertising dollars need be added. Fixed expenses don't go up (your variable expenses do), and your profits go up as well. The even better news is that this increase in sales revenue for a typical retail furniture store will more than double profits!

It's a simple process that's been the foundation of my efforts over the years. It never fails to generate an environment of continual improvement, because once you reach the new, higher levels of performance, you do the whole thing over again, and again.

Focus on Earnings

As overall store performance improves, so do the earnings of many salespeople who had been performing below the averages. This is the driving force behind sales management initiatives that work. Sales managers should focus on increasing each salesperson's earnings, set goals and coach to get them there.

In addition to the obvious affect sales improvement has on sales manager and company success, this strategy promotes teamwork, overall positive morale, and personal success for all individuals.

So far this article has focused on under-performing people, but it's just as important to hold on to your high earners. This requires that you focus on getting every member of your sales team to their goals instead of just concentrating on your company's goals.

You don't want to lose your best earners to competitors due to lack of sales management support.

Managing Your Range of Performance

What causes some salespeople to consistently have the highest Closing Ratio, or the highest Average Sale? The answer is two-fold:

1. These people have personal skills that help them to connect to their customers – right from the start.

2. They have learned about how the products they sell are made, as well as features that will resonate with consumers as benefits (remembering always that there are no benefits that lie outside a customer's need for them)

3. They possess some or all of the following selling skills:

- **Connecting skills** – includes everything from the way they look, smile, what they say, and how they say it. This helps them to connect rapidly to other people without appearing "pushy".
- **Interview skills** – to determine why each customer is in your store. They learn about the customer's "project" (because it's always a project to them) – and what their customer wants to accomplish today. Understanding the customer's "project" is a critical element because the decision to buy will almost always have ramifications

"Always remember that no one wants to do a bad job. No one wants to go to work every day and fail, yet closing ratios in the 20% to 25% range means salespeople fail 75% to 80% of the time."

ONE ON ONE

beyond just today's purchase.

- **The knowledge that few customers buy on their first store visit** – on a “project”. My metrics history shows that around 15% of first-time visitors on a new project purchase on their first visit, BUT, that number goes up to 70% or higher on a second visit. Most stores' overall close ratio is a combination of first-time buyers and Be-Back buyers who are in the store for the second or third time on a “project”. This means that the real goal of dealing with a customer on a first visit should often be to get a second visit. To do this effectively requires a robust CRM plan and system to capture contact information from each non-buyer. Getting customer information is easier when a high-level connection between salesperson and customer is established.

And, this type of connection is best based on trust and the understanding that the salesperson truly understands the customer's situation (project) and is willing to help her achieve her goal.

If you want to help your salespeople achieve higher Close Ratio and Be-Backs, have them record every customer opportunity. Make sure they note those customers who fit the description of a Be-Back – someone who has been in the store before on the same project.

Previous customers who return to the store (and hopefully to the salesperson) on a new home furnishings project are considered to be “Personal Trade”, and the best salespeople accrue a lot of them over time. Track them all, and know your metrics. When these people return, they buy because trust has already been established (if you've

Note: for the chart below and on the following page, three part-time employees were not included in some of the calculated averages.

Salesperson	# of Ups	Close Rate	# of Sales	Average Sale Amount	Written Sales Volume	RPU
Roy	116	22.4%	26	2,560	\$66,559	\$574
Don	165	22.4%	37	1,734	\$64,175	\$389
Alan	159	18.9%	30	1,789	\$53,670	\$338
Butch	136	31.6%	43	1,126	\$48,412	\$356
Geraldine	82	32.9%	27	1,741	\$47,009	\$573
Barbara	90	27.8%	25	1,855	\$46,381	\$515
John	130	21.5%	28	1,427	\$39,955	\$307
Xavier	96	28.1%	27	1,415	\$38,217	\$398
Robert	108	17.6%	19	1,688	\$32,071	\$297
Rachel	103	19.4%	20	1,284	\$25,680	\$249
Deena	131	6.9%	9	2,306	\$20,753	\$158
Patty	69	15.9%	11	984	\$10,829	\$157
Totals	1385		302	19,909	493,711	
Average	115	21.8%	25	1,635	\$41,143	\$356

Historical Data For 12 Salespeople - Metrics Before Bringing Under-Performers Up To Average

Historical Data For 12 Salespeople - Metrics After Bringing Under-Performers Up To Average

Salesperson	# of Ups	New Close Rate	New # of Sales	New Average Sale Amount	New Written Sales Volume	New RPU
Roy	116	22.4%	26	2,560	\$66,559	\$574
Don	165	22.4%	37	1,734	\$64,175	\$389
Alan	159	21.8%	35	1,789	\$62,025	\$390
Butch	136	31.6%	43	1,635	\$70,297	\$517
Geraldine	82	32.9%	27	1,741	\$47,009	\$573
Barbara	90	27.8%	25	1,855	\$46,381	\$515
John	130	21.8%	28	1,635	\$46,341	\$356
Xavier	96	28.1%	27	1,635	\$44,140	\$460
Robert	108	21.8%	24	1,688	\$39,750	\$368
Rachel	103	21.8%	22	1,635	\$36,716	\$356
Deena	131	21.8%	29	2,306	\$65,867	\$503
Patty	69	21.8%	15	1,635	\$24,596	\$356
Totals	1385		338		\$613,856	\$5,357
Average	115	24.4%	28	1818	\$51,155	\$447

done everything well) and they know you know about their projects.

"Sales" Training

There are many kinds of training

"It's just as important to hold on to your high earners. This requires that you focus on getting every member of your sales team to their goals instead of just concentrating on your company's goals."

that retail furniture salespeople need to receive. Usually it begins with product knowledge encompassing literally thousands of details. There are many ways to manufacture furniture, and most vendors use many different manufacturing processes and components to build their products. It's important for salespeople to know about them all, and to be able to relate the information to customers.

From good old solid wood to Medium Density Fiberboard (MDF) and from Eight-Way Hand Tied spring decks to sinuous wire systems, they must know it all, and be able to explain it to their customers in terms that don't denigrate anything, but explain the benefits. Your salespeople must be experts on everything they sell, and where each item fits on the scale of quality and value in our industry.

Sales managers should conduct regular training sessions on these topics, and this is the perfect place to have manufacturer's sales representatives explain all the details salespeople

should know.

In my thinking, this is the **ONLY** place where manufacturer's sales reps should engage salespeople... under the careful monitoring of the sales manager.

"Selling" Training

After understanding what they're selling, salespeople move to the front line which is engaging customers who are wary of anyone with the title "Sales Associate". The decision-making process has five levels of progression, so knowing where a customer is on this progression is important. Managers should make sure that every salesperson understands, and is on the lookout for, these five different stages of decision-making which are:

Dreaming – which can last years months or minutes.

Exploring – this is where connection is critical. Interpersonal skills reign

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"You can't observe

every interaction, so create a way for each salesperson to document his or her customer engagements in an unobtrusive way."

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Planning - this is where understanding and connecting to the project are key

Selection - this is where you want to be every time.

Enjoyment - and here too, staying involved after the delivery is a career-building exercise.

We usually meet people in one of the four stages after the Dreaming stage, but there is no research available regarding how long any of these stages lasts, or what the interval timing is between them. In today's hyper-connected world, customers can move from dreaming to selection with just a few clicks of a smart phone. The Exploring, Planning, and Selection stages are likely to be all happening at the same time in many cases - which is the definition of confusion and uncertainty that is summed up in a salesperson's description of her last customer - "She doesn't know what she wants."

My point is that if you can connect to a person in the Exploring or Planning stages - you can be around for the selection stage - which is when sales are closed.

All of these issues are subjects for Sales and Selling Training. You need a program and a system that your salespeople understand, respect, and use to be great in the one most important area of performance improvement - bringing back the non-buyers!

Now, let's say you have your selling strategy in place; the metrics you

need; have established your salespeople's goals for income; and the training is in place to deliver your strategy. What's next?

Observe the Game Being Played

Imagine a professional football game being played while the head coach is in his office planning the next game, or making travel arrangements to next week's game, or going over the stats from last week's game. Sounds just plain dumb, right? All the coaches, the head coach, the offensive coach (coordinator), the defensive coach, the receivers coach, are all watching the game being played, play-by-play. There are dozens of other observers as well who watch individual players, record the action and feed information in real time to field coaches who use this information to make immediate changes on the field of play.

You have a game being played in your stores every day, but where are you? In most stores no one observes the game being played, and that's why managers are sometimes surprised by the results, good or bad.

Observation is one of the key elements in sales management that is sadly ignored by furniture store owners and managers. Observation shows you quickly whether your selling strategy and training have had an effect on behavior. It's called execution, and failure to execute is the single com-

mon point-of-failure in our business. We are playing a one-on-one game between one salesperson and one customer (or family). If you only pay attention to the end result, how will you know what coaching advice you need to provide to each individual salesperson? Metrics alone won't tell you the whole story. You have to hear the words, the body language and evaluate the chemistry.

Of course, you can't observe every interaction, so create a way for each salesperson to document his or her customer engagements in an unobtrusive way. It should include information such as:

- A summary of the project.
- A sketch of the room.
- What's being replaced, added, or is staying in the room.

"Develop a Performance Improvement Plan for everyone who is performing below the 90-day averages for Close Ratio and/or Average Sale."

2017 Furniture Expo

NIWA

Northern Indiana Woodcrafters Association



The NIWA is an association consisting of quality furniture builders located in the heart of Amish country in Northeast Indiana. All products are American made and built locally. The NIWA Furniture Expo is an important opportunity for more than 90 exhibitors and hundreds of dealers, to discuss ideas, identify customer trends, and reveal new possibilities.

Categories represented include:

- Bedroom Furniture
- Dining Room Furniture
- Living Room Furniture
- Occasional Tables
- Office Furniture
- Cabinetry
- Game Room Items
- Entertainment
- Outdoor Furniture
- Crafts & Accessories
- Finishing
- Flooring

The two-day 2017 Expo extravaganza at the Michiana Event Center (February 28 and March 1) will include picturesque furniture displays, diverse products and innovative designs. There will be a Mowhawk Workshop demonstrating "Hard Fill" technology for repairs to damaged furniture both days of this year's show. The event offers attendees practical and inspiring ideas to help show and explain to customers how handcrafted hardwood furniture is one of the best investments for a home or office.



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"The difference between a store closing rate of two out of every ten customers, and closing three out of every ten is a 50% increase in sales."

- *What the time-line is for completion.*
- *What products are being considered now with pricing and stock status.*
- *What is the follow up plan by date – when to contact, etc.*

A document should be used to evaluate the salesperson's work as well as feed your CRM system so you can remain in contact with customers regarding unresolved projects to draw them back. If they did buy, this can be used by salespeople to invite customers to the next 100 sales events to get their next projects going.

Provide Positive Feedback

Watch the game being played. Listen and note how the interaction progresses. If you get personally involved in the play, as a manager, the customer's focus will switch to you. Take every opportunity to support your salespeople. If you feel that it's necessary to intervene with a customer during an observation session, be supportive, agree with their inputs, and simply add something new if you see the need. Never, ever make them appear weak or unknowledgeable. Use your intervention as an opportunity to teach by example.

If you just observe or teach by exam-



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ple, feedback after every observed engagement is necessary. Meet with your salesperson immediately after the customer leaves the store. Feedback has to be provided quickly and be based on your personal observations as they relate to the facts of a specific situation and how it relates to your Selling Strategy. There will always be a lot of good things done right and well. Make sure these points have equal emphasis with the points that are not so great.

Always, always remember that no one wants to do a bad job. No one wants to go to work every day and fail, yet closing ratios in the 20% to 25% range means salespeople fail

75% to 80% of the time. Never forget this as a coach.

In major league Baseball a lifetime batting average of .250 gets you early retirement. A lifetime average of .300 gets you into the Hall of Fame. In your business, the difference between a store closing rate of two out of every ten customers (losing eight out of 10), and closing three out of every ten (still losing seven of 10) is a 50% increase in sales. Can your team do it?

Observation of the game being played, the work being done, puts you in the game with your people. When you're out there with them, they'll remember their training, try to

do things right, not take shortcuts.

Individual Coaching

Weekly planned and scheduled one-on-one coaching meetings are a must as well. Your top performers deserve your personal congratulations. Weak salespeople need the same thing if they are improving. If they're not improving, don't be angry, don't resort to the three principles weak, ineffective leaders resort to: threats, intimidation, and fear. Remember – no one wants to do a poor job at their job.

Review the things you have

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CNRHOLDING



"What causes some salespeople to consistently have the highest Closing Ratio, or the highest Average Sale? The answer is two-fold..."

observed and offer direct advice on how to do better. Don't just tell a person, "You have to do better." Tell them how, and when you can, show them how by letting them observe you doing it right with real customers.

Develop a Performance Improvement Plan for everyone who is performing below the 90-day averages for Close Ratio and/or Average Sale. Have the current update ready for this coaching meeting, and go over the details carefully and thoughtfully with a positive, "you can do this..." attitude. Never, never get angry. Remember, you are not dealing with children.

Then, there's this: Everyone contributes to the total, whether they are below the "averages" or above them. All contributions are important and meaningful to your company regardless of what didn't happen or might have been. Thank each person, and find additional ways to teach, support, and guide those who need it. That is leadership.

Team Sales Meetings

Team sales meetings are important for many reasons:

- First, congratulate the team when it wins.
- Congratulate individuals who have performed well or outstandingly.
- Congratulate those who have improved since the last meeting.
- Offer information from other departments such as

Merchandising, Warehouse, Service, Delivery and Advertising.

- Owners can weigh in, but always in a way that is positive and supportive. After all, it's the result of work by salespeople that pays for all those other departments.

Group sales meetings should be held early in the day, prior to opening for the day.

Conclusion

So, there you have it all:

- You have your selling strategy in place.
- You have the metrics you need.
- You have your salespeople's goals for income.
- You have training in place to deliver your strategy.
- You have coaching tools in place.
- You are observing your salespeople in action.
- You are providing positive feedback.
- You are holding one-on-one sales meetings.
- You are holding staff sales meetings.

And the coaching cycle just continues, utilizing individual Performance Improvement Plans to guide your coaching efforts.

When things change, as they always do, you'll adjust your selling strategy

and training. Remember that your strategy must always address the ways people think about their homes, their lives and their shopping preferences today.

About Joe Capillo: Joe Capillo consults with top-100 and independent home furnishings retailers on sales management issues. He is author of the book "Living On The Top Line", and contributing editor for Furniture World Magazine. Questions about this article or any sales management topic can be directed to Joe at joefcap@gmail.com. See all of Joe's articles on the furninfo.com website.





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OFFLINE-ONLINE

What retailers should be doing to bridge the gap.

by Amitesh K Sinha

In the past year technological leaps forward have made it possible for small and medium-sized retailers to level the playing field with their larger competitors.

The channel debate continues to shift as customers take control of the highly unpredictable consumer-retailer relationship. Keeping this in mind, it has become crucial to bridge the gap between bricks and mortar and online stores.

Do Channels Really Matter?

With omnichannel found everywhere, shoppers are being labeled as 'channel-agnostic'. Is this the right time to completely abandon channel definitions for good?

The executive chairman of the National Online Retailers Association, Paul Greenberg, believes so, "Customers today don't shop by channel. They shop by brand, and they're calling the shots. Customers demand multiple touchpoints with their brand of choice."

Greenberg argues that instead of just focusing on channels, stores should give importance to Brand and Experience.

- **Brand** – Your brand should be strengthened so that it successfully attracts more loyal consumers. This can be done by working on your

brand awareness, reputation, and credibility.

- **Customer Experience** – New ways of engaging customers should be found to make it easier for consumers to engage with you.

These are the basics of doing business, and are crucial factors that help you connect properly to your customers, regardless of the channel you use.

Once this has been worked upon, your store can ponder effective ways to bridge the gap.

Bridging the Gap: How It Can Be Done

Home furnishings retailers who have done the requisite work Greenberg suggests, are ready to bridge the gap between offline and online. There are numerous ways in which retail stores can do this. Start by considering these four effective methods to bridge the offline-online gap.

1. **Implement a Location-Based Marketing System.** Using Wi-Fi analytics tools, brick and mortar store owners can and should track foot traf-



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"Offering WiFi will encourage them to do research in your store so they can make informed buying decisions, plus allow you to track their shopping behavior at the same time."

fic not only inside their stores, but also outside within a certain range. New technology can gather and analyze collected data so you can send location-based offers to prospective buyers to lure them into your store.

This is a prime example of an area where technology has evolved quickly. Location-based technology has become highly effective and so affordable that growth-oriented retailers can not afford to ignore it.

How Location-Based Technology Works

- *Wifi sensors and cameras facing the front doors capture foot traffic data from shoppers carrying smart phones as they enter.*
- *Cameras take pictures to provide accurate traffic counts, and use*

"If a customer's phone has WiFi enabled, it will always ping the available Wi-Fi ssid's - (Service Set Identifiers) of customers and shoppers entering your store."

face recognition technology, capable of identifying buyers/shoppers who are repeat customers.

- *Camera sensors provide a heat map of average shoppers as they walk through the store, showing where they spend their time. Heat maps are a critical tool to manage store layout and merchandising so management can focus on specific product categories and store areas backed by hard data.*

Example: Retailer "XYZ"

Let's look at retailer "XYZ" based on an actual case study. Before installing new technology, this retailer used rough estimates of traffic and did not have a proper UPS system to gather information and bring it to the front.

Like many furniture retailers, traffic estimates were based on what people "thought" was happening with foot traffic and sales person interactions.

Since store "XYZ" put its system in place, they were able to identify exactly how many people entered the store every hour of every day, as well as calculate how many sales people were required to work with these potential customers to make a minimum sale every week day, weekend and holiday weekend.

Initially, they were shocked to learn their store was always understaffed.

Proper staffing resulted in increased customer and sales person interaction. An increase in sales person motivation levels led to a more sales per employee, overall growth and profitability.

The key take away? Stores either have WiFi available, or can make it available at very low cost. If a customer's phone has WiFi enabled, it will always ping the available Wi-Fi ssid's - (Service Set Identifiers) of customers and potential customers entering your store.

2. Start To Digitize Your Retail Environment. Innovative retailers are digitizing their retail environment by utilizing digital technologies to enhance the customer experience in their stores. We are beginning to see free Wi-Fi, cloud based POS systems, interactive shop windows, beacons, and more. Should retailers offer in-store Wi-Fi? It's not optional in today's wired world! Consumers demand it, and offering Wi-Fi will encourage them to do research in your store so they can make informed buying decisions, plus allow you to track their shopping behavior at the same time.

Is there a reason not to offer free WiFi? Only if you have slow WiFi speeds, as this will turn off the current generation of tech savvy customers who want information delivered to them very quickly. Consider putting up signage that announced your FREE WiFi, similar to what Starbucks does to invite customers indoors.

This comes with some considerations with respect to customer privacy. While using Wi-Fi, you'll pick up customers' Media Access Control (mac) identification numbers, addresses that are tied to the physical embedded chipsets. As part of the wireless protocol(s), these mac ids are automatically broadcast



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"As the lines between each of the channels continue to blur, it has become very important to seamlessly integrate your inventory with order processing and fulfillment strategy."

when devices search for networks or communicate with other devices, including wireless access points and wireless headsets-- so they are visible to a broader set of monitors. Mac ids often can be linked to individuals by name. For example, when your customers sign into a commercial Wi-Fi network, their mac id is tied to the information they use to sign up for the service. Additionally, automatic Wi-Fi probes also broadcast the names of last networks a device has connected to, which can potentially reveal additional information about the individual, such as the name of their home or work network.

Camera and facial recognition captures images of customers walking in through the front doors and then in and around stores. This allows a store's system to capture unique versus repeat visitor rates. The store system will keep the images in its database for accuracy of count and recognition purposes over a period of time, perhaps three to six months.

Retailers have the option to post a policy statement about the use of personal information collected, but this may serve to bring attention to,

and increase shoppers' confusion about, how images and data are being used and whether their right to privacy is being respected. Suffice it to say that furniture retailers should be aware of these issues, respect and protect the privacy of customers.

3. Develop a Rich Mobile Experience. With the continuing rise of mobile, smartphones and tablets have become a crucial part of consumers' lives, allowing them access to various digital touchpoints. Bricks and mortar retailers should, in an attempt to bridge the offline-online gap, introduce mobile commerce to make it easier for their customers to buy using a channel they prefer. Consumers are in control today, not retailers. You must give them the tools to shop you when, where and how they want to engage with your store. If you don't, they will go to a retailer that does. Why risk that?

4. Give Customers Visibility into Your Stock Levels. As the lines between each of the channels continue to blur, it has become very important to seamlessly inte-

grate your inventory with order processing and fulfillment strategy. It's a wise idea for retailers to invest in an online-offline inventory management system. This enables consumers to check what is in store, saving them from the hassle and frustration of visiting the store only to find out that the product they want is out of stock.

Compete With Wayfair, Amazon & All The Rest

There is no reason why customers should have to wait for a store employee to retrieve information on inventory levels and product options. Consumers expect instant access to product availability information and delivery times, either from sales associates or from a robust website that can sort your SKU's as In-Stock and/or On-Display.

No matter what system you use, you should have the ability to sort your SKU's relative to your best sellers, additional items in the collection and more. The key word here is "intelligence".

Remember, your competitors are Wayfair, Amazon and all the online retailers showing hundreds of thousands of products with in-stock and delivery options. If you can't accurately show everything you have open to buy, you will put yourself at a competitive disadvantage. Over 80 percent of all consumers would rather buy locally, so don't give them an excuse to look for other options.

Integrating Retail Systems

Finally, bring yourself up to speed with current technological advances and new ways to upgrade and integrate your systems. It is possible

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and advisable to use a business intelligence platform to integrate, number crunch, analyze and display information collected from your POS system, location-based technology and UPS system software.

Once a store has integrated reporting in place, retail managers have easy access to just about every key metric in retailing.

Some training is, of course, necessary. But generally, learning to use business intelligence systems and processes only takes a few hours of training, once the systems are set up

Conclusion

Advances in retail technology, from search through check-out, will leave unprepared retailers lagging the competition. If you don't adapt soon, harness your data and have it at your fingertips 24/7, you risk becoming a dinosaur. So many former successful furniture retailers are "gone". They didn't adapt... and are now just a memory.

Technology provides an opportunity for small and medium-sized retailers to level the playing field with their larger competitors because adapting systems, processes and business intelligence is NOT as expensive or cumbersome as it was even a few years ago. Advances in technology and the ability to harness it for everyone has changed our lives. Think how the Smart-Phone has changed your life, now think "Smart Store"!

About Amitesh Sinha: Amitesh Sinha is a contemporary technology consultant based in North America who focuses on the home furnishings industry. With over 20 years of hands-on experience in developing and deploying innovative solutions for retail stores, Sinha has gained a distinguished reputation for Business Intelligence & Analytics for Retailers, inventory software solutions, creating databases, Home Furnishing Software, POS Furniture Software, and re-engineering of software with extended features and support. His company, iConnect offers business technology solutions that integrate with most P.O.S. systems to make them more efficient and user-friendly.

For more information about this article or any retail technology question contact Amitesh at 703-471-3964, amitesh@iconnectgroup.com or www.iconnectgroup.com.

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building ✓ CUSTOMER LOYALTY

by Chad Burwell

"A furniture loyalty program? I don't get it! Most furniture shoppers return in about five years."

-Recent comment from a furniture store owner about loyalty programs.

The comment (at left) from a furniture store owner illustrates the typical expectation that customers return to stores to buy furniture, perhaps after five years or more. It's a long time to wait, but there are a number of ways retailers can shorten the interval between customer visits. Some of these are:

- *Follow up systems that allow salespeople to track customer sales and follow up with new products or special offers likely to be of interest.*
- *Preferred customer events.*
- *Mailing, e-mailing or connecting with customers over social media with content that keeps customers engaged.*
- *Loyalty or VIP programs that focus on bringing customers back to the store after the sale.*

It's a fact that furniture stores lag behind retailers in other industries in their efforts to create incentives for customers to return to stores more often. Many in our industry seem content to throw large amounts of advertising dollars against the wall and see what sticks. Advertising is an effective way to bring in traffic,

but there is a downside. It can be a high cost strategy if efforts to bring back existing customers are not fully explored as well.

The remainder of this article will focus on loyalty programs along with the positives and negatives of the various types. Retailers today, regardless of size are constrained by time spent on buying, selling, staffing, customer service, delivery, accounting, advertising, etc. Who wants to put one more item, a customer loyalty program on the list? A more important question, however, for retailers is what happens if you don't put it on the list? The answer is that you will be passing up a strategy to get existing customers

"In theory, there are two kinds of loyalty programs retailers can offer. The first is a traditional rewards model."

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Types of Loyalty Programs

In theory, there are two kinds of loyalty programs retailers can offer. The first is a traditional rewards model where the customer accumulates points at the time of purchase to be used for future purchases. This model is similar to rewards programs found in almost every industry. The second model is the VIP membership in which the customer pays for a membership

to enjoy the benefits of being a VIP. The most obvious example of this program is Costco. Currently, Restoration Hardware is the most recognizable furniture retailer that provides a VIP program in the furniture industry. Restoration Hardware charges customers an annual fee and provide a significant discount to members. Which model works?

Both can work, but the model that works best depends on the store. Here are examples of each program type.

Traditional Rewards Model: Recently a nationally recognized retailer started a program offering levels of in-store credit along with each purchase. Simply put, the more customers spend, the more they get back in credit. The program, in its infancy, has shown some immediate results. Here is one example. A customer made a purchase and received a \$275 in-store credit. She went back to the store about a month later and spent her \$275 credit plus purchased additional items for \$3000. Would she have returned without the loyalty program? It's hard to say, but it's likely that the \$275 credit kept her from considering going to another store. Plus, it created an incentive to come back sooner to make another purchase. We are seeing 5% of loyalty program members who purchased furniture return within 60 days. Imagine having a customer return in 2 months rather than 5 years.

Membership Loyalty Program: The second model is based on having a membership. Late last year, a small

independent store operating in a town with a population of roughly 22,000 people started a VIP membership program. They charged a \$49.99 fee for a two-year membership which gave their customers the opportunity to shop at reduced VIP pricing along with additional savings and coupons over the remainder of the term. In seven months, they acquired more than 700 VIP members, generating revenue of over \$35,000.

The approaches the stores took in the examples given above have two things in common.

1. Each store recognized the need to create a program to generate excitement and commitment from customers.

2. Each of these stores was the first in their market to offer the program. Being the first to market gave them an advantage over their competition, as customers are unlikely to join two loyalty programs. By being first, they have given their customers an incentive to continue to return.

Considerations

Return Times: If you don't give customers a reason to return sooner, you should expect/hope that they return in about five years. However, if they have purchased a VIP membership card, they will be committed for the duration of the program which is typically two years. Conversely, if you offer a loyalty program, you should expect to see a

"Build the program with limitations to the credit provided. This will allow you to protect your margins while providing the customer with the opportunity to get great deals."



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"Stores that market solely on price and frequently discount will also find it challenging to charge for a VIP program. You need to ask yourself, "Would I want to pay for a membership to my store?"

percentage of customers return within weeks or months instead of years to make a secondary purchase.

Dollars Spent: You should also expect to see returning customers spend two to 11 times their credit amount when they return. For example, if a customer is given \$100 in-store credit when they spend \$2500, they are likely to return to spend \$200-\$1100 on their return to the store.

Protecting Margins: It is important to note that certain parameters must be put in place to ensure this return rate, and protect margins. Retailers should focus on two key facts which will protect their margins when establishing a program.

- Offer in-store credit/discounts and not cash-back or external benefits. You want the customer to come back to the store, not go on a trip with their rewards!
- Build the program with limitations to the credit provided. This will

allow you to protect your margins while providing the customer with the opportunity to get great deals.

Management Time: When set up properly, a VIP or loyalty program will take almost no time, but will provide results which can be quantified. A good program will be able to track results, provide timely follow up to your customers, provide on-going communication with your customers, drive traffic to the store, and more importantly, deliver sales results.

5 Program Set-Up Steps

Once a retailer has decided to focus on customer loyalty, a program can be designed in five steps:

#1 Loyalty vs. the VIP model: To charge or not to charge, that is the question. Most retailers want to charge their customers for a VIP membership as it obviously creates positive cash flow, can be used to

close sales and will provide incentives for the customer to return. However, the traditional loyalty program which is provided to the customer for free will also meet these same goals without giving a discount on the initial sale. Retailers must take into consideration their history and previous marketing efforts. A new retail store shouldn't attempt to charge for a membership as their reputation and customer base isn't fully established yet. Also, stores that market solely on price and frequently discount will also find it challenging to charge for a VIP program. You need to ask yourself, "Would I

"For example, a store currently charging \$49.99 for a two-year membership had a 25% closing rate for extended warranties. By giving VIP members a 25% discount, they have almost tripled the closing rate."



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"Don't wait too long. If your customer joins another loyalty program offered by a competitor, you run the risk of losing that customer."

want to pay for a membership to my store?".

#2. Rewarding the customer: Once you have chosen the model that best fits your needs, you need to create incentives for customers. The VIP customer should get a discount on their initial purchase along with additional discounts on future purchases and in most cases, for a specific time period. This may include discounting on extended warranties, which in turn will increase closing rate on warranty sales. For example, a store currently charging \$49.99 for a two-year membership had a 25% closing rate for extended warranties. By giving VIP members a 25% discount on warranties, they have almost tripled the closing rate. It does

reduce the margin, but it significantly increases sales volume, which along with the membership fee equates to higher initial sales. In contrast, the Loyalty model which is free to the customer can often increase closing rates and create a much quicker return for additional purchases. Telling customers that they get a \$100 in-store credit that can be applied to their next purchase simply by signing up to the program is an excellent generator of good will. The loyalty model can be set up to avoid backend costs. You can negate cost on additional sales by building in specific parameters to the program which will be much more cost effective vs. the VIP program. Both models can include variations including tiered rewards, specific "members only" offers and additional incentives.

#3. Keep customers engaged: Every loyalty program should include a welcome/thank you e-mail for their purchase. This communication introduces the program and follows up on any service issues. It can also provide an opportunity to advertise or send a coupon to your new customer. From there, you need to decide how often you will contact customers, perhaps quarterly to maintain customer contact, build brand recognition and at the same time, build your data base. The value of building a customer data base can not be overlooked.

#4. Operational set-up: At this point you have a basic outline of your program and can now address its operational requirements. For example; you will need to design



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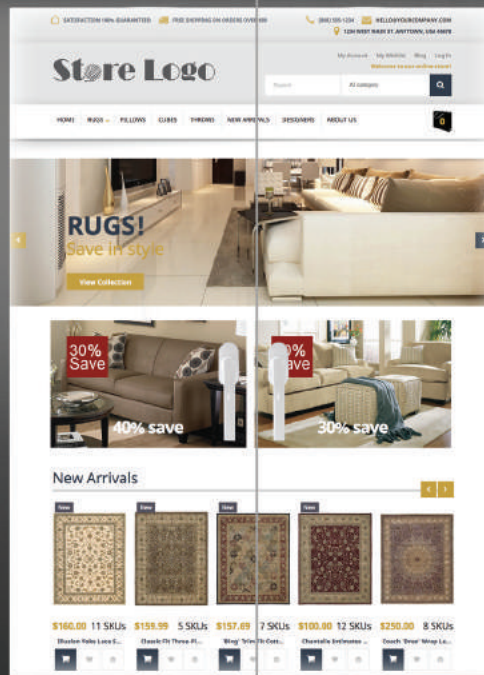


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and print your membership cards, POS material, e-mail template, customer log-in access portal, retailer access portal, a tracking system for purchases and points, redemption allowances etc. Essentially, everything to make it work. Some POS systems will allow you to e-mail customers and build a data base, however, the functionality falls short for a proper loyalty program. There are several moving parts to a program and unfortunately, it is not a DIY project. Engaging a third party to run your program will not only be cost effective but will also reduce the time required to almost none.

#5. Get started: Regardless of the model you choose, you need to have the system in place and your staff trained and on board with

the program before starting!. You also need to have managers engaged so they can continue to drive the enthusiasm required for ongoing success. Finally, don't wait too long. If your customer joins another loyalty program offered by a competitor, you run the risk of losing that customer.

Implementing a program can seem like a daunting project at first but in reality, with a bit of effort, it can be up and running within 30 days.

Change your expectation of five years for your customer to return to months or even weeks and not only your customer will thank you but your sales staff will too!

About Chad Burwell: *Chad Burwell, owner of Rewardslp.com, a company*

which specializes in the development of customized Loyalty and VIP programs for furniture, mattress and appliance retailers. For contact details, go to www.rewardslp.com.

"A new retail store shouldn't attempt to charge for a membership as their reputation and customer base isn't fully established yet."

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DEAD END SELLING

by Dr. Peter Marino

A list of 25 traits, attitudes and poor practices RSAs practice that will contribute to failure on the retail sales floor.

1. Start each day counting the things you don't have. Doing that will render the things you do have useless.
2. When you arrive at work, be sure to start out the day by bringing up or thinking negative things about your company and co-workers.
3. As you approach customers, make sure you don't greet them with the word, "Welcome," even though that is the second best loved word in the English language. Instead, use the words, "Hi, folks." The folks will love you for that.
4. Always greet your customers with the words, "How can I help you?" or, "How may I help you?" Keep on using those words even though one study found that what customers hear in those words is, "How can I sell you?"
5. When you hear the phone ring, let it ring about ten times. That way you will be sure that the potential customer on the other end of the line really means business.
6. Don't pay attention to your voice quality on the phone.
7. Make sure that you don't make your last words to the caller, "Thank you for calling," especially if the customer called about a problem.
8. On the sales floor, if your customer starts out with the words, "We've bought all our furniture at your store," give him or her a wry smile and be sure to omit any acknowledging statement. That way the customer will know you didn't fall for a gratuitous compliment meant to get you to offer a lower price. Avoid acknowledging that statement by saying something like the following: "Thank you for sharing that with me. I am going to do my best today not to spoil that record."
9. When the customer greets you with the words, "I'd like to look around if you don't mind," let your body language show the customer you do mind. Above all, be sure you do not use something like the follow-



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"Limit acknowledgments

to words like Uh-huh, I understand and You betcha."

ing professional three-step opening: "Nothing pleases us more than having you feel comfortable as you look around our store. If after you've been in the store a while, would you mind if I showed up to answer any important questions you might have?"

10. Instead of using the opening given in the previous example (#9), share the dog and pony show you've memorized.

11. Use only closed probes with your customers so you have complete control over them. Do not use any open probes that may spoil your sales pitch. If, in spite of your best efforts, the customer states a need, make sure you do not acknowledge that need with a closed probe. Instead, rush in and overwhelm the customer with as many features as you can. Don't give any credence to the saying, "Features tell, benefits sell."

12. If despite your directive approach, the customer still manages to express feelings both verbally and nonverbally, make sure you do not specifically acknowledge those feelings. Instead, limit your acknowledgments to words like Uh-huh, I understand and You betcha.

13. If the customer raises an objection, look upon that as an invitation to get into a debate you end up winning. Forget to consider that all objections are implied needs. Instead work hard to overcome every objection. Always have the "last word". The sooner you win the argument, the sooner your customer will know who's in control.

14. Never ask for the sale. Simply remain silent and wait the customer out. In that way, you will add your name to the list of the eighty percent of retail salespeople who fail

to ask for the sale even once.

15. Do not spend any available down-time you have at work learning more about your products. You already know more about your products than your customers will ever know.

16. Do not buy into the concept of side by side buying. Any one with an ounce of common sense knows you are there to sell, not to help customers buy.

17. Believe that all customers come in two sizes: those who buy and those who don't buy. Your professional attitude, your lack of specialized product knowledge, and your professional selling skills have little to do with it. Every time you lose a sale, blame store management, selection, pricing, etc.



"If your customer raises an objection, look upon that as an invitation to get into a debate you end up winning. Forget to consider that all objections are implied needs."

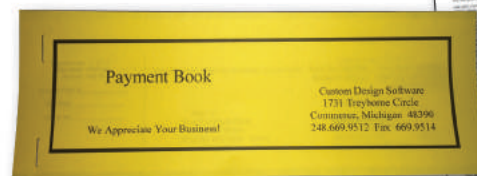
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“When Customers Say,
something negative about your competitors, do not reply with words like the following: ‘I am sorry to hear you say you had a negative experience with that company.’”

18. Don't listen to those sales trainers and educators who believe the customer is the pilot and the salesperson is the copilot. Instead, believe you are both the pilot and the copilot. The customer is only a passenger who has no idea where he is going.

19. When the customer says, “That's too expensive,” don't use any of the replies those successful salespeople of yesteryear used, such as, “It is expensive, and worth it. When you buy quality, you cry only once!” or “When you rely only on price, you're rolling dice.”

20. When Customers say something negative about your competitors, do not reply with words like the following: “I am sorry to hear

you had a negative experience with that company.” Instead, agree with the customer by saying something like the following: “We often hear negative things from our customers about that company.”

21. Make sure your clothes advertise your last meal. Never shine your shoes. Dress casually. Do not be overly concerned about personal hygiene. Believe that the smell of cigarette smoke, your last cup of coffee, or your most recent meal does not linger on your breath and clothes.

22. Never thank a customer at the end of a caller's call, especially when that customer gave you a tough time. Instead, leave the caller with a distinct distaste that leaves

him or her convinced never to call with a problem again.

23. If you are alone in the store, never ask the customer you are working with for permission to answer that call. If you ask, they will just about always give permission, but not asking may leave them with the impression that they are not valued.

24. Don't demonstrate your product's features. Forget the saying, “Not shown when told remains unsold.”

25. Read as few books on selling as possible. The only way to get better at selling is to rely on your experiences and winning formulas for success.

If you follow these twenty-five suggestions, congratulate yourself. You belong to an exclusive group of salespeople: The Dead-end Club of Selling.

Remember Zig Ziglar's formula for getting all the things you want in life: “You can get all the things in life you are looking for if you will help enough other people get what they are looking for.”

About Peter Marino: Corporate trainer, educator and speaker Dr. Peter A. Marino has written extensively on sales training techniques and their furniture retailing applications. See all of his articles posted to the “Sales Skill Index” on furninfo.com.



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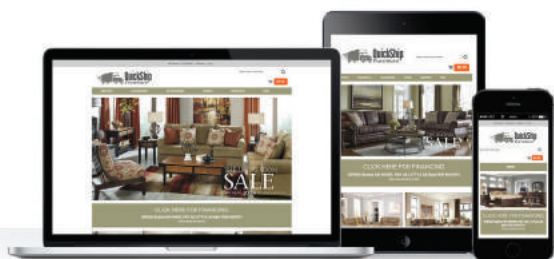
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