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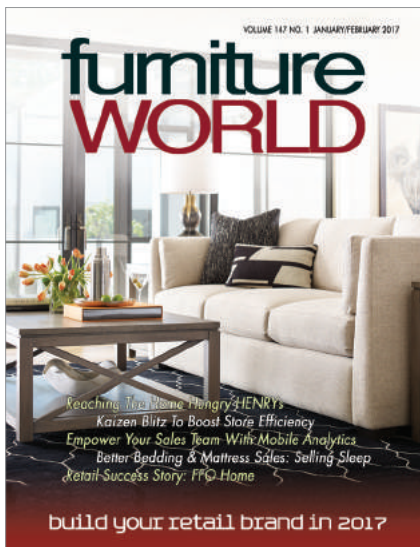
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COVER: Craftmaster, in partnership with its sister company Legacy Classic, offers this modern sofa as part of the Rachael Ray Home collection, a whole home offering of case goods and upholstery. This style is a key piece in the Highline collection, inspired by the celebrity's New York home. It features a low profile loose pillow back, and an exclusive Comfort Coil cushion. For more information, see page 21 in this issue, visit www.rachaelrayhome.com or www.cmffurniture.com.

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Customer Service &
The Parable Of
The "Horrible Dib Dib"

Early this morning I found myself searching through a pile of books looking for a Sufi teaching story to send to a friend, "The Horrible Dib Dib" re-told by Idries Shah in his book, "The Way of The Sufi."

It's a parable about an old woman plagued by the sound of a dripping faucet. A thief hears her crying out "Aah... the Dib-Dib, the horrid Dib-Dib! This abominable Dib-Dib will be the end of me." Not having seen the faucet, and fearing that his close contact with the woman has infected him with a terrible disease, the thief's wife contacts a village elder. As the very short story progresses, it touches on themes of fear, human nature and wisdom. In the end, the elder gets wisdom, the thief is rehabilitated, the thief's wife saves her husband. Everyone gets what they need, even though nobody fixes the woman's faucet!

People take from great parables what they need and what they are able to process. My take-away, for the purposes of this Editor's Corner, is about customer service.

Just about everyone in the best retail organizations are responsible for giving customers what they need, so they can be happy and satisfied. Problem is, what they need isn't always obvious. Horrible dib-dibs may arise as misunderstandings, service issues and quality problems. "Fixing the faucet" and explaining the situation may seem like the obvious solution, but customers create their own stories; about the horrible dib-dibs they've encountered that don't always respond to reason.

What's my advice? Sorry, I'm no customer service sage, or a sage of any kind. I do have an intuition that careful listening, patience, a desire to serve, and possibly reading "The Horrible Dib-Dib" will help you find your own solutions. Email me at russ@furninfo.com and I will be glad to send the text by return email.

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Marketing 2017

HOME HUNGRY HENRYs

Home marketers' best new-customer prospects.

By Pam Danziger

Who has enough income, enough desire, and just the right demographic profile to buy furniture and home accessories right now? The Henry's do!

As a girl I discovered Nancy Drew, the young reader's detective series by mystery writer Carolyn Keene. I was hooked on the mystery genre. So I graduated to Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie, then onto other mystery writers, preferring the British authors like Dorothy Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, Josephine Tey, Ellis Peters, and P.D. James. Also Elizabeth George, though she is an American, her mysteries are set in the U.K. and follow the traditions of the British greats.

I've often thought career-wise, I missed my true calling – to be a real-life detective. Yet as a market researcher, I'm just about the closest thing you can get to it, without having to deal with the blood, gore and guts of real detective work.

Mystery-novel enthusiasts and police procedural fans know that detectives investigate a crime and identify the criminal by focusing on these three aspects:

- **Means** – Who had the means to commit the crime?
- **Opportunity** – Who had the opportunity to commit it?
- **Motive** – Most importantly, who had a reason to do it?

A market researchers' job is to understand customer behavior and

identify the best potential customers. That takes detective work, which means uncovering who has the means, opportunity and motive to buy goods and services. The same three perspectives apply to researching a new consumer market segment.

HENRYs Have the MEANS to Buy

The key to identifying customers with the means to buy home furnishings is to understand the demographics of HENRYs (High Earners, Not Rich Yet).

Demographics provide the facts and figures that allow marketers to zero in on the best prospects. Income, gender and increasing age demographics best define the HENRYs, particularly younger HENRYs, as home marketers' best new customer prospects.

The HENRYs term was originally coined by Shawn Tully in a 2003 Fortune magazine article focused on the segment's heavy tax burden. But for home marketers, their spending potential is primary.

Unity Marketing defines the affluent as those with household incomes at the top 20% of the U.S. overall. HENRYs are defined by their income, ranging from \$100,000 to \$249,000.

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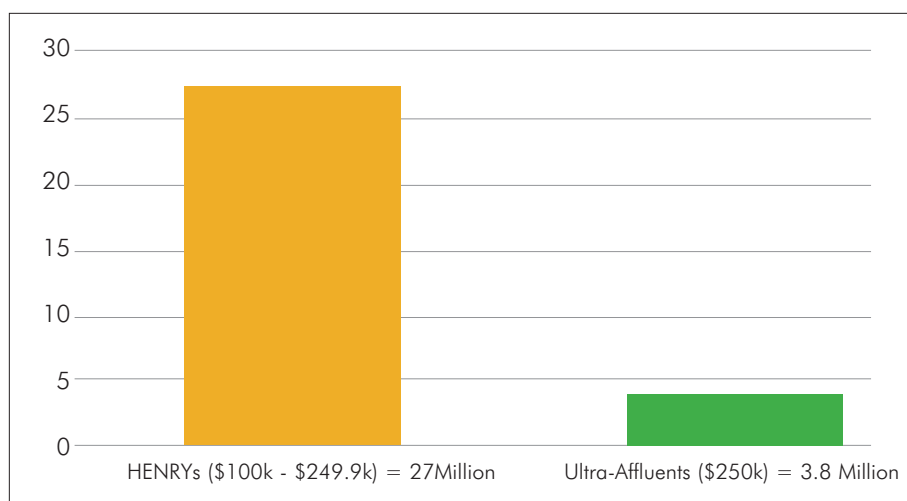
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Affluent Market Segments by Income



“As compared with the U.S. population as a whole where only two-thirds live in family households and one-third live in non-family households, over 80% of affluents, 78% of HENRYs and 83% of Ultra-affluents, live in a married-couple household.”

Younger HENRYs

Affluence comes with middle-age, with income peaking from age 35-54 years, after which people start to retire, which tends to drive down the overall income of those from age 55-64

years. So for both HENRYs and Ultra-affluents the ages of 45-54 years specifically are when both segments’ peak in terms of size and spending power.

However, HENRYs are far more heavily represented in the younger age ranges, 24-34 years than Ultra-affluents. These younger HENRYs are busy growing in their careers and incomes.

In Unity Marketing’s affluent tracking study, \$250k marks the line between mass affluence and ultra-affluence. Additionally, two key age ranges, 24-44 years (young affluents) and 45-64 years (mature affluents), have emerged as significant to marketers aimed at the high-end and luxury segments.

Those in the young affluent segment are significantly more active purchasers of luxury goods and services, especially home furnishings, as they are in an acquisitive life stage, forming families, establishing households, buying homes and investing in luxuries to enhance their lifestyles. Mature affluents, 45 to 64 years, have already acquired many goods that define a luxury lifestyle. They are transitioning out of an acquisitive mindset toward a more experiential one, often downsizing their homes as children leave the nest and their housing needs change.

This is not to say that mature affluents, including mature HENRYs, don’t

represent an important market segment for home marketers, but younger HENRYs, aged 24-44 years, are primed for buying things to decorate and enhance the quality of their lifestyles in the home. As a result, home brands as diverse as IKEA, RH, Pottery Barn, Crate & Barrel, West Elm, Ethan Allen and others have found success focusing on the luxury leanings of young HENRY affluents.

Gender is less important than HENRYs marital status

In certain marketing categories, gender plays a decisive role; however, in home-related purchases, especially among the affluents, marital status is far more important. That’s because the vast majority of affluents, both HENRYs and Ultra-affluents, are married and largely make home decisions as a couple. Indeed marital status is a key demographic distinctive in the affluent market, since often it takes two incomes to propel a household into the top 20%.

As compared with the U.S. population as a whole where only two-thirds live in family households and one-third live in non-family households, over 80% of affluents, 78% of HENRYs and 83% of Ultra-affluents, live in a married-couple household. While HENRYs are slightly more highly represented in non-family households than Ultra-affluents, the differences are not statistically significant and can be understood by the higher representation of younger, still single affluents in the HENRY income segment.

"Affluents are spending less

on more purchases, such as buying at a discount, trading down to less high-end brands, selecting less expensive options, and/or economizing in other ways."

Therefore, home marketers aiming to capture the spending power of HENRYs, need to be focused on the needs of young couples and growing families. That is the thinking behind Ethan Allen's recent licensing partnership with Disney for a line of kid and youth furnishings.

High levels of education,
a demographic distinctive

A final distinctive defining the

HENRY consumer is high educational attainment. While only about one-third of all U.S. households are headed by a consumer with a college education, twice as many HENRYs and Ultra-affluents (about 66%) have attained a college degree or post-graduate education. This means that home marketers can approach the HENRYs and communicate with them at a higher, more conceptual, value-focused level than can marketers aimed at more middle-income consumers.

Final word of advice, given the

HENRYs high levels of income, educational attainment and career focus, HENRYs often have budgetary responsibilities in their jobs. They are trained and have experience evaluating purchasing options and making budgetary decisions that maximize the return on investment in spending. They seek out and know how to identify the purchase options that represent the best value for their companies.

When they go home at night, HENRYs don't leave their business smarts at the office. They apply the

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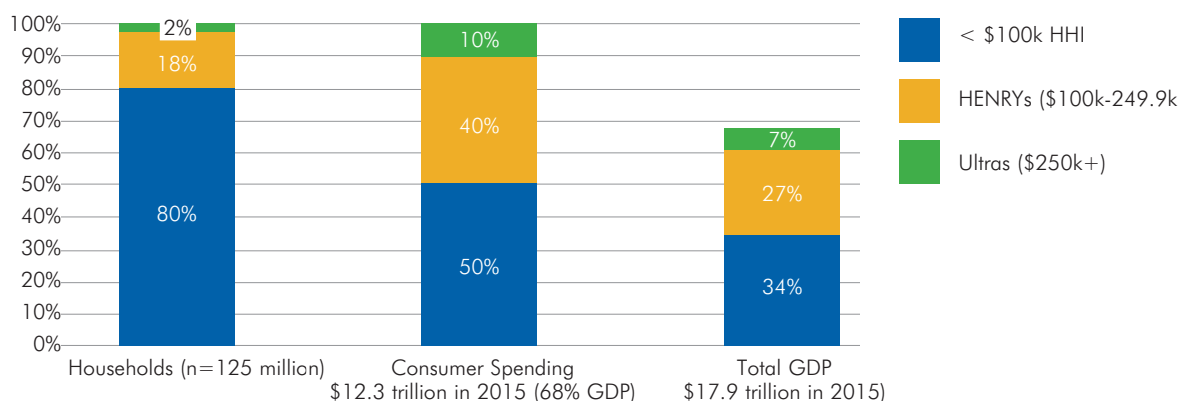
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HENRYs Contribution to U.S. Economy



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bureau Labor Statics, Unity Marketing

same due diligence in making personal purchase decisions. HENRYs know how to measure meaningful value and will seek out the best options to deliver value at the most reasonable cost.

That calls on home marketers to communicate value messaging to HENRYs who aren't necessarily interested in the cheapest option. They would rather find the most cost-effective products and services that deliver what they value and desire.

Young HENRYs are primed for home-related products

Assessing your marketing opportunity with HENRYs requires understanding his or her shopping and purchase behavior. Consumers are more or less creatures of habit who tend to follow similar paths to purchase; ones that have worked successfully for them in the past.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure survey, the nation's authority on consumer spending and the source used by policy makers in the federal government, identifies two key consumer segments where expenditures on household furnishings and equipment peaks: ages 34-44 years and household incomes over \$100,000.

Admittedly, spending on home furnishings continues strong for those aged 45-64 years and peaks as incomes rise over \$100,000, but since almost all of tomorrow's Ultra-affluents start out as young HENRYs, these are the best customers for home marketers to make a connection today that can lead to growth and prosperity tomorrow.

Connecting with younger HENRYs is even more vital for home marketers' strategy because as they mature, HENRYs' housing needs are likely to change. From 25-34 years young people are in the household formation stage, starting their families and often buying their first homes. From 35-44 years they are likely to move up to a second home and add family members. In the mature life stages, from 45-64 years, consumers also make predictable changes in their homes as they perhaps move up again, or invest in a second home. Then as children leave the nest and retirement approaches, they may move again to a smaller home, all the while continuing to have the need for new home furnishing and home decorating solutions.

To dig even deeper into young HENRYs purchasing and shopping behavior, syndicated market research studies can provide more insight. For example, Unity Marketing measured

two independent but important variables that are key indicators of affluent purchase behavior in the home furnishings space:

- *Luxury home furnishings demand* – which indicates the percentage of affluents, both HENRYs and Ultra-affluents, that made a recent purchase of home luxury goods.
- *Luxury home furnishings spending* – the amount of money spent making those home goods purchases across nine different categories, including furniture, floor coverings, outdoor luxuries, home electronics, decorative home accents and tabletop, linens and other soft goods, art and wall décor, major home appliances, kitchenware and

"Exclusivity to HENRYs feels undemocratic and too elitist, qualities that turn off more HENRYs than they attract."

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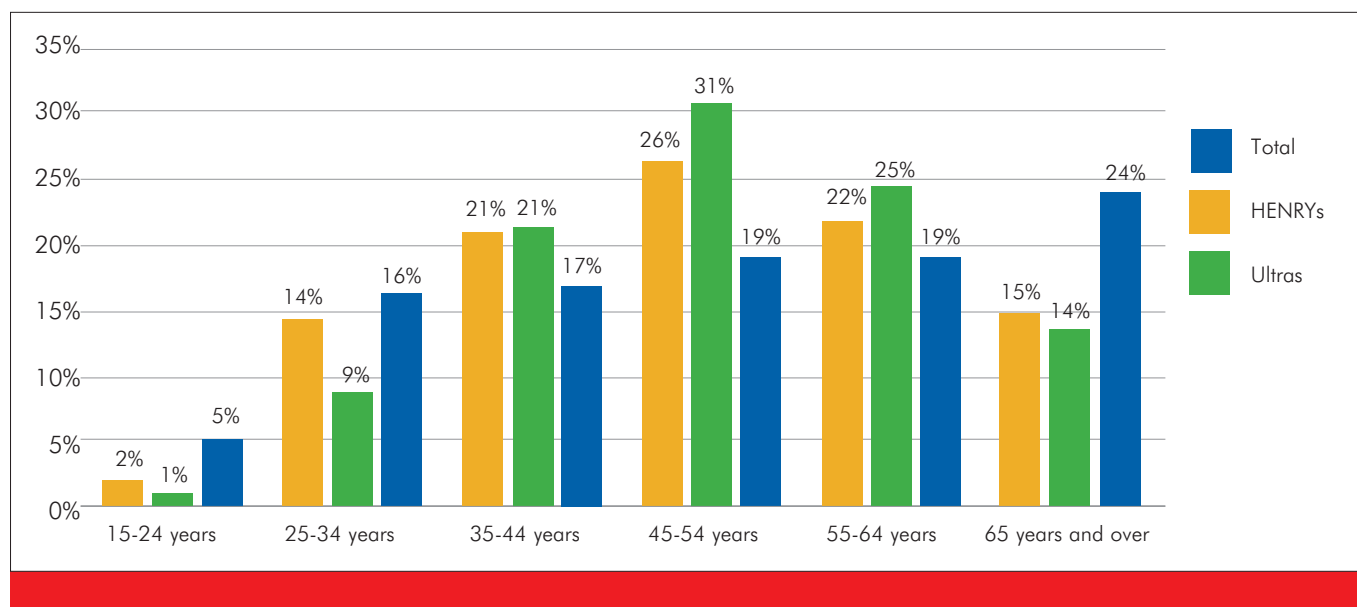
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Distribution of Households by Age



housewares, and mattresses and sleep systems.

Included in those studies are the specific types of products bought in each category and where purchases were made. Here are highlights of recent Unity Marketing studies.

Growing Demand

Statistically, there is no difference between the percentages of HENRYs and Ultra-affluents that make home goods purchases.

65 per cent of all affluent households purchased home luxury goods in 2016. That being said, it is important to recognize that with a population of 27 million people, far more Henry's purchased luxury goods than Ultra Affluents (population 3.8 million).

The home luxury market is deeper, wider and bigger among the lower-income HENRYs than the Ultra-affluents, who tend to be the primary targets of traditional home luxury brands. HENRYs represent a huge potential opportunity for home marketers.

Ultra Affluents Spend Less

While demand may be equal

between the two affluent segments, the same cannot be said for spending. Ultra-affluents with their far greater income and wealth spend more on home luxury goods, though the differences in spending between HENRYs and Ultra-affluents has been narrowing. Unity Marketing data shows that Ultra-affluents are starting to spend more like HENRYs.

The survey reveals that spending on home luxuries declined almost a third from 2012 to 2016, even while demand for home luxuries increased over the same five-year period.

This pattern -- demand on the rise, but spending on the decline -- indicates that the affluent are spending less on more purchases. Affluent consumers are buying at a discount, trading down to less high-end brands, selecting less expensive options (e.g. choosing accent pieces and fewer major furniture pieces), and/or economizing in other ways.

Shopping Patterns Shift

Disruption is a favorite word pundits use when talking about how consumers are shopping differently than they did in the past. While big national retailers, such as Macy's, JC Penney's

and Sears are closing stores, other retailers, notably RH, are opening grander stores that offer new shopping experiences.

And then there is the internet. Amazon continues to expand its merchandise assortment to offer more and better things for the home, and Wayfair, with its family of online brands, including Joss & Main, AllModern, Dwell Studio and Birch Lane, has grown from sales of a mere \$601 million in 2012 to \$2.25 billion in 2015. Net revenues for the first two quarters of 2016 are up 76.1% in 1Q16 and 60% in 2Q16 over previous year periods.

All in all, affluent today have a much wider range of home products to buy and places to buy them than they did a mere two years ago. Unity Marketing's Affluent Consumer Tracking Study (ACTS) tracks where HENRYs, as well as Ultra-affluents, make their purchases in nine different home product categories. It reveals these as the fastest growing channels for shoppers within each category.

Nine Growth Categories

1 Art & Antiques. While art galleries remain HENRYs go-to destination for art purchases, specialty



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HOME HUNGRY HENRYs

home furnishing stores, department stores, and discount stores, outlets and warehouse clubs are among the fastest growing destinations to purchase art and wall décor.

And while the internet ranks second as HENRYs' shopping destination for art and wall décor, it isn't growing as fast as home furnishings, department and discount stores. This may signal that internet shopping, at least for art and wall décor, is reaching its peak.

2. Home Electronics. For this category of goods, specialty electronics stores remain the destination of choice, but more HENRYs are also sourcing their television sets, audio systems and other home electronics from online retailers. To date discounters, outlets and warehouse clubs haven't made significant strides in capturing the spending of affluents in this category.

3. Furniture, Lamps and Floor Coverings. Specialty home furnishings stores are the destination of

choice for HENRYs when shopping for these goods, though their use of the internet has more than doubled since 2013 and home improvement store purchases have increased by 77%. These shifts make internet and home improvement stores the second and third most important destination for these goods. Of note, use of interior designers as a source for these goods declined from 13% to only 5% of affluent shoppers.

4. Garden, Outdoor and Patio. Garden centers and big-box home improvement stores capture the bulk of HENRY shoppers in this category, but art galleries that offer more artistic, hand-crafted items for the garden and patio are a rapidly growing source for these goods. Also trending are specialty home furnishing stores and discounters, outlets and warehouse clubs as a source for HENRYs' garden decorating needs.

5. Kitchenware, Cookware and Housewares. The HENRYs' top

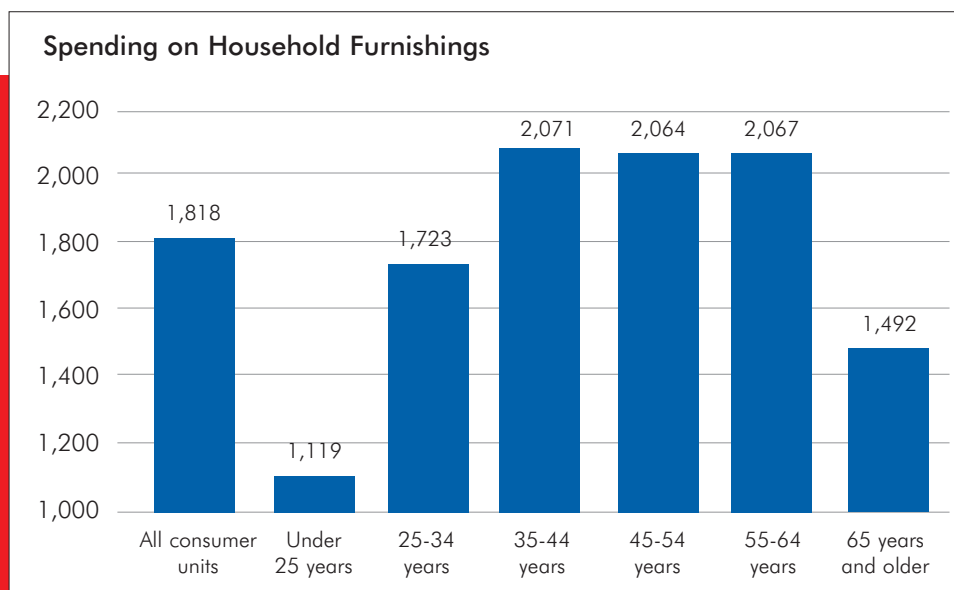
three most important shopping destinations in this category are specialty gourmet cooking stores, internet and department stores, in that order. Except for a growing use of the internet for these purchases, there hasn't been any other significant shift in shopping patterns.

6. Major Appliances, plus Bath Fixtures and Building Products.

An important category for many luxury appliance and fixture companies, the HENRYs have been moving toward home improvement stores and the internet for these purchases. They are less likely to frequent specialty appliance dealers and interior designers/contractors for these purchases.

This suggests to brands that strictly limit distribution to designers and appliance dealers that they may want

"Home marketers aiming to capture the spending power of HENRYs, need to focus on the needs of young couples and growing families. That's the thinking behind Ethan Allen's recent licensing partnership with Disney."



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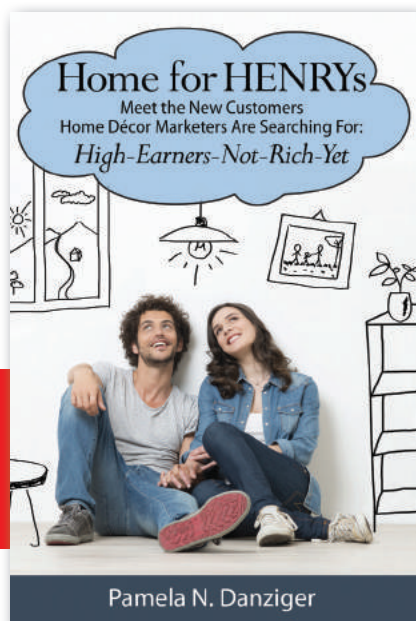
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HENRYs

Pam Danziger's mini-book, *What Do HENRYs Want?* takes a deep dive into the income profiles, buying patterns and psycho-graphics of the a group she characterizes as the "home-hungry HENRYs".

to broaden distribution to less exclusive channels in order to connect with high-potential HENRYs.

7. Linens & Bedding. Department stores are the primary shopping destination for HENRYs when looking for home linens, and since 2013 department stores have grown even more as a primary destination. Also posting growth in this category is luxury-branded boutiques and discounters, outlets and warehouse clubs.

Interestingly, the internet reached a peak in 2014 but recently dropped back to 2013 levels.

8. Mattresses & Sleep Systems. The internet is the big news in the change in where HENRYs are shopping for mattresses and sleep systems. Use of the internet for these purchases has doubled since 2013, to be the second most popular destination.

Internet growth came at the expense of lost patronage in mattress specialty and furniture stores, though mattress specialty stores remain the number one destination.

9. Tabletop, Flatware, Dinnerware, Glassware. Unlike other home categories, there is no clear winner as number one shopping destination for HENRYs when it comes to tableware. They shop widely across a range of stores, notably department stores,

internet, specialty gourmet and table-top stores, and specialty home furnishings stores, with the latter two growing in importance from 2013.

Overview

For each brand and each marketer their distribution strategies will necessarily differ. It makes sense to expand distribution in the fastest-growing channels. Yet, as is the case in art and linens and bedding, the internet may well be reaching its peak. So, moving aggressively to online distribution in these categories may not be the optimum strategy.

A key for any home marketer aiming to capture the HENRYs attention and spending is to:

- **Not be too exclusive.** Exclusivity to HENRYs feels undemocratic and too elitist, qualities that turn off more HENRYs than they attract. Your brand doesn't need to be everywhere, but it needs to be accessible and affordable.
- **Find partners that understand what value means to HENRYs.** Above all, HENRYs are looking for value when it comes to purchases for their home. Not necessarily the cheapest offer, but the one that offers the best value for the money. That means, pricing is not about

how low can you go, but how much value can you offer.

- **Focus on "how" you sell.** The key to success in retailing today is not about WHAT you sell, but HOW you sell it. Make sure your retailing partners believe the same thing and are willing to focus on the customer, their needs, desires and values in the retailing experience.

About Pam Danziger: Speaker, author, and market researcher Pamela N. Danziger is internationally recognized for her expertise on the world's most influential consumers: the American Affluent. Her new book, *Shops that POP! 7 Steps to Extraordinary Retail Success*, reveals the secrets to crafting a retail shopping experience that's irresistible to high-value shoppers. As founder of Unity Marketing, Pam leads with research to provide brands with actionable insights into the minds of their most profitable customers.

She is the author of five books including a recent mini-book, *What Do HENRYs Want?* (available at <http://www.paramountbooks.com/home-henrys>), explores the changing face of America's consumer marketplace. Pam is frequently called on to share new insights with audiences and business leaders all over the world. Contact her at pam@unitymarketingonline.com.



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Retail 2017

DON'T GET PEPPERED WITH EFFICIENCY

They say "time is money", but that's not always true at retail.

by Gordon Hecht

Each shopper and each sale is a little bit different. Provide an effective pathway to purchase and you will win big in 2017.

When you spend time working in the manufacturing world, you get really familiar with EFFICIENCY. Ever since Frank Gilbreth studied time and motion in the early twentieth century, manufacturers have worked to reduce steps to save time. You may have heard... Time is Money!

When McDonald's started cranking out billions of burgers, all cooked the same, they removed 10-15 minutes out of the wait time and created the efficient Fast Food Restaurant. Everybody is looking to take a step out of the process. I thought I had seen it all until a lunch break during a recent business trip.

Mixing Salt & Pepper

When traveling, I like to stay away from the national chains and give my business to the local guy. I went to a hometown sandwich shop for a quick bite. The line to order was about 10 people deep. I waited, placed my order and then moved to the part of the process where the sandwich artist

adds your condiments. She asked if I wanted salt and pepper. I've never been a pepper fanatic, so I asked if I could get a light dusting of salt on my

"I asked if I could get a light dusting of salt on my sub. She told me that they mix their salt and pepper together because most people want both."

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Retail 2017 EFFICIENCY

sub. She told me that they mix their salt and pepper together because most people want both. And sure enough there was a large shaker filled with a black and white substance.

This act of EFFICIENCY probably shaves 5 seconds from the meal making process. You may be thinking "Multiply that 5 seconds by 10,000 customers and..." It's my opinion, that this is taking efficiency beyond good taste.

Efficiency vs. Effectiveness

Think about these two words: efficiency and effectiveness. The first refers to getting acceptable results in the least amount of time. The second, effectiveness, refers to reducing bottlenecks and roadblocks while accomplishing goals. In the sandwich shop, efficiency is making the most sandwiches in the shortest period possible. Effectiveness is satisfying each customer with a tasty product in a reasonable amount of time.

Don't Be Too Efficient

This translates to our mattress and furniture business too! Think about home delivery, the final mile of customer satisfaction. The most efficient way to deliver is drop off boxes at the front door, ring the doorbell and leave. It may work for UPS or

your local newspaper kid, but would be totally ineffective in our industry. Imagine the returns for shopper-inflicted assembly damage. You'd spend twice as much repairing the ill will as it would have cost to give top flight service in the beginning.

Efficiency in the sales process would mean you would have an hourly paid armed guard at your front door handing everyone a pad of paper and pencil. The shopper would browse through your store, write down UPC numbers of your merchandise, and key them in at a self-service register like the kind they have at better Walmart stores. We sell products that have to be explained to shoppers, requiring an effective sales process.

Amazon Prime Experience

In 2017 shoppers will trade up on price to reduce headaches and hassles. Right now Amazon's Prime

shoppers are paying more for Prime Service even though Amazon displays lower cost options. This trend points to a need for furniture and bedding retailers to take a close look to see which of their efficient business practices are creating extra time and tasks for shoppers.

Your Telephone

A good place to start is at your telephone. You will score extra points with shoppers if you have a real human voice answering the phone within three rings. Those points double when you offer a friendly greeting and use your name along with the store name.

Your Promotions

Next, be sure that pricing and promotions are not full of holes and exclusions. No promotion should beg

"Retailers provide
a world class shopping experience by thriving on variables because each shopper and each sale is a little bit different."



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"You are wasting
your shoppers' time if you are spending more than three
minutes to create the order (five minutes if it is financed)."

people to shop and then dare them
to BUY!

Your Checkout

Put a stopwatch on your check-out procedure. Radio Shack lost their business partly because they asked for too much information from their shoppers, even if they were just buying two AAA batteries. Set up a blank Cash Customer Account on your POS system for orders paid by credit card and carried home by the shopper. Even if the order is for home delivery, you are wasting your shoppers' time if you are spending more than three minutes to create the order (five minutes if it is financed).

Your Delivery

Getting back to that delivery process, the most effective time to deliver

to your customers is when they are home! Consider starting your delivery routes at three pm and wrapping up at nine pm. You may interrupt a few dinners, but you'll save your buying public from having to take time off of work or worrying about picking up kids from school.

World Class Experience

Manufacturers survive by eliminating the variables to create a pathway to efficiency. Retailers provide a world class shopping experience by thriving on variables. Each shopper and each sale is a little bit different. Provide an effective pathway to purchase and you will win in 2017.

About Gordon Hecht: *Gordon Hecht is Senior Manager-In Store Concepts for Serta Simmons Bedding Company, introducing and expanding bedding business in conventional and*

non-traditional venues. He started his 30+ years experience in the Home Furnishings industry in Las Vegas, NV as a delivery helper and driver and later served in sales, retail management and consulting roles. Questions and comments can be directed to him at ghecht@serta.com.

"Radio Shack lost
their business partly
because they asked
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POINT-COUNTERPOINT

by Bill Napier & Ed Tashjian

Is the licensing of celebrity furniture lines in the home furnishing's category worth the cost for manufacturers and retail brands? Two marketing experts explain their differing points of view.

Furniture World asked the question at left to marketing experts Bill Napier of Napier Marketing Group and Edward Tashjian of Tashjian Marketing and asked them to duke it out. Bill doesn't think it's a great idea for many companies but his friend Edward Tashjian differs. We'll let each have their turns, and will let you, the reader decide!

Point Napier

Bill Napier: Almost daily I read that another home furnishing company is licensing a celebrity of some sort, Chef, Singer, popular Home Makeover TV Host, etc... to promote its products and brand, especially now before major furniture markets.

My first thought is; Why would they do that? Sure, these celebrities benefit from the exposure and the revenue that brands/licensees provide, but I can't help but wonder if the brands receive the same exposure and the consumer connections they hope for as a result.

Then I thought back to all my RANTS on <http://www.napiermkt.com/retail-rants-blog> about the lack of, or complete abandonment of manufacturers

investing in and promoting their own companies as "brands". And more importantly, using their resources to help their retailers get velocity on the products they floor of those brands. Personally, I think I've made the case over and over that our industry considers true marketing to be for the furniture markets only, at the expense of investing in branding focused on helping retailers and convincing consumers.

Let me explain why I think this is a problem for our industry.

Let's start with your target audience, the people that actually have the money to buy your products, the 34-64-year-old age group. This demographic includes the Millennials who are so important to the survival of any home furnishings enterprise. Recent research from The Nielsen Company (*Global Trust in Advertising Report*, Sept 2015) identifies "winning strategies for an evolving media landscape," found that, US consumers are big fans of humor (score one for Alec and Lil'); however, the study says that celebrity and athlete endorsements are two of the three themes that resonate the least". The survey found that celebrity endorsements resonate with just 8% of US consumers (see chart

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"Based on this study

the best options for marketers be to look at are themes such as; Value, High Energy, Aspirational and Humor."

on page 30).

Based on this study, the best options for marketers to look at are; Value, High Energy, Aspirational and Humor before handing off their brand to some person whose personality and actions could become detrimental to their investment with a single tweet, comment, political position, moral or ethical faux-pas that might disrupt brand good will.

What's The Cost?

Not all license deals are the same. Some are very expensive, but the ones I've worked with, usually hover around minimums/guarantees of approximately \$1,000,000 against the wholesale dollars and this could be for 1-3 years! Once that minimum is met, then the celebrity could be looking at 1% - 10%+ of every sale. I wonder what would happen if these home furnishings producers invested in their own brand and in the retailers who support them with this type of investment. BUT that's not all of the costs. There can be travel expenses, appearances, social interactions and others. So why would a manufacturer do this?

I'll explain what I think, and it may be a bit brutal, but I've been there/ done that.

- **Rationale #1:** *"They are famous and we are not. This will elevate us in the buyer's mind at markets to come see us."*
- **Rationale #2:** *"The celebrity has a huge social media following and we can gain traction with that."*

- **Rationale #3:** *"We get huge traffic and we get placements from the buyers at markets."*

My answer to #1 is, manufacturers need to invest in their own brand so that their retail customers can get sales velocity. This investment needs to include the basics such as product videos, P.O.S., social media, blogs, a great website and so much more.

Even if some of your customers care about celebrities who are endlessly highlighted in magazines, tabloids, and on TV, are you sure that this interest will translate into sales?

My answer #2 is that most brands in this industry have lousy websites, and social/blogging platforms that are virtually non-existent. When manufacturers partner with celebrities they must ask themselves, whose brand gets the attention? There are a handful of manufacturers in our industry that have done this well, because they co-branded extremely well. They've thought it out to insure they took advantage of the opportunity to support their retailers with a variety of tools for increased velocity.

My answer #3 is OK, I'll give you that because in the last 16 years of attending market, there really isn't any "BUZZ" except about a new country singer, celebrity chef, home makeover person or something. Believe it or not, the "person" gets all the advertising, while the Brand and the product play second or third fiddle to their name.

The Bottom Line

So I ask you, after the initial intro-

duction and placement, what are the numbers over one year, two years, three years? Are the placements and more importantly the sales velocity, worth the cost of those licensing fees? And, has this licensed product cannibalized sales from other collections and SKU's? If so, there's a HUGE problem when the agreement ends, because all the investment, all the attention has been funneled into the celebrity brand; not into the manufacturer's or retailer's brand. And, when the term of the agreement is over what can be done? Renew or buy another or start all over again of course.

As a marketing person for over 30 years it was my job to do the research, due diligence on the research, formulate a plan, articulate the plan and execute the plan with input and insights from employees, salespeople, outside vendors and more. I don't see a lot of furniture marketing people doing that anymore. Sure there are a few really good ones, but believe me, not nearly enough.

In Summation

If you've read this far, you've probably figured out that my view of most celebrity "designed" or endorsed home furnishings products are not well researched, not well articulated as a brand, not well executed, very expensive and most importantly... are not worth the investment because, as the research shows, there are so many other ways, better ways, to get consumers to have an interest in and buy home furnishings products.

Counterpoint Tashjian

Bill makes some good points, but don't throw out the baby with the bathwater. There is no such thing as always or never. Without question there are plenty of ill-conceived licensing arrangements that are a waste of resources, but there are many that make sense. The key is to know the difference before you jump in with both feet. I will provide a checklist, but first let's examine the three primary

objectives of marketers at the various markets. or psychological differences.

1. To develop and bring to market differentiated products with real
2. To get those products brought to the various markets placed at retail.

"Licensing can be a very effective strategy.

Like everything else, if poorly conceived and executed, it is counterproductive. But when it works, it can be magic."



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3. To facilitate the sell-through of those products at retail.

The right partnerships can make a world of difference in each of these areas. With more than 2,000 exhibitors introducing new products at least twice, and some as many as four times a year, it is extremely difficult to stand out. This is especially true in a category that is driven more by fashion than technology. Many of what Bill referred to as celebrities are in fact bona fide designers with extraordinary talent and creativity. For example, take Richard Frinier for Century Outdoor and Brown Jordan. He is the quintessential outdoor designer that redefines the category with style and innovation (which is why he was inducted into the Hall of Fame this October.)

"Lifestyle brands like Tommy Bahama or TV celebrities like Joanna Gaines, bring something to the table that no one else can."

Lifestyle brands like Tommy Bahama or TV celebrities like Joanna Gaines (Magnolia Home), bring something to the table that no one else can. I recently conducted surveys with several top retailers about this topic. Dealers have mixed feelings about licensed brands. They believe the key drivers are product and value and the license is just the frosting on the cake. But nearly all feel they need to have them and in fact buy them regularly.

Different channels need different partners. Middle-market stores need middle-market licenses. They loathe the high-end designers, but are attracted to well-known names, especially when they're known for their expertise in the home, like Joanna Gaines. Aside from the cachet of the name, what retailers like about them is that they often come with manufacturer commitment and energy as well as marketing which includes both lifestyle photography and personality photography drawing interest and differentiating their store both in advertising and at the point-of-sale.

Getting products placed in the marketplace is another challenge. There is a limited amount of floor space. I estimate that the products shown at market is anywhere from 50 to 100 times what can actually be placed at retail. There are 11.5 million square feet of show space in High Point alone. Even the most efficient buyer, there for seven days can visit only 70 exhibitors per market. Rachael Ray has wide distribution. Without her endorsement I doubt Legacy Classic would have achieved those placements. A primary goal of competent furniture marketers

Advertising Themes that US consumers say resonates most	RPU
Humorous	50%
Value Oriented	38%
Family Oriented	33%
Real-Life Situations	35%
Pets/ Animals Centered	27%
Health-Themed	24%
High-Energy/ Action	17%
Sentimental	15%
Aspirational	13%
Kids-Centered	13%
Sports-Themed	12%
Sexual	11%
Competitive	10%
Celebrity Endorsements	8%
Car-Themed	6%
Athlete Endorsements	5%

is first to get people to their showrooms. Does a celebrity magnet help? You bet it does. Anyone who is ever done this successfully knows that the right license brings in new customers and you can double normal show-room traffic whether it's the result of vanity or real product differences.

A license almost always leads to better marketing at retail because there is a contract that requires it.

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Don't miss the best thing at Market...

"The licensor should

appeal to each of your constituencies. Interior Designers, Buyers, floor design associates and end consumers."

Yes, in a perfect world, manufacturers would add a 10% advertising royalty or marketing fee to their OWN bill of materials. Nearly every other industry does this to support their marketing efforts. Here's why furniture manufacturers don't. The barriers to entry and the real product differences in this category are very low. There are certain merchandising price points that manufacturers need to hit. If they don't, there are plenty of competitors that do. And, a manufacturer is lucky to make a 5% net operating profit. Their thinking is, if they put this into marketing they won't make any money at all. Without something special like a license, they can't reconcile the premium price.

Having the license forces manufacturers to build marketing into the cost. Along with the new products, there is advertising, point-of-sale, in-store events and training that come with the territory—which are often the real differentiators!

Not all licensees are created equal. Some are great and some are lousy.

Both retailers and manufacturers are well advised to know the difference before they buy in. Allow me to share my top 10 checklist of criteria for knowing the difference.

Top 10 Licensing Checklist

- 1. Fill a profitable design niche.** A common element of all successful licensing programs is good product, which meets an unfulfilled lifestyle niche. The licensor should bring something special to the table in terms of design, marketing or brand equity.
- 2. Increased placement.** A license should allow you to open more doors, increase square footage on existing floors, or bring new customers (Example: a younger demographic or a new channel of distribution).
- 3. Support higher prices and margins.** Your margins must increase by a minimum of the licensing

fee plus 20% to cover extra costs.

- 4. Extend a product life cycle.** The licensed brand should be of an enduring nature which allows you to add products and extend a product life cycle.
- 5. Be consistent with your brand positioning.** For example, if you stand for fashion leadership, your licensed brand should be of a design nature, or have the ability to enhance displays.
- 6. Have a strong Social Media following.** Social media is continuously evolving, and each medium has its own special audience. The partner must have a strong following, a contractual agreement and a plan to promote the products on an ongoing basis.
- 7. The licensor should appeal to each of your constituencies.** Interior Designers, Buyers, floor design associates and end consumers. There



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needs to be a reason why everyone can get excited by it.

8. Be a logical and believable fit. Make an easily understandable, authentic connection.

9. The Licensed brand should be better known than yours. You are licensing the equity in a brand which has already been built, vs. using your marketing dollars to build their brand.

10. High Quality Partners. Your partners should bring to the

table a stable staff of intelligent, creative, available and responsive people, who help you to grow your business.

Licensing can be a very effective strategy. Like everything else, if poorly conceived and executed, it is counter-productive. But when it works, it can be magic.

About Bill Napier: Bill Napier is Managing Partner of Napier Marketing Group. He has been the chief marketing officer of several small, medium and large companies throughout his

career, most notably Ashley Furniture Industries Inc.

Bill is also a featured writer and speaker in the retail industry. His passion is to help retail brands & brick mortar retailers grow their businesses by creating, guiding and deploying successful marketing B2B/B2C solutions integrating traditional marketing with the web/social media. He has demonstrated this with his FREE website www.social4retail.com with hundreds of articles and "how To" strategies for retailers and brands. Bill can be reached at; billnapier@napiermkt.com or 612-217-1297.

About Ed Tashjian: Ed Tashjian is Principal of Tashjian Marketing, a strategic marketing and business development consulting firm based in Hickory, NC specializing in the home furnishing's industry. Find out more information at www.Tashjianmarketing.com or call (828) 855-0100.



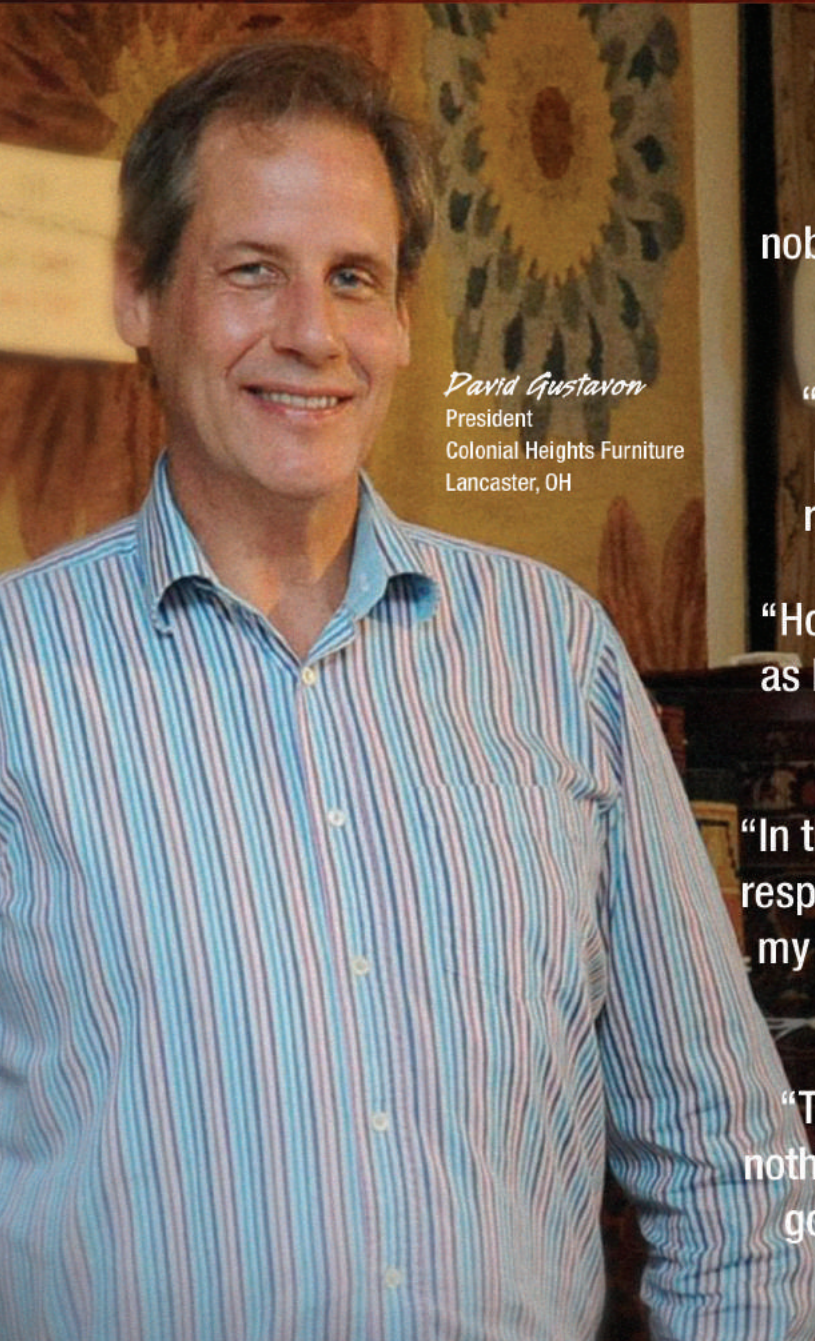
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EMPOWER YOUR SALES TEAM

by Amitesh K Sinha

Mobile analytics can prevent common causes of shopper anger & disappointment.

Winning retail sales teams are armed with powerful tools such as effective branding, advertising, store layout, brand alternatives, sales skills, promotions, financing and much more. With these tools, it is the sales team's mission to create a positive buying experience for every customer.

What happens when these tools fail? Imagine the following scenario: a couple walks into your store and are greeted by a well-trained, smiling sales rep. They want to buy a recliner. The rep deftly takes them to the correct section of the store, explains about the different products, subtly guides the couple toward the most popular choice, and convinces them that it's the perfect addition to their home.

At checkout, both the salesperson and shopper discover that this particular recliner is out of stock and cannot be delivered for another three weeks.

The couple, angry and disappointed, leave the shop, never to return. A perfect sales journey is overturned at the last moment because the RSAs data was not up-to-date.

Could this situation have been prevented? Yes, with the use of mobile analytics in the hands of the sales associate.

Mobile Analytics

Mobile analytics refers to the collection of real-time data, its study, and presentation as actionable insights. It relies on mobiles to both input data and output the right information to the right person at the right moment (often called just-in-time content).

What the sales team cannot be expected to remember or know, their mobiles certainly can. Giving the sales

team access to advanced analytics on their mobiles augments their knowledge with a whole new array of data, giving them that much more power to drive sales and keep a store competitive.

Mobile analytics can provide sales associates with immediate, up-to-date information on stock availability, price fluctuations, trending products, new launches, and more. At the click of a button, the RSA in the above example could have pointed the couple towards a recliner that was in stock, and simultaneously alerted the back office about the out-of-stock situation.

A Sales Management Boon

Salespeople are uniquely positioned to understand client behavior. The addition of mobile analytics allows them to capitalize on that understanding by sending clear, relevant data back to the store or sales managers. Clever displays that help transform that data into insights, help managers to quickly adjust settings to solve problems in real-time, rather than having to wade through crude data gathered in monthly reports.

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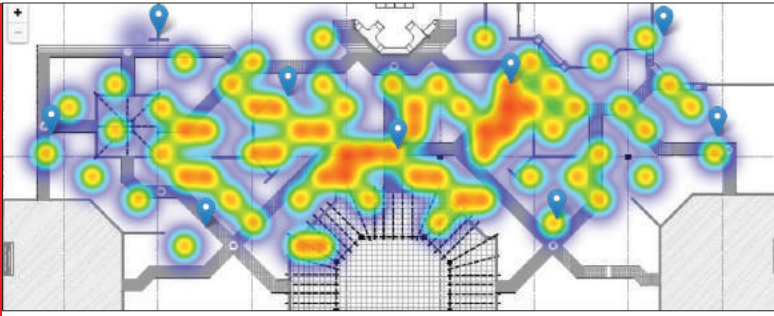
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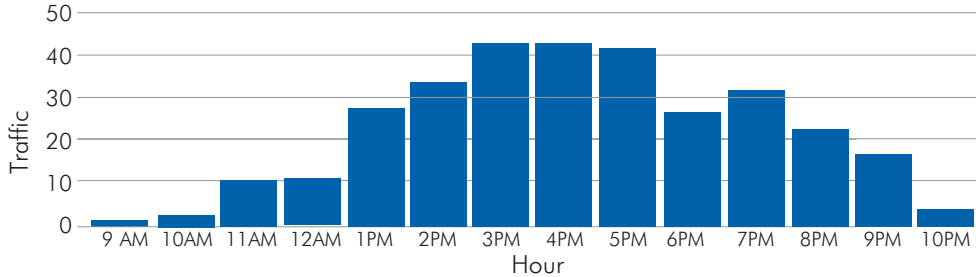


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Store Heat Map



Hourly Analytics



"Clever displays that help transform data into insights helps managers to quickly adjust settings to solve problems in real-time."

Here's an example of how this might work:

1. A salesperson shows a coffee table to a potential customer.
2. She uses her mobile to pull up a full product profile and quote the most accurate, up-to-date data.
3. The customer decides not to purchase that coffee table in favor of a competing brand.
4. The sales associate infers a reason for this decision and feeds that information into her mobile with a single click. For example, the price was too high, the table was out of stock, or the size, color or materials weren't appropriate.
5. Analytics software aggregates this and similar reports from salespeople to get a clear understanding of why the table isn't selling. In this case it might be that 35% of customers preferred a taller table, and 52% of customers preferred a cheaper table.
6. Sales managers and buyers review the data to recognize recurring problems and offer solutions, such as to adjust the table's price, change its in-store location to a display of lower coffee tables, where it might fit in better, or move the table to clearance and purchase other stock.

This ability to monitor, in real-time, the varied factors affecting sales from the floor, has proven to give managers many more opportunities to optimize sales, stock management, placement, discounts, promotional campaigns, and so on.

The Bigger Picture

Mobile analytics allow more than in-store gains. They can boost cross-store improvement in big furniture retail chains, and keep retailers abreast of competing online businesses.

To obtain this bigger picture, retailers must standardize and curate their inflow of data. Stock management software must converse with point-of-sale software, with workers' mobiles, with online promotional campaigns, and with online competitors to create a picture of furniture retail in full context. This high level of communication and adaptability is in part possible due to advanced cloud services that allow synchronization with multiple sources, and the generation of reports and insights at the highest level.

Furniture retailers who manage each store in a chain separately, and at best compare their revenue and other generic metrics monthly, can now afford to do better. Mobile analyt-

ics allows these retailers to draw cross-store insights, run cross-store tests, plus optimize promotions, product launches, displays, pricing, and much more. This finer granularity is made possible by efficient metrics collected by sales associates and reported in real time via mobile analytics.

It may sound complicated, but it's not. For example, to conduct A/B testing on a new product to find its optimal price, you would just do the following:

1. Give the new product a price 'X' at one store, and price 'Y' in another.
2. Collect sales data on the ratio of potential customers to actual sales of the product at each location.
3. Quickly and efficiently decide which price point works best.

Live reports from the furniture sales floor also allows managers to easily analyze and compare the efficiency of stores, managers, and individual salespeople.

Happy Sales Teams & Clients

Detailed sales reports and analysis take time to produce and even more time to sift through to glean useful

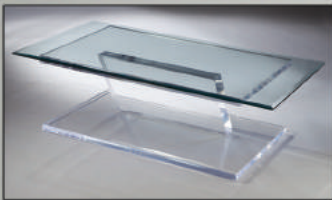
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insights. As a result, in-store sales teams rarely peruse such data for its fullest potential. This creates a gap between how they “sense” the field, and how the marketing department sees it through cold reports. This gap can cause alienation between sales teams and marketing directives.

Mobile analytics allows sales teams to feel they are part of the process, more influential, and responsible.

With the help of mobile analytics, sales associates can be confident that the highly accessible data on their devices is always organized, up-to-date, and official. This boosts confidence in their ability to recommend the best options, which in turn contributes to the establishment of rapport with customers. Sales teams tend to become more energetic and active using this technology, and their enthusiasm facilitates a better shopping experience.

Mobile analytics enables the kind of friendly competition within sales teams that Collins and Porras speak so high-

ly of in their book, *Built to Last*. It also encourages personal excellence and reinforces a sense of being seen and valued by management.

The Opportunity

A high percent of Fortune 500 companies are turning toward mobile solutions. They equip their sales teams with mobiles or tablets, and incorporate mobile analytics in day-to-day decision-making. This approach often shows strong results not only in sales, but also in efficiency and timeliness, making these companies the leaders in their fields.

The furniture industry has been very slow to adapt to this new reality. The good news is that there’s an opportunity for early adapters in our industry to gain an edge over slower competitors. With all the advantages stacked in favor of mobile analytics, there is no reason why furniture retailers should not leverage this technology for success.

and an open network shoppers can use, set up just for your guests.

- Make sure your staff has access to a good strong wifi signal that works across your whole store, with secured/password restricted access for employees only.
- You MUST have internet access with a strong bandwidth signal throughout the store. Consumers have no tolerance for anything less.
- If you develop a Mobile APP that is data intensive, include both IOS and Andriod devices to account for every consumer preference.
- Work with your IT team, or an IT provider who knows and understands Mobile Applications and their implementation.
- The mobile APP must be extremely easy to use.
- The APP must be able to read or “read & write” from your back office POS database, in real time, for updates, APP improvements and more.

“There’s an opportunity for early adapters in our industry to gain an edge over slower competitors.”

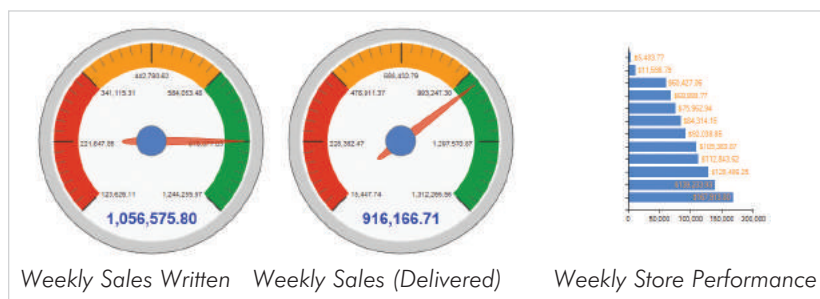
Getting Started

Here are a few things to consider before you implement mobile APPS into your stores.

- Create a dual wifi network; one for your staff/company that is secured,

About Amitesh Sinha: Amitesh Sinha is a technology consultant based in North America. With over 20 years of experience developing and deploying solutions for retail, Sinha has gained a reputation for home furnishing software solutions, furniture software, POS furniture software, and re-engineering of software with extended features. 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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Top 100 retailer "Where great quality lives for less!"

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

There's a secret to FFO Home's success. Look at their stunning trajectory!

Founded in 1984, the vision of a gentleman by the name of Ray Whitmire, the first Furniture Factory Outlet store was located on Rogers Avenue in Fort Smith, Arkansas. The family-owned business focused from the outset on quality and value. The Whitmires developed their innovative business successfully until they sold in 2007 to Alpine-Investors Inc.

It was in the fall of 2012 that Larry Zigerelli brought his magic to FFO, beginning a dramatic surge to Top-100 status. Larry saw the "big picture". His impressive international credentials included the Vice Presidency of the U.S. Health Care Division for Procter and Gamble, plus a Vice Presidency for Latin America and Puerto Rico. He was Executive Vice President of CVS Pharmacy, then President of Meijer, Inc., followed by stints in private equity. But if you happen to be chatting with the objective and modest Larry you'll find that he perceptively tends to attribute FFO Home's escalation to the company's well deserved "loyal customers". Said Larry, "We were able to add brand names at everyday low prices and we activated expansion both in existing markets and in Oklahoma and Texas".

In December of 2015, FFO's corporate offices moved from Muldrow, Oklahoma, back to Fort Smith. And during this transition, an affiliate of the private investment firm Sun Capital

Partners acquired the by now 36-store FFO, "setting the foundation for our aggressive growth plans", said Larry.

The move was recognized and applauded by Asa Hutchinson, Governor of the State of Arkansas. "It's always encouraging to have a company decide to locate a corporate headquarters here. Companies from across the U.S. and internationally realize that our central location and versatile workforce make Arkansas an ideal location." He congratulated FFO Home, predicting that the company had established a "footprint for the

"Over the past two and half years our store base has expanded nearly forty per cent, with 8 to 10 more stores to open in 2017.

In 10 years we'll keep on expanding on the same strategy of growth."

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RETAIL PROFILE

future”.

Now, at this point in time, with 41 stores ranged across the five-state area of Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Kansas and Texas, it is undeniable that FFO Home is a force to be reckoned with!

“We have also always offered the convenience of being able to take our furniture home the same day of purchase so our customers can begin enjoying their new items right away.”

Low Price Strategy

The “secret” begins to reveal itself in Larry’s incisive description of FFO. “The original company was founded more than 30 years ago as a superior value furniture retailer that provided the lowest prices to our customers day-in and day-out. FFO was able to offer great savings based on our ability to make special buys on ‘one-of-a-kind’ product overruns, buying factory direct products at close-out prices and by keeping the cost of our operations very low. As a result, our everyday prices have always been 30 to 50 per cent below our competition. We have also always offered the convenience of being able to take our furniture home the same day of purchase so our customers can begin enjoying their new items right away.

“At our all new FFO Home, we retain that same philosophy of providing superior value with all these same practices. We have also dramatically expanded our product selection including a wide variety of upholstery,

bedroom, dining and mattresses and with quality that’s simply second to none. And we’re proud to offer new categories such as 100 per cent hand-made wool rugs, lamps, hundreds of home accent products and much more.

“A word on quality which we hold paramount at FFO Home. We are proud to offer dozens of quality name brands as well as FFO Home Brands. Our upholstery lines have everything from top quality microfiber to 100 per cent leather with popular brand names such as Flexsteel, Broyhill, Simmons and Home Stretch and Serta mattresses. Our Natural Elements mattresses have the same cutting edge sleep technology and great quality as the name brands with prices up to 70 per cent lower. Because we manufacture our own brand, cutting out the middle man, we can pass on these huge savings. And, don’t forget, we always have ‘one of a kind’ special buys.

“Our bedroom and dining room selection is also bigger, with all wood materials in traditional, modern and



This group represents over 135 years of service to FFO Home. Pictured from (l-r): Johnny Mizell - Vice President Advertising; Martin Moore - Distribution Center Manager & Dispatcher; Kim Doengi - Accounts Payable; Brownie Harp - Logistics & Distribution Coordinator; Gary Cooper - Vice President Logistics & Facilities.



rustic collections. We have just introduced a youth bedroom department, with popular styles like bunk and trundle beds. In addition to all this, we now carry hundreds of new home décor accessories at the lowest prices in town for you and your family to enjoy." Larry urges customers to check FFO Home's excellent website.

"We stand behind our quality with a 100 per cent hassle free product warranty, and we guarantee the lowest price on all our products."

Expressive of the FFO vision and mission, "Where great quality lives for less".

Management emanates from the corporate central office, "Some stores we build from the ground up. We also take existing stores and adjust them to our vision. Very important, our vision and mission are the same for all our stores. We are very open administratively, truly family oriented."

What does the consumer discover when she/he enters one of the 41 colorful, immaculate showrooms? Bustling activity, a friendly sales staff, quality great looking home furnishings, mattresses and acres of well-chosen accessories. A kind of energized,

happy buzz with treasures waiting to be revealed and taken home. Another part of the FFO "secret". It's not only clever strategic planning and the crafting of corporate numbers. It's the heart of the company. Such stellar growth can have a crystalline quality. But you don't have to look too deeply to discover FFO's soul.

Says Larry, "We have a long lasting relationship with St. Jude Children's Hospital, our principal concentration. This past year FFO Home was the furniture sponsor for three St. Jude Dream Homes in Owasso, Oklahoma, Springfield, Missouri and Wichita, Kansas. We gave away a \$10,000 furniture shopping spree for all of these. Whenever and wherever we can partner with them, we do.

"And we donate to several non-profits throughout the year."

In December, FFO Home partnered with Toys for Tots. "Each of the FFO Home stores was a drop off location for Toys for Tots. And for anyone who dropped off a Toy, they received \$25 in free accents."

At the upbeat Grand Opening not only did Larry say, "We are excited to open our doors to our friends in the

"We have a long lasting relationship with St. Jude Children's Hospital, our principal concentration. Whenever and wherever we can partner with them, we do."

Stillwater community. We look forward to serving the furnishing needs of area residents and continue to strengthen our relationship in Oklahoma. Our commitment to offering top quality furniture at the guaranteed lowest prices, along with striving for 100 per cent customer satisfaction, makes us a great fit for this area. With financing plans designed to fit any lifestyle



"FFO Home's staff
can help customers put together their
dream rooms or entire homes in-store."

or budget, we can help every family take home the furniture they've been wanting at a great value!" But he added, significantly, "We love to get involved in the new communities we join, and we look forward to getting to know and serve the community of Stillwater with charitable and social events, beginning with the Stillwater Special Olympics in May."

And to achieve great things FFO has always counted on its people. Loyalty again plays a big part. Johnny Mizell, the company's genial Vice President Advertising, gathered four of his colleagues, all "thankful to play a part in the growth and success of our company. Together we represent over 135 years of service to FFO Home." Martin Moore is the Distribution Center Manager and Dispatcher; Kim Doengi has the happy task of Accounts Payable; Brownie Harp is Coordinator of Logistics and Distribution and Gary Cooper (more handsome than the actor!) holds the adventurous role of Vice President Logistics and Facilities. They are FFO's designated "golden oldies"! Speaks well to the "great working environments and how much we value our staff as well as our customers."

"For recruitment we attend college career fairs, a lot of universities. We post on college employment sites and are active at local job fairs. And we look for special qualities in individuals, that they are 'people persons'. Our District Managers are responsible for making sure we have the absolute best full and part time employees."

There is great emphasis on con-

tinuous internal communication and constant exchange of ideas. "District Managers in the field talk with Store Managers, then they talk with staff. There are constant updates and daily memos and conference calls. Focusing on superior customer satisfaction and motivation of employees."

"And we offer a lot of in-store training on product and design. Our Managers train and so do suppliers' representatives. We run contests, Manager of the Month, Employee of the Month."

While FFO is growing rapidly, they make sure to get store managers together at regional seminars and bi-annual managers' meetings in which managers meet with central office staff to share ideas and learn more about products and special offerings.

And, Braden Fouts, Marketing/Event Coordinator, told us, "We also have a fantastic annual banquet every January celebrating our store staff for their exceptional work throughout the year which allows everyone to come together and share in our success".

All of FFO Home's staff is trained to be knowledgeable about design and furniture trends. "They can help customers put together their dream rooms or entire homes in-store. We attend all of the top Furniture Markets. We also have lots of decor tips and tricks on our blog that we're always adding to."

And speaking of blogs, said Larry, "We have a very active website and many of our customers go to the website first to find tips and inspiration before they come to our stores. It was designed internally by a third party, the

architect of the site. We have a Digital Marketing Director who oversees the website and all our social media."

The FFO website contains a segment devoted to Employment. The potential staffer reads, "We offer our associates a competitive package that includes: medical insurance, life insurance, 401K, paid vacation, long and short term disability."

It goes on to discuss an exceptional opportunity for eager, career-minded applicants, "Paid Internship Positions"! They would be excited to read: "If you're in school and want for more than a part-time job, you should consider FFO Home! We're looking for sharp students who are willing to earn while they learn great business skills."

**"Medical insurance,
life insurance, 401K,
paid vacation,
long and short term
disability are part of the
compensation package.
Paid internships are
available for 'sharp
students'."**



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"Our Natural Elements mattresses have the same cutting edge sleep technology and great quality as the name brands with prices, up to 70 per cent lower."

environment that will help prepare you for what lies ahead. Apply online today, or visit any FFO Home close to you and find out what we have to offer. Who knows. We may end up as the next step in building your future!" Wow. What an opportunity! The "secret" continues to unfold!

Many financing options are also defined clearly. Including digital versions so the customer can explore "at their convenience" to find just the right one. Many offer online approval. "If you are approved, you will be able to print your approval and bring it in-store to make your furniture shopping experience even easier." Especially since the customer is assured that "Our flexible financing plans make our furnishings even easier to own." AND, "Our

Pictured above is the ribbon cutting at the Fort Smith headquarters opening.

merchandise is in stock and available to 'Take Home Today!'" Check out FFO's remarkable website. Could not be more friendly and easy to access.

One of the essential skills, marketing, is as you would expect, well represented at FFO Home. "Holistic 360 degree marketing," Larry told us.

"What works best for us is our ability to integrate our marketing messages across all media seamlessly," Braden added. "No matter where a customer interacts with us, we have all of the information they need to get started on finding their dream furniture." FFO promotes in all of their markets via



FFO Home carries name brands and also manufactures National Elements mattresses with prices up to 70 per cent lower, made possible by "cutting out the middle-man".

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Flexible financing plans make FFO Home's furnishings easy to own.

print, TV, across digital, outdoor, at events and via radio from time to time.

Events figure strongly in the mix, essential to developing meaningful contacts with existing and potential customers. "We like to do a variety of events across all of our markets, from local fairs and football games to charitable events. We're continually looking for new events for all of our stores to participate in, and many are unique to their individual locations. We often get some great ideas from the stores themselves which, in turn, get suggestions from the customers, so we're really

able to be where our customers are and the places that matter to them most. We occasionally have events across all stores, such as our Toys for Tots drive.

"Our new store openings are always reasons to celebrate, so to pass this celebration on to our customers we run a special week of festivities adding unique giveaways of gift cards, recliners and home accents, and free trip getaways with purchase to our already lowest prices. It really gets our stores and our customers excited!"

Customer service is, of course, top of the FFO mind set! Larry has "A corporate customer service person who works directly with me. I receive e-mails immediately about any customer service problem. We're always trying to improve. We've devised customer surveys which are carefully analyzed and provide us with useful information."

Braden reinforced, "Our customers' satisfaction is our priority so to ensure we're able to provide top service to all of our customers, we have a comprehensive customer service program in place. And this includes post-purchase satisfaction surveys and online and social media support. Everyone from district managers to store managers, our customer service manager and even Larry, our CEO, work whenever

necessary to make sure every customer is happy.

"We don't provide our own delivery as one of the ways we save our customers money, but we are able to help arrange for third party same day delivery in every area we serve."

The environment is addressed in-store with appropriate packaging methods and with LED lighting.

FFO product lines include upholstery, recliners and reclining sofas.

"We have over 50 recliner styles to select from, quality fabrics, leather and many with power recline, heat and massage options.

"Our mattresses, the Natural Element brand, are built in Fort Smith. They feature a 10 year warranty, non-prorated. We offer pillow top, memory foam and the new Somni Gel mattress with a comfort layer for added support and cool sleep.

"We also carry a Serta line and Comfort Coil, also manufactured in Fort Smith."

Larry talked about FFO Home's mission. "Our mission is all about family and home. Going above and beyond to satisfy our customers is our #1 focus. We strive to gain every customer's trust in us to meet their home furnishing needs and treat them as if they were our own family as we do with our employees."

"No matter where a customer interacts with us, we have all of the information they need to get started on finding their dream furniture."

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Pictured at right is the ribbon cutting ceremony for FFO Home's Paragould, Arkansas store.



And the future for FFO Home? "By 2017 we will have eight to 10 more stores. Over a 30 per cent increase, four more in the next few months. In 10 years we'll keep on expanding on the same strategy of growth, introducing FFO into adjacent markets in the same manner. It works for us!"

And the home furnishings industry? "It's thriving now and will continue to grow and evolve. The future of furniture is as great as it has ever been, and we intend to be a part of that growth!"

A smiling Larry told us, "The most fun

and rewarding experiences I have had at FFO Home involve the teamwork and family culture we have throughout the company, watching the personal growth and career development of our associates right along with the company growing and prospering. And constantly interacting with our associates, customers and charitable and business groups in the communities we serve."

There are scientists who believe there are possibly seven other planets in our universe that might just support life of some sort. With FFO Home's

"Our store openings are always reasons to celebrate, so to pass this celebration on to our customers, we run a special week of festivities adding unique giveaways."

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exponential rate of expansion, Larry and his team could be quietly exploring extra-terrestrial opportunities. But don't say I said so!

FFO's star quality is evident. NASA has confirmed 3,431 exoplanets including six planets closest in size to Earth and located within the habitable zone of a star. Can't help but wonder what Larry's thinking about when he looks up at the sparkling night sky!

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SELLING SLEEP!

The science of sleep deprivation.

by David Benbow

Where does sleep science fit into a sales narrative that emphasizes mattress comfort and restful sleep?

Every day, it seems we hear some new horror story about the effects of sleep deprivation. More and more studies tell us in vivid language something most of us have known all along. Most people need to get more sleep and better sleep.

What does this mean to Retail Sales Associates (RSAs) who sell bedding for a living? Well, it should mean everything; but do most RSAs sell sleep, or do they sell mattresses? Remember the old saying about selling benefits, not features? A mattress is a feature, sleep is the benefit.

You might ask, "Where does sleep deprivation fit into a sales narrative that emphasizes comfort and good, restful sleep?" I'm not saying that the RSA should make the fear of sleep deprivation the centerpiece of his sales pitch. I am saying that every RSA who sells bedding should understand something about the science of sleep. Part of the science of sleep is sleep deprivation, which is now in epidemic proportions across our great country, and around the world. The RSA can do his customer a great service by not just selling a set of quality bedding, but also making his customer aware of this growing and dangerous prob-

lem in our society.

In this article, we will try to accomplish two things. First, we will talk about the science of sleep. This will include a few paragraphs about the normal sleep cycle followed by a brief discussion of sleep disorders which can cause sleep deprivation. Second, we will talk about how the RSA can invoke his knowledge of sleep science to help customers make a more informed decision about a new bedding purchase.

Allow me to proceed with one important caveat. I am NOT a sleep expert. What you read here will not make you a sleep expert. For any reader that would like to confirm my data, I have included some sources at the end of the article. My point is that the RSA can educate customers as a layman and with a layman's interpretation of scientific data. No RSA should purport to be a sleep expert; unless he or she has studied sleep physiology at the university level or worked in a sleep lab.

The Stages Of Sleep

According to WebMD, there are



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“RSAs should not

set out to solve customers’ sleep problems, but should be able to solve customers’ mattress problems which can be a major contributor of poor sleep.”

two types of sleeping soundness, REM and non-REM sleep. Your body cycles between REM and non-REM stages as you sleep.

REM stands for Rapid Eye Movement. It is called this because the eyes move quickly back and forth in different directions during this stage of sleep. Most people dream during REM sleep, but not during non-REM sleep.

There are three phases of non-REM sleep. (Some sources say there are

“Studies show that older people need as much sleep as when they were younger, but for some reason, they just don’t get the same quality sleep as before.”

four phases.) Stage One is the lightest sleep phase. Eyes are closed and the sleeper is easy to awaken. This phase lasts from five to ten minutes.

Stage Two non-REM sleep, is also light sleep. The sleeper’s heart rate slows and body temperature drops. This is where the body is preparing to go further into “deep sleep.”

In Stage Three of non-REM sleep, the body is in Deep Sleep. The sleeper is much harder to awaken, and if awakened suddenly, the (former) sleeper probably will feel confused or disoriented for a few minutes. It is in this Deep Sleep phase where the body rehabs itself from the daily destruction of living. Tissues are repaired and grown anew. Muscle, bone and the immune system are toned and reinvigorated. So, obviously, the more Deep Sleep one gets, the better it is for one’s physical health and well being.

Unfortunately, as usual, life offers a regrettable downside. The older one gets, the less Deep Sleep one gets. Older people sleep more lightly and

for shorter time periods. I had a ninety year old great aunt tell me one time that she NEVER slept. I didn’t argue with her, although I was skeptical. Studies show that older people need as much sleep as when they were younger, but for some reason, they just don’t get the same quality sleep as before. Older people also wake up more often and have more trouble going back to sleep. For all we know, this diminished quality of sleep might even contribute to the aging process. This statement, however, is uninformed speculation on my part.

Now, what about this REM sleep we hear so much about? According to WebMD, REM sleep begins to happen around ninety minutes after falling asleep. The first stage usually lasts about ten minutes, then the sleeper cycles back to non-REM sleep. The next REM phase typically is longer than the previous one, and again, you cycle back into non-REM sleep. The final phase of REM sleep can last up to one hour. During REM sleep, the sleeper has the most intense dreams, the brain is more active, heart rate and breathing quickens. Interestingly, the body is actually paralyzed during REM sleep. No body movements take place. Some scientists theorize that this temporary paralysis keeps the body from injuring itself when it might try to “act out” the dream.

Infants spend as much as half of their sleep in the REM stage, whereas adults usually spend only about one fifth of their sleep in the REM phase. In a future article, we will talk about children’s sleep and how the RSA



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"Are your competitors talking sleep science?"

Probably not. So, RSAs should use it, when appropriate, to help them stand out from the crowd, be memorable."

employs this information to sell bedding to concerned parents.

What are the benefits of REM sleep? According to MyEssentia.com, during the REM phase of sleep, the brain processes all the information absorbed during the previous day. This process allows the mind to be renewed, refreshed and improves mood when awake. In other words, REM Sleep helps people to think more clearly and be nicer.

Also, the body prioritizes Deep Sleep over REM sleep. Remember, Deep Sleep restores bone, muscle and bodily functions. REM sleep restores the mind. For those sleepers who get less than optimum sleep time, Deep Sleep takes precedence in the sleep cycle. Your metabolism thinks it is more important to fix the body than it is to refresh the mind. Sleep experts suggest sleeping an extra hour or so because the later sleep is usually REM sleep. This could help the mind. So, the lesson I take from this is; if you wake up too early and feel groggy and grumpy, go back to sleep for a while. It might make you feel better.

Sleep Disorders

What, exactly, is a sleep disorder? The Mayo Clinic, and I quote directly from their web-site, says, "Sleep disorders are changes in the way that you sleep." Somehow, I don't find this definition scientifically fulfilling,

but that's just my opinion. I guess you could say that a sleep disorder is sleeping any way that deviates from the norm. Sleep disorders cover a lot of territory, perhaps even including experiencing discomfort and loss of sleep from an old, bad mattress.

The site goes on to say that, "signs and symptoms of sleep disorders include excessive daytime sleepiness, irregular breathing or increased movement during sleep and difficulty falling asleep." So, if you have any of these problems, it looks like you may be suffering a sleep disorder.

They list some of the more common ones including:

- *Insomnia – difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep.*
- *Sleep Apnea – abnormal patterns of breathing while sleeping.*
- *Restless Leg Syndrome – a sleep movement disorder.*
- *Narcolepsy – suddenly falling asleep during the day.*

We will avoid discussion of treatment for any of these conditions. If you want more information, Furniture World's Editorial Director suggests you purchase "The Stanford Sleep Book" by sleep researcher William C. Dement MD., PhD., D.Sc., available on Amazon. The book goes in-depth about sleep, sleep disorders, dreaming and the impact this has on our everyday lives.

Sleep Deprivation Dangers

The sleep and health literature is loaded with the ill effects of sleep deprivation. Which are the worst? It depends on who you talk to. Certainly, sudden death from falling asleep at the wheel would rank pretty high in my estimation. Sleep deprivation, both occasional and chronic, has numerous insidious effects on the body, mind and psyche. Let's go over a few.

Science Editor Sarah Knapton of *The Telegraph*, dated December 2, 2016 wrote, "Just one night of sleep deprivation is enough to cause strain on the heart..." The study she cites was published by Daniel Kuetting of the University of Bonn, performed on twenty radiologists who had worked a twenty-four hour shift with only three hours of sleep. The workers experienced increased levels of TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone) and cortisol, a stress related hormone. In addition, their hearts were shown to work ten percent harder than usual (presumably to compensate for the exhaustion). This was after just ONE twenty-four hour shift!

The same article goes on to say, "a major study by the University of Warwick found that people who slept less than six hours each night were twelve percent more likely to die prematurely (before the age of 65.)"

Forbes magazine published an article December 1, 2016 by Niall McCarthy, entitled "Report: Sleep Deprivation costs the U.S. Economy \$400 Billion Every Year." This article cites a study by Rand Europe. To put this number in better perspective, the United States defense budget for 2015 was \$598.5 billion. Here's another way to look at it; it's about five times more than Bill Gates carries around in his wallet! Of course, it's

SCIENCE OF SLEEP

only about 2.92 percent of America's \$18 trillion GDP, but it's still a lot.

The same study encouraged employers to educate workers on the problems of sleep deprivation and also recommended that employers "build nap rooms." (I thought that's what desks were for.)

In all seriousness, though, the problems go well beyond listless accountants and torpid computer programmers. The National Sleep Foundation, in their DrowsyDriving.org website, cites the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration as saying that conservative estimates suggest that 100,000 police-reported vehicle accidents every year are caused by driver fatigue. The effect of this is 1,550 deaths, 71,000 injuries and \$12.5 billion in monetary losses.

Here are a few more items from the same source.

- Adults between 18 and 29 are much more likely to get sleepy while driving.
- Men are more likely than women to drive while sleepy.

- Adults with children at home and shift workers are more likely than the general population to drive while sleepy.
- Drivers who sleep only six to seven hours are more than twice as likely to have accidents as those who get eight hours of sleep.

So, please DO NOT drive while sleepy. It can have the same result as driving while drunk.

These are some of the short term deficits of sleep deprivation. The long term consequences may be just as devastating. Here's some information from www.healthline.com, in an article entitled "the Effects of Sleep Deprivation on the Body", written by Ann Pietrangelo and medically reviewed by George Krucik, MD, MBA, dated August 19, 2014.

- Inadequate sleep raises your risk of accidental injury and death.

"The sleep and health literature is loaded with the ill effects of sleep deprivation. Which are the worst? It depends on who you talk to."



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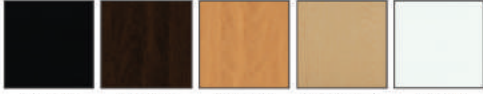
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"Talking about sleep science

to a sleep deprived customer can help hold the customer's interest. It keeps him talking. It keeps him in the store. It might even persuade him to consider a better mattress than the \$299 advertised special he came in to see."

- The brain is unable to rest and renew.
- Excessive yawning.
- Impaired concentration and creativity.
- Short term memory loss, long term memory impairment.
- Mood swings, emotional, quick to anger.
- Extreme exhaustion can lead to hallucinations.
- Anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide.
- Narcolepsy. (Falling asleep without knowing it.) Also, micro sleep, when you fall asleep a few seconds or minutes without realizing it, sometimes with fatal consequences.
- Weakens immune system and

body defenses. The immune system produces protective elements while you sleep. Lack of sleep also causes the body to be more prone to colds and flu, and worse, chronic lung disease.

- Increased appetite, and weight gain.
- Affects insulin release, increasing chance of Type 2 Diabetes.
- Elevated blood pressure.
- Chronic sleep loss can lead to chronic cardiovascular problems like hypertension (high blood pressure) and heart disease.

This same article points out that there is no substitute for proper sleep. Caffeine and other stimulants are only short term remedies.

Does A Good Mattress Help?

Oddly, in all this searching for information about sleep deprivation, very few scholarly articles talk about mattress quality. For example, the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, in their website, suggests that to sleep better you should; (1) block out seven to nine hours daily to devote to sleep, (2) establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine, (3) exercise only in the morning or early evenings, (4) make your bedroom cool, dark and quiet and "make sure your mattress and pillows are comfortable." This is the only mention I could find about mattresses and pillows.

That leaves a lot of room for the well informed Retail Sales Associate, does it not?

What Is The RSA's Role?

You may be saying about now, "Well, all this is well and good, but how do I insert this information into my sales presentation, and, for that matter, why should I?"

Here's how to bring up the subject in a tactful and non-intrusive way. RSAs are supposed to ask qualifying questions, are they not? A good series of qualifying questions could go something like this, "How well are you sleeping every night?" The answer frequently is, "Not very well." The RSA could then follow this question/answer with, "Do you have any idea why you are not sleeping well?" "Is it your mattress?" "Do you suffer from any sleep disorders?" "Have you seen a physician about your sleep deprivation?" "Do you drive while you are sleepy, or do you tend to fall asleep while driving?" There are a number of similar questions that the RSA can ask to draw out responses from the customer.

Remember, part of the RSA's job is to establish rapport with the customer. Being able to talk about sleep science to a sleep deprived customer can help hold the customer's interest. It keeps him talking. It keeps him in the store. It keeps him out of your competitor's store. It builds the customer's confidence in the RSA. It might even persuade him to consider a better

"Lifestyle improvement information can also be very helpful for the RSA, especially when talking to prospective customers. That is the whole point of this article."

mattress than the \$299 advertised special he came in to see.

Again, most RSAs are not sleep experts. They should, however, be mattress experts. They, therefore, should not set out to solve customers' sleep problems, but should be able to solve customers' mattress problems which can be a major contributor of poor sleep.

Can a new mattress solve a sleep disorder? I don't know. It may depend on the sleep disorder. If your customer's sleep disorder is extreme discomfort caused by an old, bad mattress, then the answer is probably yes. Anyone who has ever slept on a rock hard, but lumpy, cheap hotel

mattress, knows the answer to this question is yes.

What Is The Store's Role?

I am not an advocate of "lifestyle" advertising for selling bedding. A lot of money can be wasted while the store down the street's "urgency" advertising is drawing in all the paying customers. That is not to say that "lifestyle" messages cannot be included in your regular advertising. You can do both. Lifestyle improvement information can also be very helpful for the RSA, especially when talking to prospective customers. That is the

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whole point of this article. Once you have the customer's attention, THEN you can talk about lifestyle enhancements, which include preventing sleep deprivation. Many bedding shoppers already hope that a new mattress will

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This image shows a large wooden bunk bed with multiple drawers and a blue quilted mattress. A red and white chevron rug is on the floor. A red starburst graphic contains the text "Make your appointment now!".



SCIENCE OF SLEEP

help them to sleep better, longer and more comfortably.

Stores can provide brochures and other handout information for RSAs to give to shoppers. Store websites are a good location for promoting the life enhancing benefits of good sleep, which can be improved by the use of a high quality bedding set. These items obviously include not only mattress set, but pillows, sheets and mattress protectors.

Where To Get More Info.

There is more information about sleep on the world-wide-web than any one person can absorb in a lifetime of reading. For those who would like more information, I suggest the following searches.

First, GOOGLE "sleep." If the information there won't solve your insomnia, I don't know what will.

Second, try a few of these web-sites.

- WebMd
- National Sleep Foundation
- Healthline.com
- American Academy of Sleep Medicine

- Better Sleep Council – the education arm of the International Sleep Products Association (ISPA)
- Sleep Products Safety Council
- Mayo Clinic
- Stanford Center for Sleep Sciences and Medicine
- National Institutes of Health
- Sleep Research International (SRI)

There are a lot more than those listed. Also check out, "The Stanford Sleep Book" by sleep researcher William C. Dement MD., PhD., D.Sc.

Conclusion

Can this information sell bedding? That depends on the customer. Are your competitors talking sleep science? Probably not. So, RSAs should use it, when appropriate, to help them stand out from the crowd, be memorable. It might even help one customer, anonymous to the world, from becoming a tragic statistic.

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.

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Our Mission

The Northern Indiana Woodcrafters Association (NIWA) is dedicated to continuous improvement and innovative design in woodcrafting. We provide value to our customers through our honest, personable service and heirloom-quality products. Members are committed to teamwork among themselves and with patrons.

Our Values

- **Creative Craftsmanship:** As builders, we think outside the box about design and insist on top-quality construction.
- **Customer Relationships:** We work to develop and sustain relationships with customers from order to delivery.
- **Shared Beliefs:** As members of the Old Order Amish faith, we are family oriented, trustworthy, compassionate, and supportive of one another and our customers.

Our Story

Northern Indiana is home to one of the largest Old Order Amish settlements in the world. Traditionally, Amish communities have relied on family farms to make a living in a way that is consistent with their values. However, one of the challenges facing the Amish in Northern Indiana has been the expanding Amish population alongside the decreasing amount of available farmland. This has led some Amish to start small businesses and others to seek employment in industry and manufacturing.

Amid this change, furniture building has become a viable option for many Amish men. The steady work ethic of the Old Order Amish fits well with furniture manufacturing, an industry that relies on quality craftsmanship. As these furniture builders become more successful, they create new jobs for other Amish workers, and they grow something—a business—that can be passed on to the next generation.

NIWA was created when regional craftsmen joined together to collaborate in their marketing. As many Amish builders moved into wholesale production, they realized that all would benefit from working together to promote their craft. Formed in 1999, NIWA currently has over 90 members and has established guidelines that define the NIWA brand. Quality is essential; the furniture must be built to last, and no particleboard or chipboard is used, not even for surfaces hidden from view. All furniture is manufactured in the United States, and most builders construct all products regionally.

Each member of the NIWA is actively involved in the association, and most participate in the annual furniture expo, an event that attracts store owners from across the country. The expo is a face-to-face way for builders and buyers to form working relationships that are rooted in mutual respect and a love for heirloom-quality furniture.

— Adopted by the NIWA Board, 2016

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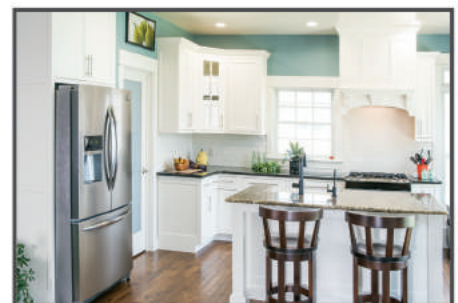
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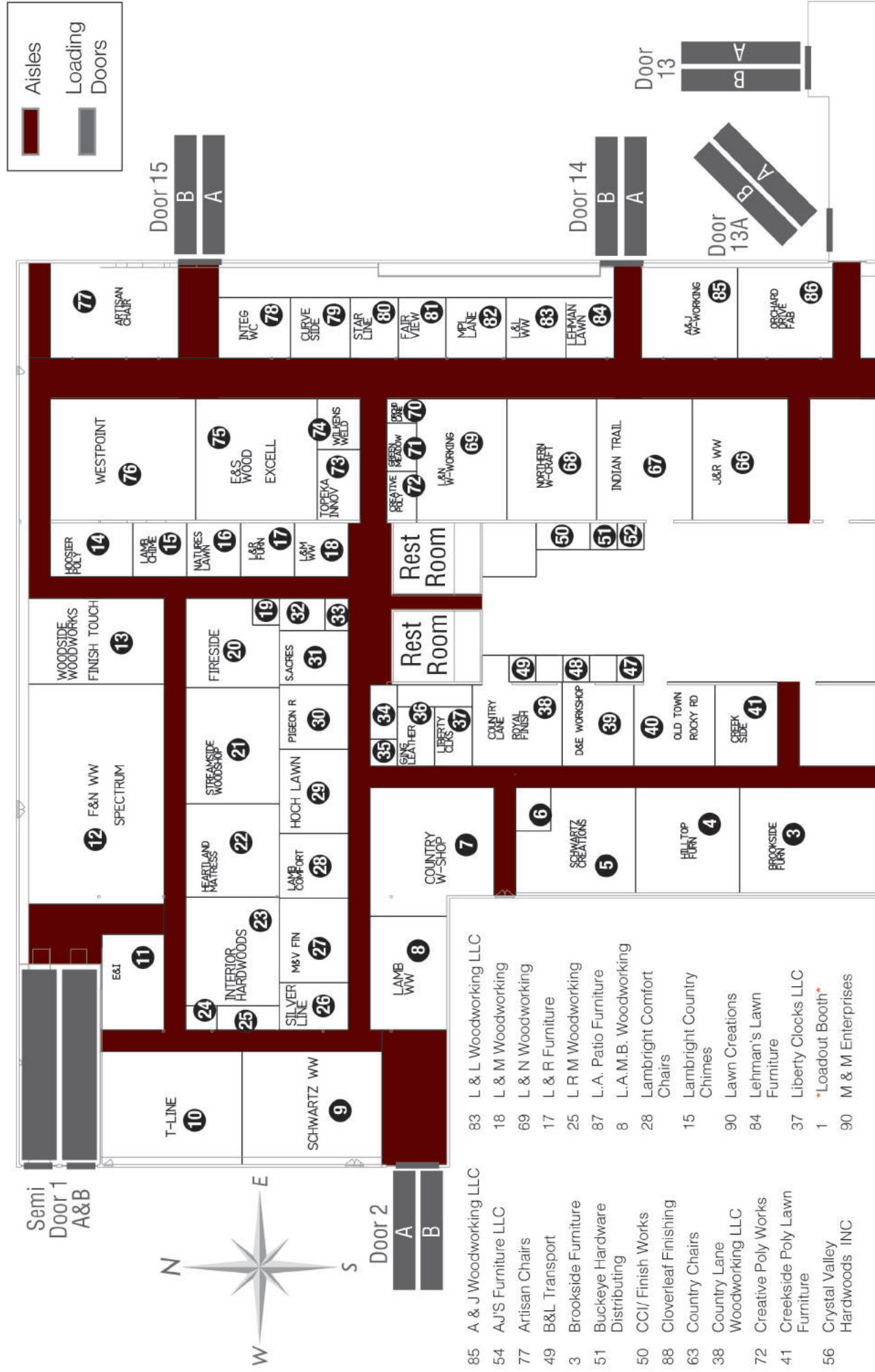
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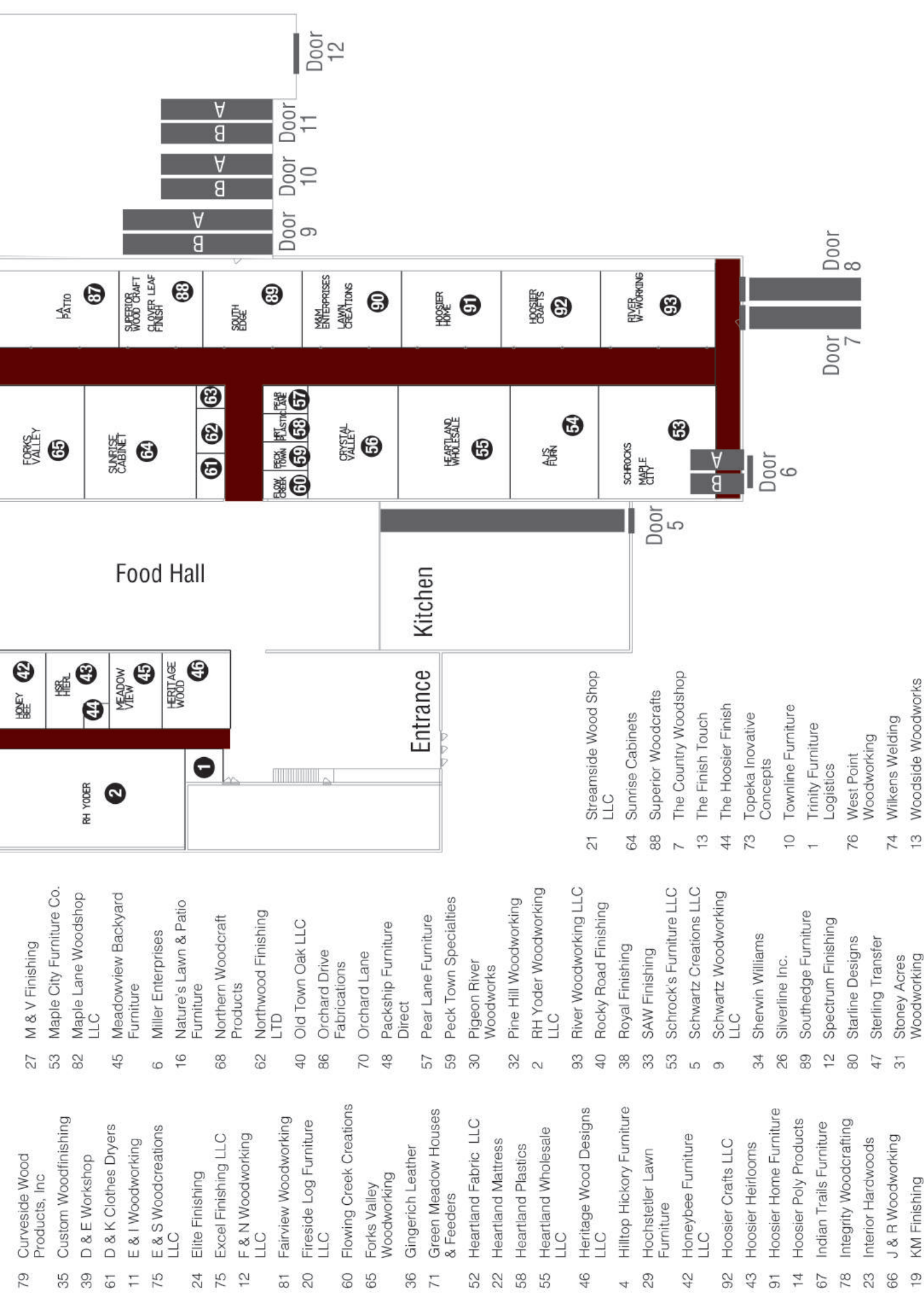


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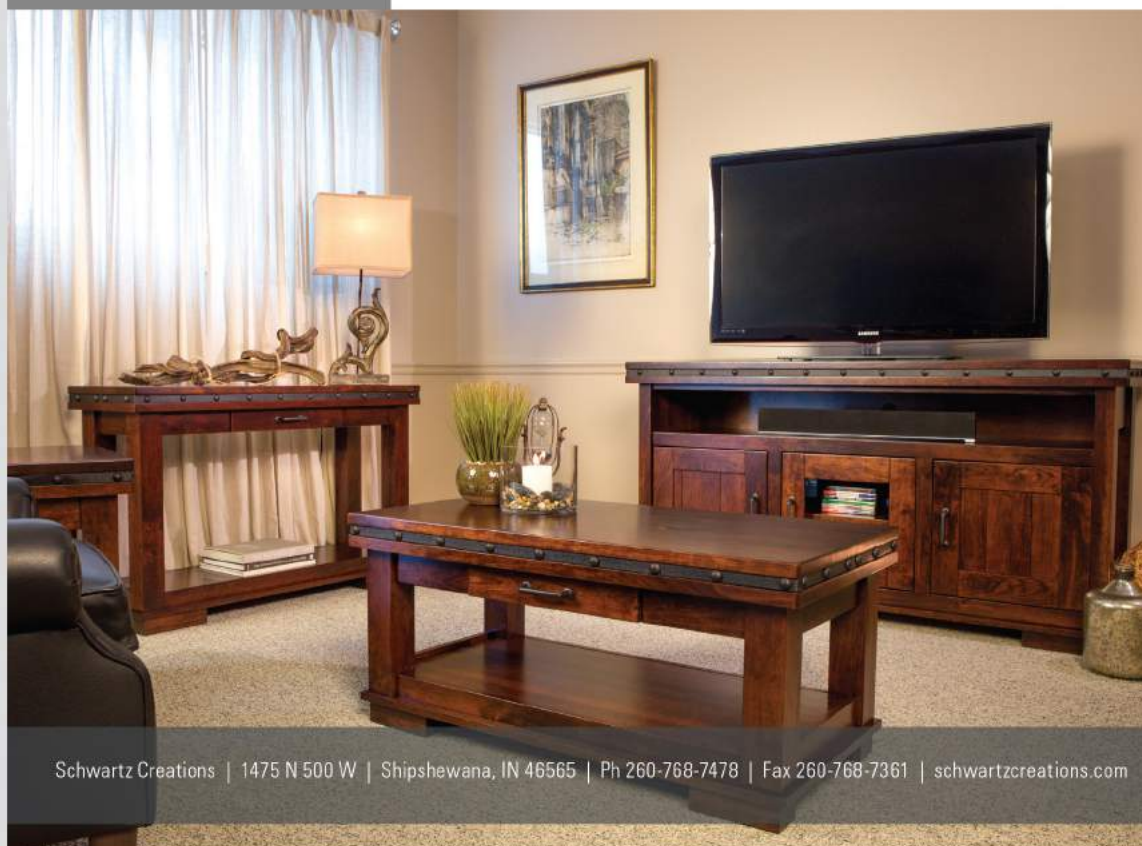
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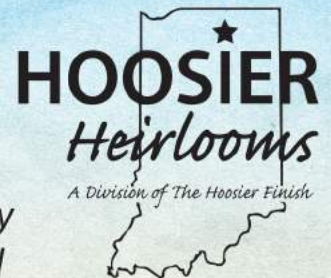
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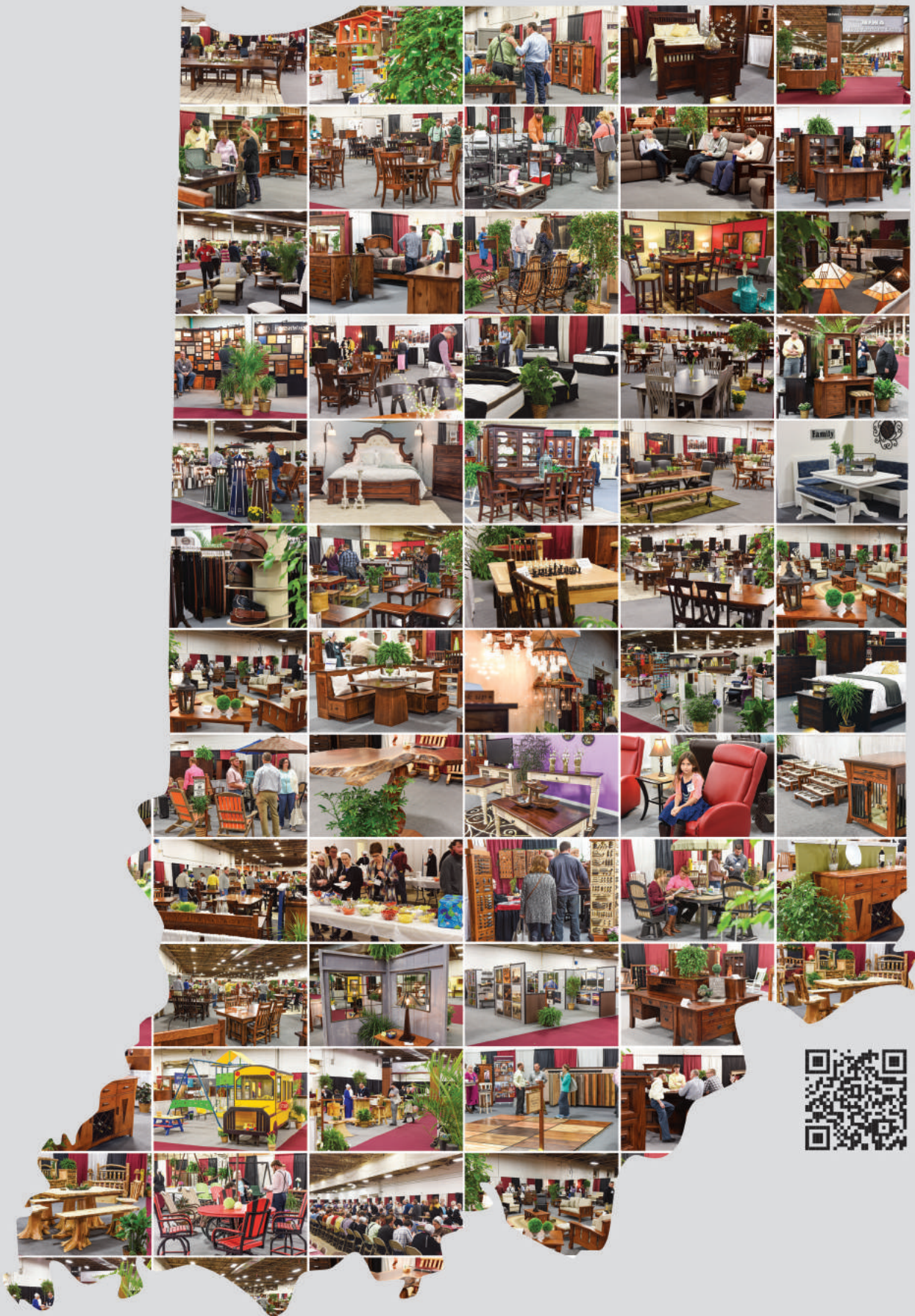
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2017

KAIZEN BLITZ

QUITE THE RETAIL UNDERTAKING!

by David McMahon

Here's how to hold a short-term Kaizen Blitz event in 2017 to propel increased efficiency and effectiveness in your furniture store operation.

The most common success trait required for long-term retail prosperity is a real, organization-wide commitment to continual improvement.

It sounds simple, but it's actually quite a big undertaking. Continuous improvement involves ongoing self-analysis. It requires seeking constant and oftentimes transformative change, and it takes a significant investment both in time and money. Anyone can say they have the discipline to continuously improve, but only the exceptional actually take the risk to execute properly. Generally there are three types of retailers:

- *Those who seek change.*
- *Those who watch for change and then follow.*
- *Those who avoid change and let things happen around them.*

This article is for those who are actively seeking change for the better. This trait allows these businesses to stay relevant and attract more customers. They are able to develop long-term employees who are engaged, and attract new talent. It allows them to grow sales volume and produce profits in all economic situations. Those who seek change are more often ahead of the curve, and they reap the benefits from being proactive

as opposed to reactive.

Perhaps the best ideology of change is known as Kaizen. In Japanese, Kaizen translates to Kai = Change and Zen = Good. Its roots are in post WWII manufacturing at Japanese companies like Toyota. Subsequently Kaizen was adapted and refined to propel efficiency and effectiveness the world over in many types of businesses and industries.

I have a Kaizen practice adapted for use in retail field operations called Kaizen Blitz (or Kaizen Event). What follows is an adaptation of Kaizen Blitz that Furniture World's readers can use to implement continuous improvement. Kaizen Blitz can open the doors to greater opportunities and transform your organization. To understand the difference between Kaizen and a

"To be really successful, an organization must champion its systems and embrace the value."

Kaizen Blitz, think of Kaizen as the macro philosophy; a long-term never-ending way of thinking. Now, think of a Kaizen Blitz as a short-term exercise that usually takes place in under one week. Its purpose is to focus on an area of a retail operation, analyze its current state, and then execute new systems to improve the future state.

Setting The Stage

Some preparation in advance is necessary to conduct the most effective Kaizen event. Many entrepreneurs want results fast, and don't like to waste time waiting around. While it's great that they want results, haste can actually waste much more time and produce lower quality results. Therefore, spend some time wisely in advance of your Kaizen Blitz.

Here are some components that should be in place:

#1: Designate The Facilitator

Every project needs one owner. A Kaizen event is no different. What is different here, however, is that the leader for a Kaizen Blitz should be a unbiased facilitator. A manager,

owner, or even an employee in a seemingly unrelated department may be influenced by personal perspectives. So, for best results, find someone from outside of your company who possesses a high-level understanding of the various inter-related aspects of operations (i.e. marketing, selling, purchasing, inventory, distribution, CRM, service, IT, financial control, and analysis) to facilitate the event.

#2: Define Focus & Scope

It is always best to focus on one area of an operation at a time. Being scattered, unfocused and getting side-tracked can hinder the reveal of potential opportunities and conceal the root of the challenge at hand. To really dig-in, the proper amount of time and effort should be invested. For example, if you want to grow sales per customer encountered, that needs to be the primary area of concentration. You must really look at all the elements impacting that metric. Don't get distracted by non-related factors, and avoid tiny exceptions.

During the several days that a Kaizen event takes place, it is possible to focus on multiple organizational

areas. My main advice here is to make sure the primary objective is accomplished before moving on to another area. If you wish to dive into improving your GMROI through stock-replenishment systems as a secondary focus, make sure everyone involved is on-board with solutions for the prime focus first. Keep your scope within reason. It is better to get one thing done right, than to realize several half-baked solutions.

#3: Choose the Participants

The kinds of team members who participate in a Kaizen event will differ from retailer to retailer. Generally though, participants are top and middle managers with some involvement from line-level employees. A general rule of thumb is that those who should be present in these improvement meetings are people who "own" the existing procedures, who understand how the procedures affect other areas of the organization, who execute related daily tasks, and can make change decisions.

Participants need to keep focused, so keep the improvement team to a number that makes sense. Too many people can cause distraction, while too few may become too insular. If needed, the leader can interact with people in shifts for better organization.

Now that you have the preparation for the improvement event covered, you are ready to address the core items of a Kaizen Blitz. If you have read previous articles in this series on LEAN operations, you will notice similarities in the approach.

#4: Analyze & Measure

The first step is to get an overview

"Think of a Kaizen Blitz as a short-term exercise that usually takes place in under one week. Its purpose is to focus on an area of a retail operation, analyze its current state, and then execute new systems to improve the future state."



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Retailer "XYZ" Priority Order Action: Project Leader-Sales Manager	Due Date
1. Refocus on selling system training.	1/7/17
2. Hire two new sales people.	1/30/17
3. Increase warranty % of sales to 3% (establish and refer to sub-plan).	2/30/17
4. Track revenue per customer closely by salesperson on a weekly basis.	1/14/17
5. Develop a marketing plan to increase design awareness and sales.	2/30/17
6. Re merchandise to create a higher price point showroom.	2/30/17
7. Establish a bonus program for achieving goals on time and on budget.	1/31/17
8. Achieve new benchmark of \$600 revenue per customer.	6/13/17

of the situation. This is accomplished in two ways:

1. Discuss and question your stake-holders.
2. Check your retail performance metrics.

The leader of a Kaizen event needs to understand how things currently work. There should be an open forum for discussion. Questions should be asked, such as:

- How do you do this now?

- What are your current systems? What are your challenges?
- What do you think can be done to improve this?
- Who is involved with this function?
- What else in the business does this effect?

This qualitative approach is often just as revealing as looking at the numbers.

Checking performance metrics is the quantitative approach allowing for points of measurement of the cur-

rent state. Look at all of the available data. Start with the high-level results and then get more detailed. If you are seeking to improve revenue per opportunity, you might also measure:

- Written and delivered volume change
- Number of customers month to month
- Sales per square foot, sales per employee
- Average sale close rate
- Source of opportunity
- Sales by vendor
- Sale by category
- Special order sales

"If you want to grow sales per customer encountered, that needs to be the primary area of concentration.

You must really look at all the elements impacting that metric. Don't get distracted by non-related factors, and avoid tiny exceptions."

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The above exercises will always reveal opportunities for improvement. This naturally leads into the next part of a Kaizen Blitz.

#5: Prioritize, Plan & Assign

Based on what is revealed in the investigation stage, Kaizen partici-

pants will need to decide on priorities and solutions. What metric will you seek to move, and more importantly, what will you do, who will do it and when will it get done?

For instance, with the focus on improving revenue per opportunity, the possible actions you might come up with could include:

- *Hiring additional sales staff.*
- *Improving the selling skills of the current staff.*
- *Changing the merchandising structure.*

- *Expanding the design program.*
- *Improving warranty sales.*
- *Focusing marketing efforts on return customers.*

Great, now document what will be done first and who will champion the initiative. Every Kaizen Blitz undertaking requires that the responsibility of managing execution be designated to one person. That does not mean that they'll be the only one individual working on the initiative. It does mean that one person will be in charge of managing the system to achieve



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"What metric will you seek to move, and more importantly, what will you do, who will do it, and when will it get done?"

desired results.

#6: Execute to Conclusion

Actualizing results is the step separating star performers from the rest. Success often rests on the follow-through abilities of top managers and business owners. You cannot expect an employee to do everything you ask them to do... not in the world I live in anyway. You can state your expectations, and get all the head nods in the world, but that will not necessarily result in adequate execution. Execution requires:

- A plan
- A leader
- Measurements
- Documentation
- Routine
- Constant inspection

- Often the investment of dollars. Execution requires follow-through.

Kaizen Initiative Example

An outline for a sample Kaizen Initiative for increasing revenue per opportunity for furniture can be found in the chart on page 100. The goal for retailer "XYZ" is to increase revenue per customer opportunity in 2017 to a \$600 monthly average from \$500 which was the monthly average for 2016.

When setting up this initiative for retailer "XYZ", a progress review schedule was set up to track and report:

- Weekly at operations meetings.
- Monthly at an all company meetings.
- Monthly at sales team meetings.

A target completion date was set as well, for June 30, 2017, six months from the start date of January first.

Continuous Review

The final phase in any Kaizen event is to do it all again. Once one goal

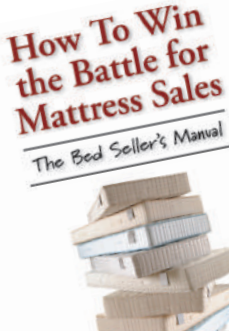
has been achieved, look to another area. Continuously seek improvement throughout the organization and conduct another Kaizen Blitz.

In continually improving retail operations it is likely that several improvement projects will be going on simultaneously. Ensure that you follow-up on all projects. Continue to watch important metrics of past and present initiatives to avoid slipping back into old habits. Track the progress of each improvement project individually, but review together in your operations meetings. One project likely affects other projects as the systems and processes in an organization are integrated. Make sure each department in the organization has its priorities established.

Keep pushing forward, drive change, reward success and overall results will follow.

About David McMahon: David McMahon, CSCP, CMA, EA is Vice President of Consulting and Performance group at PROFITsystems, a HighJump Company.

He holds professional certifications as a Certified Supply Chain Professional and a Certified Management Accountant. He can be reached at david.mcmahon@highjump.com.



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The new Roots Rack has a solid Pine top which simulates "reclaimed" wood, a rich honey finish, industrial style casters wrapped in rubber and black metal shelves.

Contact information on page 140.



Jaipur Home

The Capiz Refinement cabinet's hand carved solid wood door panels are carefully overlain with "gold" metal adding another layer of beautiful texture to the silhouette.

Contact information on page 140.

Fashion Bed

The Lakeview Bed features low-profile sides and exposed tapered wood legs, plus the new S-Cape® adjustable base. It is available as shown in Crimson fabric or Obsidian faux leather. Offered as a Queen, King or California King.

Contact information on page 140.





Abbyson

The new Brendon Fabric Armchair shown in Lime Green by Abbyson Living features a tufted back design that adds depth and comfort to this attractive piece.

Contact information on page 140.



Capel

New Homestead braided rug available in today's hottest colors, crafted of polyester, polypropylene and cotton. Available in marble, vista, sun-dried red and fountain blue colorways. 5' x 8' rug may retail for \$399.

Contact information on page 140.



Chromcraft

Metalcraft by Chromcraft offers swivel-tilt caster dining chairs with matching counter stools and three tables with choice high pressure laminate or solid wood tops plus two metal finishes. Available in standard and high dining heights.

Contact information on page 140.

Craftmaster

At 100" long, this sofa's generous scale combines familiar details such as nail head trim and turned legs. Stylish and easy-to-live with its approximate retail is \$1,299.

Contact information on page 140.



Best Selling

DESIGN



Muniz

The Hollywood Dining Chair from Muniz features a cast beveled diagonal slanted acrylic back with a cracked ice cut-out. Shown with a lavender suede seat above cast acrylic legs.

Contact information on page 140.

Tayse

Veranda is a fresh and lively collection of indoor and outdoor designs Made of 100% polypropylene for performance and durability.

Contact information on page 140.



Klaussner

Crisp lines and subtly curved arms gives the Colleen collection a laid-back, casual flare that looks both modern and cozy.

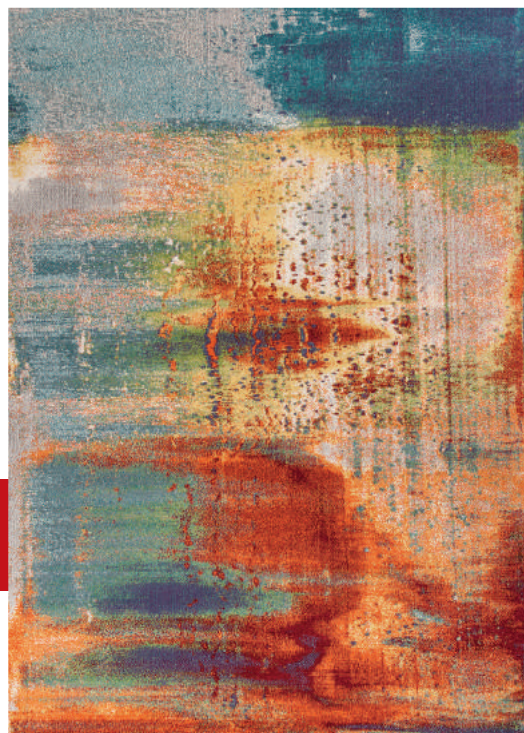
Contact information on page 140.



Dimplex

The new "Tyson" media console features industrial hardware inspired metal leg frames, recessed panel doors, breadboard top, brushed metal door pulls and a Farmhouse Chestnut finish. The Dimplex 25" firebox has details such as pulsating embers and realistic handcrafted logs.

Contact information on page 140.



Kas

Illusions Collection features an array of show-stopping watercolor designs. Each pattern is a piece of art, ranging from tonals to vibrant palettes. Made in Turkey of 100% polypropelene with 1/2" pile height.

Contact information on page 140.

Borkholder

This contemporary bedroom designed by Catina Roscoe features a solid wood, chevron-patterned panel bed from the Madera Collection, plus an end table and media center in Walnut from the new Aero Collection.

Contact information on page 140.



Best Selling

DESIGN



Norwalk Furniture

The luxuriously comfortable Devan Chaise has a tight camel back, dramatically curved deep scoop arms, a box-welted seat cushion and beautifully turned and fluted legs.

Contact information on page 180.



Nourison

This sophisticated abstract design creates pools of shimmering light that reflect an ambiance of soft luminosity.

Contact information on page 140.



Standard Furniture

Cambria has weighty vase turnings with a distressed two-tone black and dark toffee finish. Traditional in style, this eight foot dining Table is made of Pine veneer and Pine solids

Contact information on page 140.



Maxwood

Many configurations are possible with the "All in One" Loft by incorporating twin or full sized beds under the twin upper loft, ladder or staircase options, plus storage and study components. Fully reversible with solid hardwood construction.

Contact information on page 140.



Omnia

Pasadena is contemporary in design with personalized comfort options in both stationary and motion.

Contact information on page 140.

Country View Woodworking

From the American Modern Collection created by designer Michael Robinson, this bed has Amish quality construction.

Contact information on page 140.



Feizy

The Fiona Collection interprets transitional designs in a bold palette of contrasting neutrals. Power loomed in art silk, the luminous sheen lends each piece a modern edge. Erased patterns impart a hint of vintage.

Contact information on page 140.

Best Selling

DESIGN



TÖV Furniture

The Sal chair features an intricate hand woven pattern of plush velvet and rests on glamorous gold legs. Available in multiple color options, suggested retail is \$599.

Contact information on page 140.

CordRoy's

A patented foam chair with a washable cover that when removed reveals a youth, full, queen, king or ultimate king sofa with two foam mattresses inside.

Contact information on page 140.



Lazzaro

The Victoria Collection boasts a traditional, elegant club style featuring button-tufting on sides and back with a classic nail head border and turned legs.

Contact information on page 140.

Surya

Machine made in Turkey of 100% polypropylene, the Anika rug pairs an updated classic motif in a vibrant palette with rich texture and a subtly distressed look, giving the appearance of a hand-knotted rug.

Contact information on page 140.



himolla

The class-leading electrically-operated Ellington Chair makes reclining, adjusting foot rests and finding the perfect position for back rests as simple as pressing a button. Powered by advanced, rechargeable battery packs, there's no need to position this chair close to a power socket.

Contact information on page 140.



Furniture of America

The Persephone includes an ornately-carved Button-tufted headboard and intricate wooden carvings with mirror inlays.

Contact information on page 140.

Take Your
✓

SHOW ON THE ROAD!

by Jeff Giagnocavo

No doubt you have thought about doing or have done a home show, health expo or fair event outside of your store over the years.

Let's discuss the kinds of show opportunities out there for retailers and a barometer that I have developed, sadly the hard way, over the years to best evaluate which ones to participate in.

Show promoters use the same playbook as advertisers do. Big broad sweeping generalities about their attendees that ultimately boils down to this one closing argument - you will be in front of thousands of prospects who will love what your business does. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

I have found the best success with smaller, more hyper-focused shows. Case in point, in late October, Gardner's Mattress & More exhibited at a natural living expo. Ben, my business partner, staffed this event among other exhibitors, mostly healers, shamans and peddlers of various natural pills and potions.

With a total cost for two days of event participation coming in at \$900, we generated \$17,500 in direct sales by the following Tuesday. That is almost a 20:1 ROI on gross sales and a 12:1 ROI on profit dollars. This show was a home run!

Compare this result to a home show across the street from our store at the Park City Mall. This show yielded few

positive conversations and no direct sales. We participated, primarily to test our Fill Station Pillow Kiosk offers and "optics" which I will cover below.

The biggest thing we confirmed from the home show experience was, to never do a generic, "for the masses" event. The natural living show in contrast was a great example of a perfect market - message - media match. Others that fall into this perfect match are senior expos and other wellness and lifestyle shows.

Here are three big things to consider when you are setting up your own

"With a total cost for two days of event participation coming in at \$900, Gardner's generated \$17,500 in direct sales by the following Tuesday."



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"The biggest thing

we confirmed from this experience was, never to do a generic, 'for the masses' event."



booth at an event.

The Optics

Think of your booth much like you would a billboard on a highway. Your booth or message needs to be seen and understood in about three seconds. It's not that everyone is speed walking, but they are on a mission. If your message doesn't immediately attract their eye and raise interest, another exhibitor will steal their attention.

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At the generic home show we competed for the attention of every home owner prospect with the window and door company across the aisle from us. Every single person that walked by was asked quickly and with intent

- "Are you a homeowner?"
- "How old are your windows?"

We had two distinct optics happening in our booth. The first was our Fill Station Pillow Making machine. The second was a split king memory foam mattress set.

Any time that we weren't speaking with a prospect, we were making a pillow or moving that bed up and down.

The Offer

Remember, people are coming to home shows in a shopping mindset. You, therefore, should absolutely create an incredible offer to direct that spending into your bank account. Our offer was a queen adjustable bed and memory foam set for \$1,999 with \$419.80 of FREE sheets, pillows and mattress protectors financed for 12 months with no interest. Sign and sleep. It's generally an easy offer for shoppers to accept, and at each show we are typically good for 6-8 sales. For us this offer nets at 50% gross profit margin.

For the Fill Station pillow-making

machine we offered a Buy One, Get One Free offer on a good, better and best selection of pillows with margins ranging from 40% to 60% depending on the size and mix of pillows purchased.

Lead Collection

You likely have collected leads if you have participated in a show previously, but if not, you should. Lead collection extends the tail of profitability far beyond the event and well after you have recovered from three days of standing on the hard concrete floors!

"Our offer is a queen adjustable bed and memory foam set for **\$1,999 with \$419.80 of FREE sheets, pillows and mattress protectors financed for 12 months with no interest.**"



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Take This

SHOW ON THE ROAD!

Having a system in place to follow-up with collected leads makes it much easier and manageable, but at minimum you should commit to noting which leads you had the best conversations with so that you can follow up quickly and personally once the event is over.

We see a throughput of leads that typically translates into \$15,000 in sales, on average, within the 90 days.

Our experience is that once we committed to doing shows with frequency they become easier to do and our event selling skills got better.

"We see a throughput of leads that typically translates into \$15,000 in sales, on average, within the 90 days."

Once in motion, each show becomes its own tiny "oil well" generating plenty of leads and sales. It becomes a nice "pipeline of prospects" that convert into sales once the event is over.

Here's my list of items we take to each event so we are fully prepared and ready to sell:

Marketing Materials

- Blueprints (which tell our unique "Why Gardner's Story" with offer on back
- Mattress Buying Guides
- Natural Mattress Buying Guides
- Adjustable Bed Base Buying Guides
- Bookmark coupons

Show Support Items

- Contest box - enter to win two free pillows

- Pens - a bunch of 'em
- Stapler
- Power strip
- Duct tape
- Extension cord at least 125'
- Credit card swipers
- Receipt book
- Business cards
- Gardner's EXPO banner
- Folding white table(s) & chairs
- Table cloth
- Financing applications and/or internet connected laptop

About Jeff Giagnocavo: Jeff Giagnocavo is co-owner of Gardner's Mattress & More and the co-creator of Mattress Retailer Weekly. Mattress Retailer Weekly is shared with you every week so you can get new customers, stay ahead of your competition and increase your sales tickets. Get your FREE subscription by visiting www.MattressRetailerWeekly.com or text MRW to 484-303-4300.

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Larry : Thank you for the opportunity to give feedback on our recent renovation event. The preparation and crafting of the message really helped to validate the savings and created great traffic for the sale. The information and back story really helped the salespeople in the selling process and matched the activity that was going on in our store at the time. The ability to alter the items or the media during the event makes it so easy to work with you and added to increases throughout the sale. The suggestions of featured items and added value opportunities also added to the success of the sale. The experience was good for both our customers and our store!

Michael Bruce, Bruce Furniture of Kearney, Hastings and Holdrege, Nebraska

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5 STEPS TO BUILD YOUR BRAND

by René Johnston-Gingrich

What can Oprah Winfrey, Richard Branson, Kim Kardashian and Apple teach us about building a personal brand.

You may have heard buzz about the importance of building your personal brand, wonder exactly what that means and what value it brings. Those are great questions. Whether you are a store owner, manager, sales professional or other team member, Personal Branding is a concept you can leverage.

There are brands out there that are incredibly familiar, globally recognizable, even iconic. Think McDonald's, Starbucks and Apple. We know their logos and promotional materials. We are not only familiar with their products and services, but their brands are so strong that we can imagine how their products taste, how much they might cost, the types of services we might expect, and sometimes, even how they will make us feel. But branding is not limited to products. The importance of branding and your Personal Brand should not be underestimated. Your Personal Brand is associated with your values and the value you deliver to the world.

Oprah, Kim & Richard

Let's take a look at some familiar faces. Let's start at the top with Oprah Winfrey. If you were to sit down with

Oprah, you would have a pretty good idea how that conversation would go. You and Oprah would probably have a discussion about mindfulness, philosophy, maybe even spirituality, but you can be sure it would be deep and meaningful.

Now let's take another example, Kim Kardashian. Now opinions aside, there is no denying that there is a strong brand there. There is also no denying that if you sat down with Kim the conversation you had would be dramatically different than the one you had with Oprah.

Let's look at one more—Richard Branson. Now if you had the amazing opportunity to sit down with Richard Branson, you would expect to have a conversation regarding the importance for providing exceptional customer service, building a strong organizational culture or possibly giving back.

In these three theoretical conversations, your expectations would not be haphazard or accidental. Each of these prominent figures have purposefully created an image that conjures an immediate association with them, personally and professionally. The values, and qualities we associate with Oprah, Kim and Richard didn't just happen. Their messages were crafted, honed and communicated.

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"There is huge value

in relationship building when leveraged company-wide, because people want to do business with people and brands they know, like and trust."

Building Your Brand

So what does it mean to build a personal brand? I think Laura Lake captures the concept quite well on her website www.thebalance.com: "It's more than a trademark; it is how you present yourself online and offline to potential clients and customers. Your personal brand builds your business, but it still centers around you as an individual."

This topic is important regardless of whether you are the business owner or an employee, because it focuses on the individual. The concept of building a personal brand is about developing an understanding of who you are and sharing it with the world.

Here is a 5-step process for building a strong and successful personal brand.

1. Know Who You Are. What are your core values, passions, purpose? Give it some thought. If you are the store owner, you may have previously drafted a mission or vision statement. Take a moment to read it. Review it to make sure it accurately reflects your passions, values and purpose. Perhaps it needs to be updated? Perhaps reviewing it serves as a powerful reminder of why you built this business to begin with? If you are an employee, review the organization's mission statement and determine whether the company's values align with your own. They may not be

a direct match, but should at the very least, not conflict. As an employee, you want to be sure you are a part of an organization in which you share and support common values.

Evaluate your strengths and challenges. What do you do really well? Where could you use some help? Often the solution to correcting or compensating for shortcomings involves first admitting them, followed by parting with some cash and control. Ask yourself these questions. What risk is involved in continuing to do something myself that I am not great at? What is the cost in missed opportunity because I won't let it go? Focusing energy on your core competencies, delegating and outsourcing where you need support will make you more efficient. Ultimately, success depends on an authentic evaluation of who you are. In the consulting work that I do, I find that many of the most effective retailers are the ones that are very clear about where their strengths lie and supplement accordingly.

This step is really about self awareness. Often times retailers try to create and display a version of their Personal Brand that is less than authentic; opting instead to portray what they think people expect or hiding insecurities behind a false mask. This is a bad idea for several reasons. First of all it is just wrong. Second, people will eventually see through it. And finally, it is exhausting to keep up the charade. People who are honest with themselves, about their strengths and weaknesses navi-

gate business with greater ease.

2. Know Your Place. Knowing your place requires that you become a student of the home furnishings industry and also your competition. What sets you apart? What do you do better than anyone else? What is your Unique Selling Proposition? What makes you unique? If you are struggling with this one, think back to the feedback you have received from clients and customers. Have they told you how impressed they were with your turnaround time or your incredibly creative solutions? Their comments will most likely be the same things that still excite you—the reasons why you got into this line of work in the first place.

We are living in a time of unprecedented change. So, it is more important than ever to stay current so that you can adopt a progressive approach to your business.

Personal brands will differ greatly, but the ideal is to send a message to prospects and clients that you are highly competent, an expert in your field. Highly successful sales team members are those who take it upon themselves to stay current regarding their products, their market and industry trends. Strong retail operations recognize that there is a big return on investment in professional development for ownership, management and team members. If you carefully read industry articles, attend seminars and conferences — it will serve to keep you on the cutting edge and give you

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5 STEPS TO BUILD YOUR BRAND

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3. Make personal connections a priority. What we are talking about here is just building positive relationships. It's a critical skill set. No one is going to bother to try and understand your Personal Brand unless you connect with them on some level. You have to be willing to put energy into connecting. This can be as simple as expressing an authentic interest in another person. In business, this is a beautiful and unexpected thing. Expressing an authentic interest in your customer's or client's needs often leads to a discussion about how you can meet those needs. There is huge value in relationship building when leveraged company-wide because people want to do business with people and brands they know, like and trust.

4. Embrace quality. If you have taken the time to build relationships, you will want to maintain those relationships by embracing quality. When I talk about offering a quality product or service I don't mean it has to be the top of the line. Perhaps you sell sofas that retail for \$699 rather than \$6999. Embracing quality means clearly communicating the value of

the products and service you offer, value matched with your customers. Of course, it is always a good brand building strategy to take the opportunity to go above and beyond, exceeding customer expectations whenever possible. The concept of quality also involves follow through. Don't you love the "follow-through people" in your life? Those people who when you ask them to handle something, you don't think twice about it? Be that follow-through person for both your external customers, co-workers and employees.

Keeping your word is powerful. Following through and keeping your word are unfortunately no longer commonplace, so it is a strong strategy to set yourself apart. It's also the right thing to do.

5. Communicate your brand message. You have worked hard to understand yourself, understand the furniture industry, build relationships and embrace quality. Now you need to share this information by being visible and memorable. This requires that you match your communication strategies to your target audience. In communicating your personal brand, craft a clear, consistent message. In other words, your actions, words and marketing messages should be cohesive. You can use your personal brand as a barometer. Prior to creating and posting to social media, placing an ad in the local newspaper, or uploading your design blog to LinkedIn, ask yourself, are each of those pieces of information in alignment? Do they all support your personal brand? Highly profitable retail operations have mastered the art of strong, consistent messaging and this commitment is even more powerful when embraced on an individual level as well.

Here is a final thought from someone who knows a bit about branding, Jeff Bezos of Amazon. Bezos said: "Your brand is what people say about you when you're not in the room."

Conclusion

Remember, when people hear your name or the name of your store, what should come across is that you are knowledgeable, likable and trustworthy. In other words, you are someone they want to do business with.

If you want to optimally grow your retail operation, it's important to develop and utilize the power of personal branding. This requires hiring the right people, but also on a commitment to allocating the time and resources to coaching team members on how to build strong personal brands.

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

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

"Jeff Bezos of Amazon said, 'Your brand is what people say about you when you're not in the room.'"

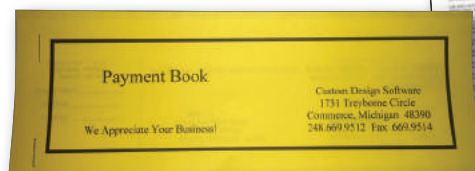
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CLARIFYING & CONFIRMING

Two of the most effective verbal responses in sales situations.

by Peter A. Marino Ph.D.

These two sales skills help to demonstrate that the salesperson has respect for the shopper's thoughts and feelings.

Two of the most effective verbal responses in a sales situation are clarifying and confirming. Each helps to demonstrate to the shopper that the sales associate has respect for his or her thoughts and feelings. Keep in mind owner and author Harvey Mackay's slightly modified version of Theodore Roosevelt's saying: "Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care."

Clarifying

Clarifying is a positive way of obtaining a clear, accurate, and complete understanding of what the speaker wants to communicate. Clarifying is especially important when one's impulse is to reject someone's idea out of hand. It makes no difference whether the idea rejected is that of a customer, a salesperson, or of any other company employee. Sales managers and salespeople alike need to listen to each other's ideas, and thrive when they do so. For when they take

the time to clarify each other's ideas, each one feels appreciated, feels in on things, and feel listened to. When that happens, the entire company functions as it ought to. Nothing else can provide the learning climate that active listening does.

Active listeners consistently avoid judging another person's suggestion without first clarifying to obtain a clear, accurate, and complete understanding of that suggestion.

Open probes invite the speaker to talk freely. In that sense, open probes are non-directive. Closed probes are, however, meant to 'fence in' the other person's communication. Take the example of a customer who tells a salesperson the following: "I'm having a tough time understanding what you mean by this table's planked solids." The incorrect response would be, "Before you leave the store today, remind me to give you one of our brochures that's great at explaining the differences between solid wood and veneers."

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"Clarifying is a means;

confirming is the end. It would make no sense to clarify the speaker's communication and then leave that clarification unconfirmed."

Such a reply is too little and too late. Moreover, that response flies in the face of one of the great Elmer Wheeler's selling points. "Save 'em steps."

Recently while putting on a sales session for a furniture store in Minnesota, I went over Elmer Wheeler's "Save 'em steps." I then mentioned that all things, animate and inanimate, strive to take the fewest possible steps in order to conserve energy. Recently a friend of mine quipped that if you want to find the quickest and easiest way to do something, observe how a lazy individual does it! Shoppers at a mall will risk scraping the paint on their cars to park in a narrow spot, simply because that spot will save them several steps.

Not a week passed and the owner of the Minnesota store called me to tell me that "save 'em steps" had helped him close a sale. The customer, loved the sleep set, but also wanted to purchase the sheets and pillow case in the same store. The owner's store happened to be out of those items. Instead of advising her to find them via an internet search, he told her he would do the "leg work" to find out where she could get the best buy on the sheets for quick delivery. He added he would get back to her on that very day. Following up, he found a store that had excellent sheets and pillow cases in stock for a modest delivery price. She ordered them online and purchased the store's premium sleep set, their most expensive. "Peter," the owner told me on the

phone, "Wheeler's "save 'em steps" made the sale." Amazing what a little clarifying can do for the salesperson and the customer!

The skill of clarifying works best when the salesperson values a customer's suggestions, ideas, and requests because it becomes easier to resist rejecting those statements out of hand, and so follow up appropriately.

Salespeople who fail to clarify customer statements that require qualifying, end up assuming incorrectly that they understand their customer's concerns. As a result, the customer may sense that the salesperson is not sincerely interested in understanding him or her.

Confirming

The purpose of clarifying is to arrive at a clear, accurate, and complete understanding of the speaker's words. Confirming is the skill by which listeners use a closed probe to test if they truly understand the speaker's logical and emotional content. Confirming is the hand that fits in the glove of clarification. Clarification is a means; confirming is the end. It would make no sense to clarify the speaker's communication and then leave that clarification unconfirmed.

One other thing: confirming is not agreeing. Also, unlike acknowledging, confirming is not restricted to dealing with the emotions or sentiments of the

speaker.

Confirming benefits both the speaker and the listener:

1. It confirms a mutual understanding between the speaker and the listener.
2. It lets the speaker know he or she has truly been listened to because it includes both the speaker's logical and the emotion content.
3. It makes allowances for the listener's possible misunderstanding of the speaker's words.

"Oh? Tell me more. I'd appreciate hearing more about this. What else is important to you? Mind sharing with me why that is important to you? How did that happen?"

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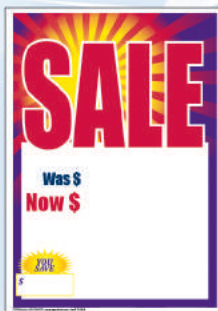
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"An effective way

to confirm the speaker's communication is to use words like the following: "Let's see if I have this right."

- 4. In doing so, confirming demonstrates the listener's humility.
- 5. It allows the speaker to add new information he or she may have forgotten to mention.
- 6. It demonstrates to the speaker that the listener cares, therefore, it helps to establish rapport and trust.
- 7. The best confirming paraphrases the gist of what the customer has said, but never echoes it.
- 8. The listener confirms only that part of the speaker's communication that needs to be confirmed.
- 9. The listener never confirms the obvious.

An effective way to confirm the speaker's communication is to use words like the following: "Let's see if I have this right." Those words are a concession to the speaker that the listener may not have it "right." Should the listener's confirming reveal that the listener did not have it right, the speaker is ready to forgive the listener. How different the speaker would have felt had the listener said, "I'm sure I heard you right." Instead, by saying, "Let's see if I have this right," the speaker tends to be more forgiving, should the listener's confirmation turn out to be faulty. At times, confirming causes the speaker to remember something he or she had not mentioned. Thus the listener receives further relevant

information that would otherwise have been omitted. Let's take a look at open and closed probes. That'll make more sense, now that we have actually seen both probes demonstrated.

Whenever the listener would like to encourage the speaker to talk freely or to elaborate on something he or she has said, the listener should use an open probe. Earlier we mentioned that open probes are non-directive, closed probes are directive. Unlike closed probes, open probes don't fence the speaker in. Because of their nature, open probes work better than closed probes to start the clarifying. Instead, closed probes fit in better with confirming. The following is a list of some open probes. Note that neither open nor closed probes necessarily end with a question mark.

Sample Open Probes

- Oh?
- Tell me more.
- I'd appreciate hearing more about this.
- What else is important to you?
- Mind sharing with me why that is important to you?
- What kind of books do you enjoy reading most?
- How did that happen?
- Why do you think that happened?

- Please describe exactly what happened.
- How so?

Closed probes limit the range of the speaker's response. There are four kinds of closed probes: (1) yes/no, (2) alternate of choice, (3) probes to obtain quantifiable information regarding size, number, color, dates, names, location, etc., (4) probes to confirm one's understanding of something the speaker said. Actually the second and the fourth kinds of closed probes are meant to block a negative (no) answer.

"On the phone you said you'd like to know more about leather before you'd invest in a leather sofa. I'd like to propose we do just that today so that you can make an informed decision. Is that OK with you?"

CLARIFYING & CONFIRMING

Sample Closed Probes

1. To win a yes or a no.

- Are you interested in having me describe the benefits of fabric protection?
- Would that be OK?
- Has anyone seen Bill today?

2. To provide alternate choices.

- Which of the two do you prefer?
- Do you prefer the table with the planked solid wooden top or the one with the veneered top?
- The blue one or the red one?
- It would help if I knew which manner of payment you preferred.

3. To get quantifiable information (size, date, color, type of material)

- How many chairs would you like with this table?
- How soon will you be requiring delivery?
- How many times has this happened?

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"Listening

[acknowledges] the talker in a way that invites the communication to continue."

- Madelyn-Burley-Allen, Listening: The Forgotten Skills

4. Confirm your understanding.

- *Let's see if I have this right. You need the sofa and the love seat. You need only one lamp table as well as the cocktail table. Is that it?*
- *I take it you are ready to make your purchase.*
- *On the phone you said you'd like to know more about leather before you'd invest in a leather sofa. I'd like to propose we do just that today so that you can make an informed decision. Is that OK with you? This is a three-step opening ending with a confirmation. At times, some call this a four-step opening, since it starts with a sentence that makes a transition from the 'small talk to' the actual opening itself.*

5. Review of Confirming.

- *It helps the customer and the salesperson to arrive at the same understanding.*
- *It allows the customer to correct any inaccuracies in the salesperson's confirming.*
- *It allows the customer to add information.*
- *It is an excellent way to practice paraphrasing the customer's words without mimicking or echoing them.*
- *It is the logical conclusion of clarifying since it demonstrates to the customer that the salesperson has been listening.*

By now it should be quite clear that active listening is a skill that

requires more than a willingness to learn. It requires:

- *A proper attitude.*
- *Focused use of one's mind, ears, and eyes.*
- *Lots of practice.*

Note: Of course, you should always be prepared should the customer take your closed probe as an open probe, and vice versa. For example, let's say the salesperson asks the customer, "What kind of fabric are you looking for?" The customer interprets that as an open probe, and therefore responds as follows: "That raises a problem between my wife and me. She chooses fabrics based on available colors and patterns. I simply want a fabric that'll last." The probe still worked. That's all that matters.

About Peter Marino: Corporate trainer, educator and speaker Dr. Peter A. Marino has written extensively on sales training techniques and their furniture retailing applications. Scores of his articles are posted to the "Sales Skill Index" on furninfo.com. He is available for in-store training, and speaking. To contact Peter, email editor@furninfo.com



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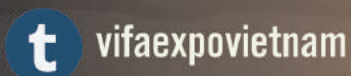
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