

VOLUME 148 NO.4 JULY/ AUGUST 2018

furniture WORLD

Retailing: Viva LaDiff!
Tiresome Sales Habits
Design & Designer Series
Luxury Bedding Sales Strategies
Warehouse Process Improvement

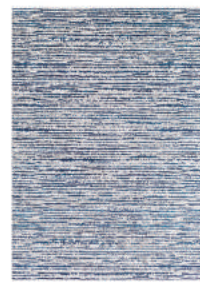
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CONTENTS

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COVER: The sumptuous Marquis Spa leather, shown on Omnia's Pasadena, realizes refined contemporary styling without sacrificing comfort. Omnia offers hundreds of personalized style options, configurations and motion, available in top grain leathers plus fabric combinations. Made in America. See pages 4-5 in this issue or visit <http://www.omnialeather.com> for more information.

06 Editor's Corner: The Rapport Report

Rapport is the glue that binds people together in families, organizations and relationships, including sales.

08 The New Home Furnishings Business

A recent study of 350-plus retailers and manufacturers pinpoints growth opportunities for furniture retailers.

20 Design & Designer Series: Kim Salmela

Kim Salmela doesn't believe in making safe furnishings decisions. She says, "There are no rules. That's the rule!"

36 Five Steps to Luxury Bedding Success

The luxury sale isn't a buzzword, it's not a flash in the pan, nor is it a money grab. Luxury selling is a mindset.

42 Warehouse Improvement Checklist

Scores of ideas to help furniture retailers improve facilities, processes and warehouse metrics.

56 Retail Success: LaDiff

A unique retail experiment, LaDiff is a contemporary style destination for customers in their mid-twenties to mid-eighties.

74 Strategies For Selling Higher-End Bedding

Whether your top bed is \$4,000 or \$40,000, here are sales strategies to help you present and sell your best.

90 Best Selling Design

Editors' picks of best selling furniture and accessory designs.

98 Technology Point/Counterpoint

Everybody is buzzing about VR/AR. Will the early adapters... the Amazons, Wayfairs and Frontgates eat your lunch?

110 Seven Tiresome Habits of Moderately Successful Salespeople

A list of seven poor retail habits RSAs hang onto, but give your shoppers a negative impression.

118 100 Years Ago In Furniture World

Interesting excerpts from summer 1925 issues of Furniture World Magazine.

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The Rapport Report

It is joyous when present, unsettling while fading, difficult when gone. Rapport is the glue that binds people together in families, organizations and relationships, including sales.

For salespeople, knowing how to establish rapport is at best, half a skill. Why? As sales guru Dr. Peter Marino wrote, "No salesperson can reasonably make the following claim: 'Even though the customer did not establish rapport with me, I established it with him.'"

Rapport can be ephemeral. Much like holding a small bird in your hand, too loose the grasp, it flies. Too tight, it can't breathe. So, what can be done to avoid losing rapport?

1. Prepare: Set an intention to establish rapport with every customer before every UP.

2. Smile: A genuine smile is best, but let's face it, Everyone can have a bad day. Studies have shown that the very act of smiling makes people feel more relaxed, comfortable, and more like smiling. It's a positive feedback loop. So, if you can't manage a 100 percent genuine smile right away, fake it until you make it!

3. Avoid: Try not to rush, make customers wait or waste their time. Don't talk when listening is called for. Being scripted or robotic instantly kills rapport, as does appearing distracted. Give them your full attention and turn off your phone! Poor knowledge of your products/services is the same as wasting their time. Never care more about making a sale than helping customers to make the best buying decision. Poor body language such as arms crossed, lack of eye contact, and unprofessional dress are uncalled for. Failure to immediately address even the smallest negative customer issue or disappointment is cowardly and rapport-killing.

"What is scary about rapport," added Peter Marino, "is that salespeople can lose it through the awkward interference of a third party, like a delivery person, receptionist, cell phone, a manager, a store policy, a shopper's friend, spouse, child or family member."

"Like honor, rapport can be lost through someone's malicious slander, such as a competitor's lie about your products or service policies (or a real or fake online review). But while others can affect the rapport between a salesperson and customer, the salesperson has primary responsibility for establishing and maintaining rapport with the customer."

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^{new} ✓ THE HOME FURNISHINGS BUSINESS

by Pam Danziger, Unity Marketing

From 2016 to 2017, furniture store sales grew 1.9 percent, while home furnishings stores climbed 7.8 percent, nearly four times faster. A new study pinpoints reasons why.

Americans' vision of the homes they live in is changing, as are the roles and functions they want their homes to play in their lives. Home has become a reflection of their personalities and values, which increasingly lean toward a simpler, functional and practical style personalized to support the way they live today.

Better Homes & Gardens magazine recently surveyed 1,600 female homeowners. The study found that 63 percent of Millennial respondents believe that having a home customized to their tastes and needs is a top priority. Sixty percent of this group, the next big generation of home-buying consumers, also said that having a home that is "a reflection of me" is more important to them than to their parents' generation.

Democratic Design

A whole new range of retailers, many of which traditional furniture stores haven't viewed as direct competitors, are answering a need for home furnishings customized to younger consumers'

tastes and lifestyles. "Democratic Design" has become the umbrella under which these emerging brands market.

The phrase "democratic design" was originally coined by designer Philippe Starck as "design that provides quality pieces at accessible prices." IKEA was one of the first brands to whole-heartedly embrace the idea. It expanded the definition to include five key principles: form, function, sustainability, quality and low price. Target has just launched a new line of furnishings under the same

"While sales in furniture stores grew 25.4 percent from 2010 to 2017, stores that sell a broader range of home furnishings, advanced much more rapidly, 34.7 percent."

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"Democratic Design

is poised to disrupt the traditional home furnishings and furniture market in much the same way as 'fast fashion' did to the traditional fashion business."

“democratic design” banner, called Made By Design.

This idea of “democratic design” is poised to disrupt the traditional home furnishings and furniture market in much the same way “fast fashion” did to the traditional fashion business. Along with its grounding principles of form, function, sustainability, quality and low price, democratic design is also fast and fashionable.

Furniture Retail Disrupted

As of yet, disruption of traditional furniture retail is measurable, but has not yet progressed as rapidly as in other consumer goods categories, such as grocery and fashion. But that is sure to change. At the macro level, consumer expenditures on furniture and home furnishings has grown 42 percent, from \$144.6 billion in 2009 to \$204.8 billion in 2017. But during that time, furni-

ture and home furnishings stores' share of those sales has declined, from nearly 59 percent in 2009 to 56.5 percent in 2017. Making up the difference is online retailers' and other retailers' share, i.e. general merchandise stores like Target and Walmart, and big box building materials stores like Home Depot which is expanding its furniture selections.

Traditional furniture stores are also losing share. While sales in furniture stores grew 25.4 percent from 2010 to 2017, the overall share of the combined furniture and home furnishings store sales has declined from 54.8 percent to 53 percent over that time. In other words, stores that sell a broader range of home furnishings, including furniture, housewares and decorative accessories advanced much more rapidly, 34.7 percent.

Given the break-neck pace
at which the consumer market

is evolving in so many different categories, traditional furniture retailers are in danger of being left behind unless they take steps now to reverse the decline and remain relevant to the needs of today's home-hungry consumers.

New Industry Study

Furniture World magazine and Unity Marketing worked together to assess the state of furniture retail today and look to its future. In a survey conducted among 350+ furniture retailers and manufacturers, we found that furniture retailers underestimate the fierce competitive pressures they face.

While they widely recognize the threat online furniture retailers represent, with nearly two-thirds (63 percent) identifying e-commerce furniture brands like Wayfair, One Kings Lane and Overstock.com as competitors, they are far less concerned about encroachment of national mass market home furnishings retailers, like IKEA, Pottery Barn, and West Elm (27 percent) and major mass-market retailers that also offer furniture and home furnishings (15 percent), like Target, Walmart, TJ Maxx, and Kohl's.

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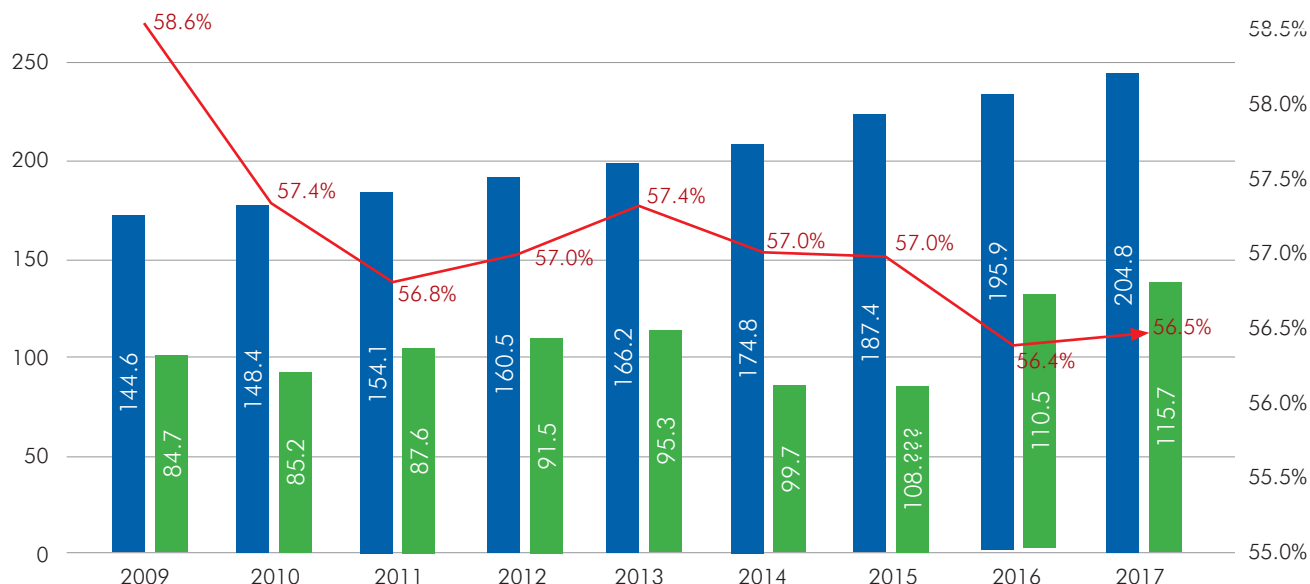
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Furniture & Home Furnishings Consumption vs Retail Sales in Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores

■ Consumer Spending on Furniture & Home Furnishings
■ Retail Sales in Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores
→ Share of Sales



SOURCE: BEA, Census Retail Sales and Unity Marketing. Consumption & Sales in Billions

"The old consumer durable way of thinking of the furniture industry has passed. **Consumers increasingly are turning to fast furniture instead of forever furniture choices.**"

Further, Amazon is only viewed as a threat by 40 percent of furniture retailers, a major oversight. Amazon has over 100 million Prime members who pay a premium price for a subscription to the service, and it is now offering two furniture house brand offerings, Rivet and Stone & Beam.

The picture that emerges from this study is that traditional furniture stores believe they have a secure place in the furniture market. But, a growing body of faster, more adaptable competitors are responding to consumers' need for speed, style and affordable price. Disruptive competitors are nipping at their heels and could well overtake traditional furniture retailers as they scale in the furniture space.

"Our biggest challenge is how to reach clients who have the means to purchase our high-end furniture. They still exist but it is really hard to find the right media that we can afford," commented a furniture retailer in the survey.

I would add that the problem for this retailer is not just finding the right media to reach their best furniture prospects, but also find-

ing the right message.

Help Customers Turn Their House Into A Home

In the survey, besides worries about online competition disrupting their businesses, furniture retailers see attracting the next generation of furniture customers to their stores as their primary growth challenge. And they believe that mastering the internet and social media – the next generation's primary tools – is the primary means to do that.

While this is critically important today, and a major challenge for many traditional furniture retailers that came of age in a pre-internet world, just being there isn't enough. Retailers have to communicate a marketing message

"The furniture you sell

is the customers' starting point for furnishing their houses.

Decorative accessories are what turn their houses into homes."

that attracts these next generation customers.

In fishing, just dropping a hook into the water and expecting to catch fish isn't enough. The hook has to be baited with something that will entice the right kind fish to bite. So it is with the next generation of furniture customers. Your marketing bait must grab their attention so that it becomes possible to reel them in.

Success in retail today is less about WHAT you sell and more about HOW you sell it. In the case of furniture retail, the furniture you sell is the customer's starting point for furnishing their houses. Decorative accessories, however, are what turn their houses into homes.

"Consumers no longer want to

be just consumers. They want to be creators! 'Personal Fashion' is now driving 'Personal Homes,'" says Jill Sands, The Trend Forecaster.

Furniture alone won't allow them to create their personal home. Decorative accessories will. The survey reveals that this potential is largely overlooked by traditional furniture stores. Only 37 percent of the furniture retailers surveyed said that decorative accessories are very important in driving sales and attracting customers to their stores.

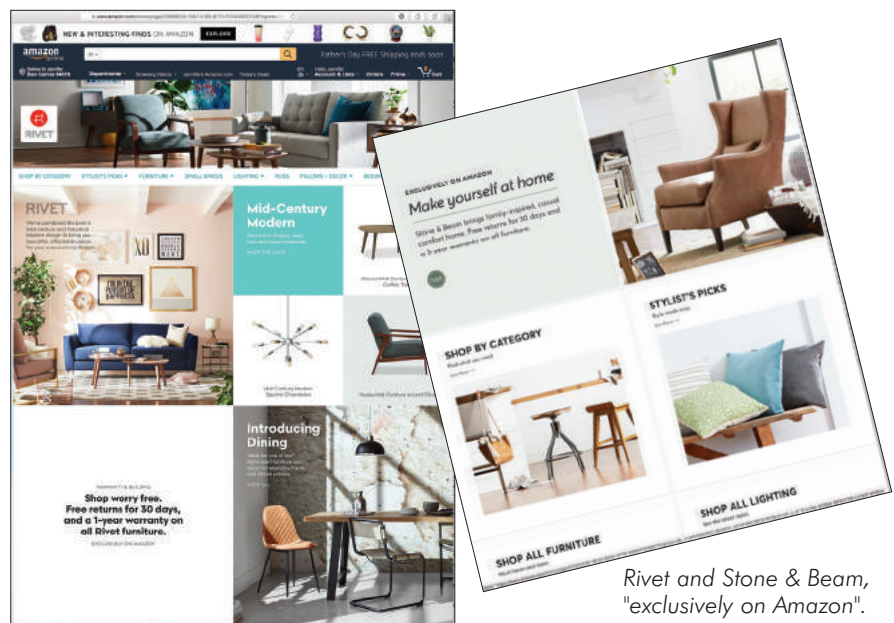
At retail, home furnishings stores are doing far better than those classified as furniture stores. From 2016 to 2017 furniture store sales only grew 1.9 percent, while home furnishings stores,

climbed 7.8 percent, nearly four times faster. What's the difference? Home furnishings stores focus on decorative accessories!

Mary Liz Curtin, owner of life-style and furniture store Leon & Lulu, located in Clawson, Michigan, a Detroit suburb, has advice for furniture stores: Accessorize. She says, "We are accessory heavy. Many furniture stores have the same accessories that have been kicking around for years." Accessories add vibrancy to any room setting, and Leon & Lulu works them for all they are worth.

Plus, when times got tough, selling furniture back during the Great Recession, the accessories kept the store afloat. "We were lucky to have small things to bal-

"Amazon is only viewed as a threat by 40 percent of furniture retailers, which is a major oversight... Amazon is now offering two house brands of furniture offerings, Rivet and Stone & Beam."



Rivet and Stone & Beam, "exclusively on Amazon".

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"The survey showed

furniture retailers are far less concerned about encroachment of national mass market home furnishings retailers (27 percent) and major mass-market retailers that also offer furniture and home furnishings (15 percent)."

ance the sales. But today, those customers who bought the small indulgences and gifts in 2008 are back to buy big-ticket furniture," Curtin adds.

Go Deep, Go Long, Go Bold with Accessories

To attract next generation customers, your marketing messages must communicate how your store is a place where they can bring their personal design vision to life. Furniture is only a part of that vision. Accessories breathe life into that vision and add verve

to store displays that will excite customers and get them to spend more time, and hopefully more money.

"Accessories are where retailers can play with color," says Patti Carpenter, president Carpenter + Company. "It's easy to bring in colors with pillows, throws and other accent textiles, also vessels, vases and similar items. That's how to add a dash of inspiration."

Too few furniture stores know how to use accessories to the max. The thought is that accessories are only there to "make the furniture look better," but just as the addition of well-chosen and placed accessories can change the whole look of a room, the right accessories used strategically can change the whole experience of the store for customers.

"Some furniture stores view accessories as a painful necessity," says David Gebhart, CEO Global Views. "But once they commit to accessory programs, they are surprised by the volume they can do."

Customers want to see something new and different every time they come into a store. Accessories can provide that experience. "Stores that are under-accessorized are just not putting their best foot forward with the tools they have to work with," says Jason Phillips, VP Phillips Collection. "Many stores, especially single store retailers and small to mid-sized chains need to be more confident in their buying position and in their store aesthetic."

Accessories greatly enhance opportunities for add-on sales and increased average sale. "Accessories can be a huge profit center for any store. Those that do it right see a high return on investment from the home accent side," says Sharon Davis, executive director of Accessories Resource Team.

Furniture retailers need to hire the right people with the right skills and a good eye to buy accessories. "Furniture buyers don't necessarily know how to

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style a room. They may know the costs, the turns and margins on categories and individual pieces, but not always the best way to finish the room. That is where the money is made," says Paul Thompson, a consultant in space planning.

What RH, West Elm, Pottery Barn & IKEA Understand

Furniture is now a fashion business. RH, West Elm, Pottery Barn, IKEA and Wayfair understand this.

The old "consumer durable" way of thinking in the furniture industry has passed. Consumers increasingly are turning to 'fast' furniture instead of 'forever' furniture choices. The problem for many furniture retailers is 'fast-furniture' can't be sold with a 'forever-furniture' approach.

Find The Right Mix

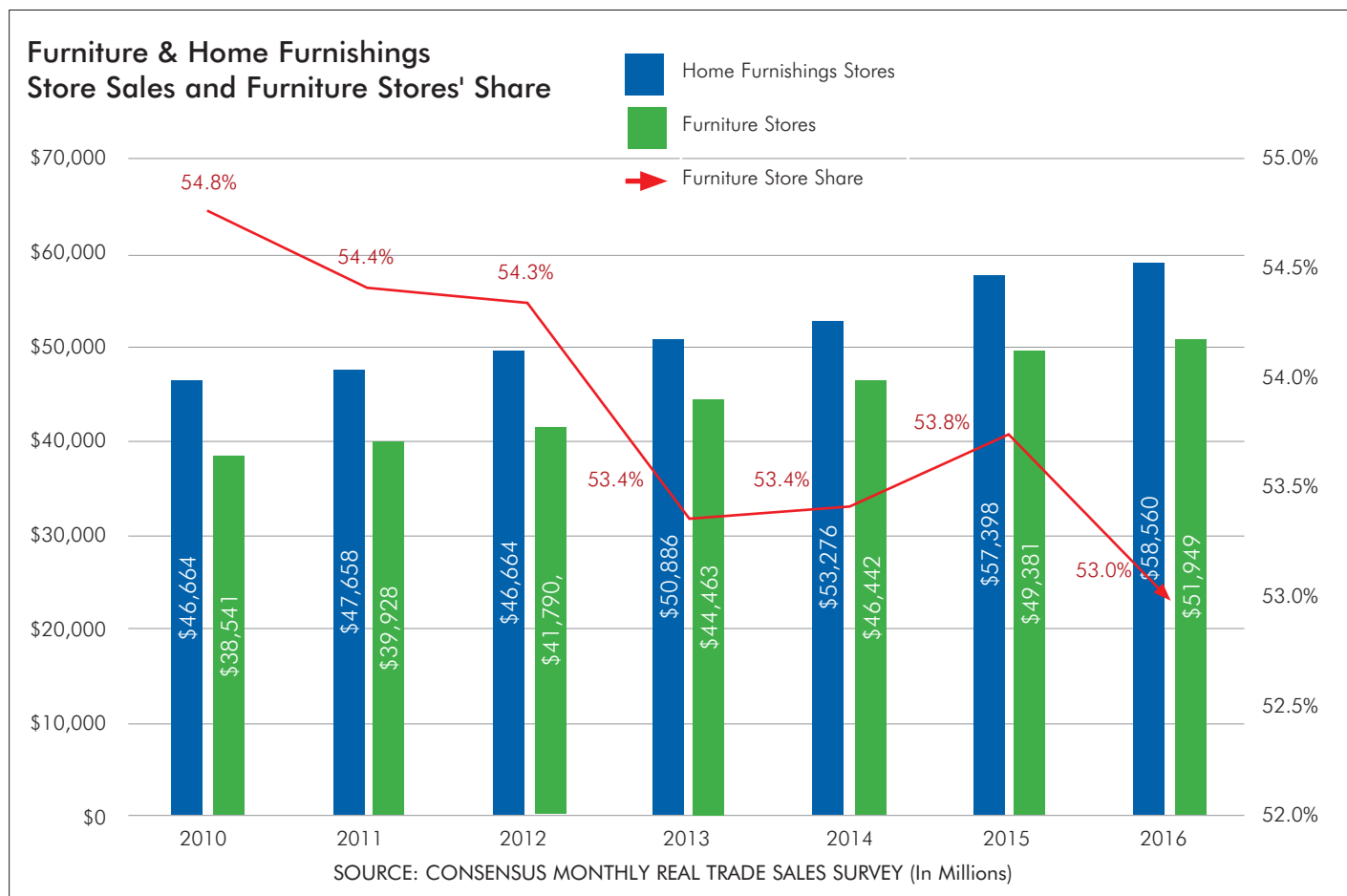
Think about mixing 'fast' furniture with 'forever' furniture lines, as this retailer who responded to

our survey has done:

"Even I am attracted to the cheap, but cute new furniture offerings! They're hard to resist when they are marketed so well online. I'm opening accounts with some new cheaper furniture lines, too, so I have a broad range of offerings."

But fashion is fleeting. It needs to be changed up regularly, which is where decorative accessories can give traditional furniture retailers an edge.

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design does last a long time. "Quality furniture never goes out of style," noted another retailer who responded to our survey.

To successfully sell forever-fashion furniture, retailers need to educate the next generation of customers so that the value of their products becomes tangible. As another retail respondent to the survey said. "I still have clients that want quality furniture. I

educate them about differences in cushion content, fabric durability, and value. It's complicated to decide which product truly is the best quality and value, so even being educated I have to just pick one."

The Full Report: The full report, "Furniture Retailing in an Internet-Disrupted Market", available from Unity Marketing for \$99, is a research-based look at furniture retail today and how retailers are fighting back against the online/e-commerce onslaught.

It reports the results of an online survey with $n=369$ furniture retailers and marketers about their business, views of the competition, advertising, marketing and digital strategies and how they are prospering in the new experience economy.

This report also provides analysis to help retailers make the research findings actionable. <https://unitymarketingonline.com/shop/buy-luxury-research-reports/furniture-retailing-in-an-internet-disrupted-market/>.

About Pamela Danziger: Pamela N. Danziger is an internationally recognized expert specializing in consumer insights for marketers targeting the affluent consumer segment. She is president of Unity Marketing, a boutique marketing consulting firm she founded in 1992 where she leads with research to provide brands with actionable insights into the minds of their most profitable customers.

She is also a founding partner in Retail Rescue, a firm that provides retailers with advice, mentoring and support in Marketing, Management, Merchandising, Operations, Service and Selling.

A prolific writer, she is the author of eight books including *Shops that POP! 7 Steps to Extraordinary Retail Success*, written about and for independent retailers. She is a contributor to *The Robin Report* and *Forbes.com*. Pam is frequently called on to share new insights with audiences and business leaders all over the world. Contact Pam Danziger at pam@unitymarketingonline.com.

"Only 37 percent of the furniture retailers surveyed said that decorative accessories are very important in driving sales and attracting customers to their stores."

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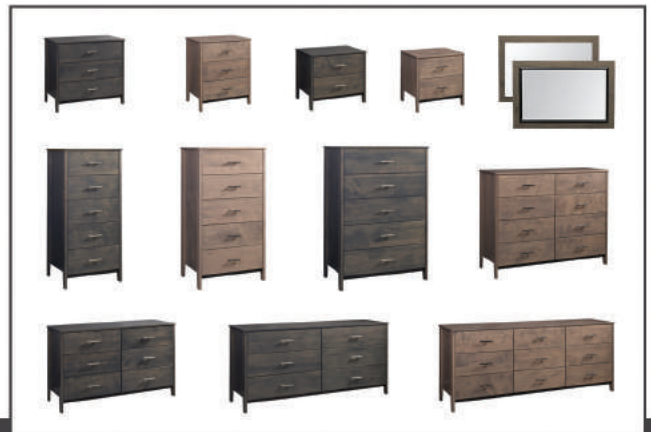


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DESIGN & DESIGNER

KIM SALMELA

by Melody Doering

Kim Salmela doesn't believe that people should furnish their homes by making safe decisions. She says, "There are no rules. That's the rule!"

For this issue of Furniture World we interviewed multi-faceted designer, entrepreneur, and manufacturer Kim Salmela. Kim got her start in design as the creative director for the entertainer Prince. From that unconventional beginning she went on to develop award-winning retail stores, become a sought after interior designer and create branded product lines. Her extensive world travels provide inspiration for her design palette, which is a bold mix of colors, patterns, and styles that create joyous interiors.

We can't start a conversation with you at any other point than with your design work for Prince. How did that come about?

"My junior year of college was spent in Milan. There the modern influence of my childhood was challenged by exposure to European cities. I saw homes and apartments where old was mixed with new. What might be called my 'design philosophy'

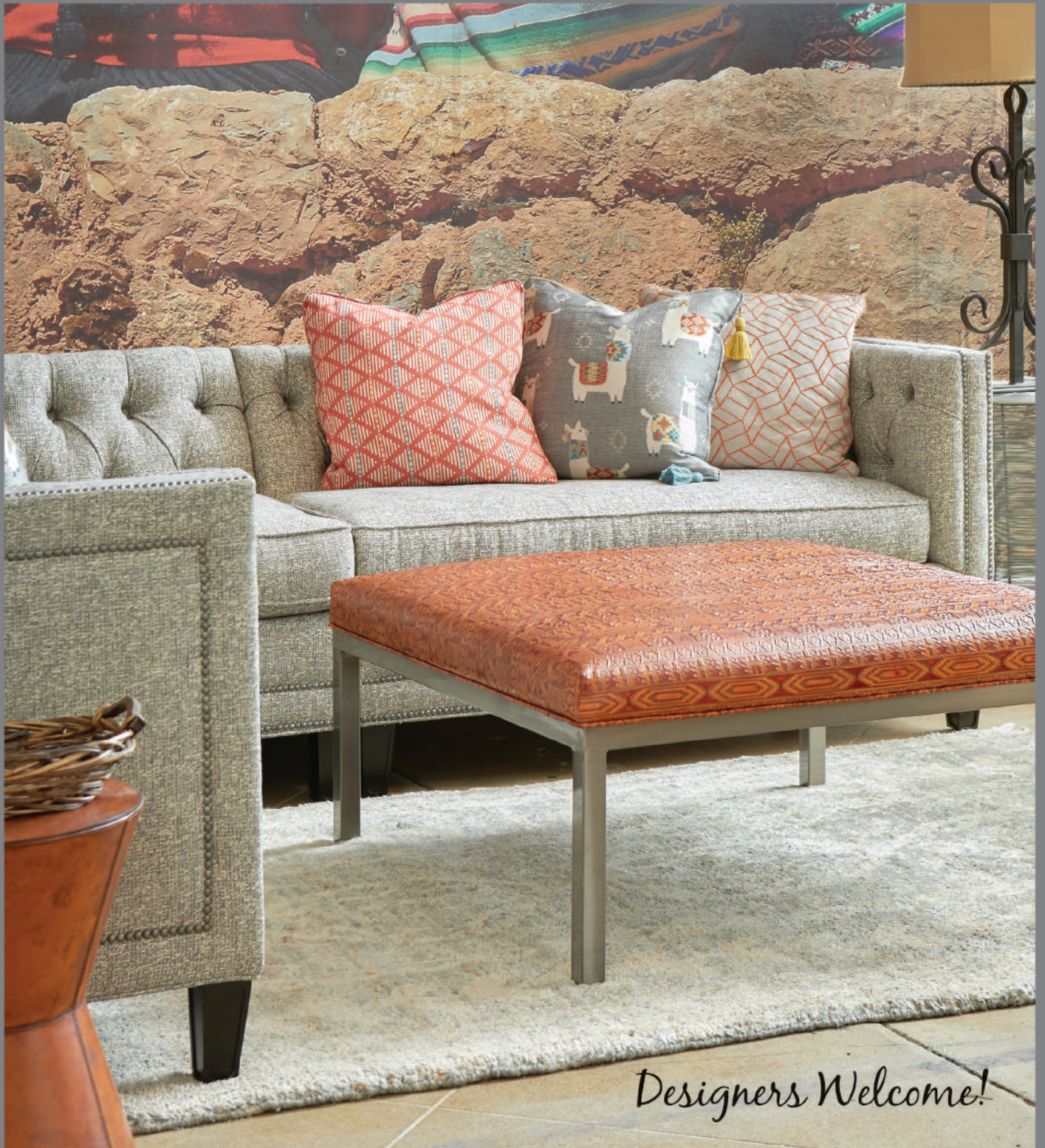
came into focus. I returned home and finished a double major in international relations and foreign studies.

"Then after graduating from the University of Minnesota, I landed a dream job. My friend, who was a backup dancer for the singer Prince, overheard that he planned to open a restaurant and nightclub. She suggested that I meet with Prince to share some of my ideas.

"I was 21 years old with no design background. Why would he even talk to me? My friend said, 'I know the woman in charge, she's not creative, and you have so many great ideas.' So she got me an interview; I drove out to Paisley Park Studios and was hired to work on the project.

"Long story short, they ended up keeping me on as creative director doing set and costume designs. I organized social events for Prince and mini-concerts. At 21, it seemed like the best job in the world."

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"It has become more challenging and more urgent for retailers and designers to offer their clients unique products to stay ahead of the game."

Restaurateur to Designer

How did you move from working with Prince's organization into design?

"Along with some friends, we adapted Prince's idea to open a hot-spot restaurant and nightclub in downtown Minneapolis.

"Soon after, I felt I needed to set out on a 'real' career path,

"Alfred's Grand Petit Magasin featured a cafe, gifts, antiques, new furniture and clothing.

It was this lifestyle offering that enticed people to spend half a day there browsing and shopping."

and opened a retail furnishings store. My first store, Restoration, presented a mix of old and new furnishings. I'd go to estate sales, flea markets, antique and gift shows to find creative, cool products. Each room in the store had its own theme. People would come in and say, 'Oh my gosh, I love the feel of this.' Then they would ask me to decorate their homes. I started doing interior design.

"The store's name was changed from Restoration to Paris Flea Market. Two years later a second store was added, Belle Epoque, focused more on furniture and interior design. Eventually I expanded to a larger space called Alfred's Grand Petit Magasin.

"That snowballed into a big business. I flew to France, rented a truck, and drove around the country, shipping back containers of antiques. At that point, head buyers from big national chains shopped my store in Minneapolis to buy those antiques to knock off for their catalogs."

Creating a Retail Destination

"Minneapolis is a big retail market. There are a lot of vendors, designers and people from the retail world who visit. Still, it was surprising that my little store in the middle of Minneapolis became known internationally. Alfred's Grand Petit Magasin featured a cafe, gifts, antiques, new furniture and clothing. There were vintage things and one-off items that could all be mixed together. And, these items could not be found anywhere else! It was this lifestyle offering that enticed people to spend half a day there browsing and shopping.

"A top way to become a stronger retailer is to become a destination for items customers can't find anywhere else. Everything's shoppable online, so how can most retailers compete for people who are internet-price shopping? It's the same, or even harder, for interior designers. It has become more challenging and more urgent for retailers and designers

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to offer their clients unique products to stay ahead of the game.

"My stores were always super experiential. Every room setting told a story. There are a lot of stores that display a sofa, a coffee table, and a chair that kind of match. And, at the other end of the store is the pillow section.

"Instead, I prefer to tell a lifestyle story, mix it all up. Consumers have a hard time imagining their rooms, so they need visual inspiration. I don't see many stores that do it really well. It's an opportunity, a way to become unique and

present a showroom experience designed to make customers feel as if they are walking into a room from 'House Beautiful' or 'Elle Décor'."

Creating Sanctuary

You have been quoted as saying that people should just be able to walk into their homes and be happy. How do you go about designing to achieve that end?

"A home should be like a sanctuary, a space that is inspirational,

comfortable and full of memories.

"I would love to see people take more risks with home furnishings. I want them to feel like they don't have to buy beige because they're worried their purchases are going to go out of style. I want them to pick a pattern and use it because they love it. People keep what they love, so yes, having clients walk into their homes and be happy is my mission, my vision, and my brand.

"I grew up with a very creative Finnish family. My parents were interested in Scandinavian

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At far left is a display from Kim's Los Angeles showroom open to designers and clients. Not only does it tell a lifestyle story with furniture and accents, but it is also smart merchandising. By thinking vertically and layering furniture, rugs, accents, pillow and books, retailers can fit more product in less space. Shoppers can see items put together in a way they wouldn't necessarily consider for themselves.



Shown above is an example of how Kim layers color and pattern on pattern.

Kim's blue and white Quinn ottoman, embraces the neutral trend and the trend for relaxed casual living. She says the pillows and rug bring in a modern ethnic vibe.

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KIM SARMELA

design. For summer vacations they would pack the family into a van and drive around the country looking at architecture, visiting Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings and homes. When I was six or seven years old, I recall redecorating my bedroom every few months. When I got old enough to babysit, all the money I earned went towards buying furniture and accessories to design around a

mood, and create an escape. Today I design the same way, by creating rooms for clients that are more about how they feel, than necessarily about how they look."

Design Process – No Rules

You've been quoted as saying, "There are no rules, that's the rule!" Please explain.

"At a certain point, product trend analysis and rules for creating spaces gets in the way of trusting your taste.

"I stay away from checking the latest color trends and trust my gut. As a designer or retailer who aspires to be different, there's a place for setting trends instead of following them.

"I use a lot of color and pattern. I don't try to compete with Restoration Hardware, or other lines that I do love, like Brownstone. Neutrals are great, but there is an opportunity for companies to use color to help customers buy furnishings they

can't find anywhere else; furnishings that create a positive mood, a happy mood.

"I constantly travel the world to find inspiring products that can be used to create a strong emotional connection. Also, to get inspiration for products I design and manufacture. I know that if I have a positive reaction to these products, there will be many other people who will feel similarly.

"That's how I pick fabrics and design frames. It has nothing to do with numbers or making safe decisions. Homes shouldn't be designed like that."

Developing a Furniture Line

What made you decide to start designing your own furniture?

"Often, when I worked with interior design clients, I couldn't find exactly the kinds of products I needed. In 2002, I started a line called Haute House, with a Los Angeles based business partner.

"Later I sold my interest in Haute House to my business partner and opened Alfred's. After two years of manufacturing and continuing to run the retail store in Minneapolis, I decided to focus more on product and interior design. So, I closed up the business, and moved to LA where I opened another store working

"I stay away from checking the latest color trends and trust my gut. As a designer or retailer who aspires to be different, there's a place for setting trends instead of following them."



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"The industry used to use 'multi-purpose' as a sales technique. Now, it's just practical design and living."

with interior design clients. "Then came a call from Judy George, the founder of the East Coast retailing chain, Domain. She had a concept she wanted to develop with a partner/designer. The concept evolved into a new furniture brand we called Hotel Maison.

"When Judy retired, I started

my own line, Kim Salmela Atelier. Within the first few months, One King's Lane saw the line and it was an incredible fit. They use me as one of their premier upholstery suppliers. We're also one of their biggest pillow suppliers."

Virtual vs. Brick-and-Mortar

"Online shopping has changed everything. It has broadened people's ability to seek out their own style, to find and buy what they want. At the same time, some retailers have struggled to keep up. Stores are realizing that they have to evolve from a style standpoint to compete with the internet.

"The ones that have done well obviously understand what their

customers want. This is the starting point for any retailer who sets out to provide home furnishings products that appeal aesthetically to their clients.

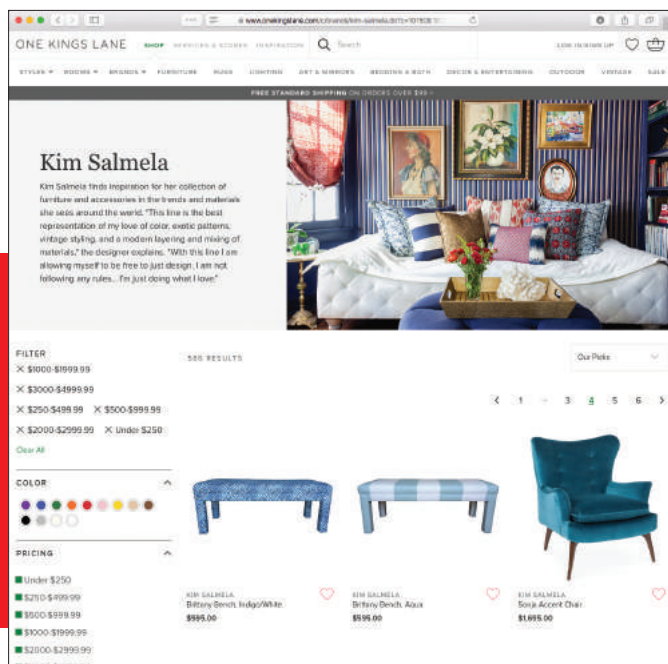
"My style appeals to a slightly younger audience: female, 30 to 50, well-traveled, and super into fashion. They're doing research shopping online. As an internet focused business, however, I felt I was missing a huge brick-and-mortar audience.

"So this fall, I'm launching a new line in High Point with Norwalk Furniture as my manufacturing partner. The facility, as well as the entire team, is amazing. I'm so lucky to have a relationship with Caroline Hipple and Dixon Bartlett who have mentored

At right, two different styles are contrasted to create a fresh look. A Scandinavian Modern frame matched with a cotton ikat print brings in a soft ethnic touch. Featured is the Sonja chair designed by Kim Salmela.

Image below has a chic, modern, bohemian lifestyle vibe. Kim says she uses texture when she doesn't want to incorporate a lot of pattern. The pillows were designed by Kim Salmela.





One King's Lane features Kim Salmela in the "Brands We Love" section of its website. She says, "If I am similar in price points to someone else, then I want to offer more design. If someone can offer a similar design, then I want to be lower in price than they are."

me throughout the years."

Opportunities for Furniture Retailers

What opportunities do you see in the next decade for retailers?

"If retailers can figure out and overcome the shipping/logistics

"More brick-and-mortar stores need to take advantage of the fact that minimums for manufacturers have gone down.

Being able to use the words 'Exclusive To...' is invaluable."

issues, the internet is the way to reach millions of consumers beyond their immediate area. Every retailer must have a strong internet presence.

"I probably spend a minimum of five hours per day shopping/sourcing products online. How much easier is it for me, in my capacity as an interior designer to log on to local retailers' sites to see what they have, versus getting into the car. When the right product at the right price pops up online, it makes it easy for customers who may never visit a store, to buy.

"More brick-and-mortar stores need to also take advantage of the fact that minimums for manufacturers have gone down. Being able to use the words 'Exclusive To...' is invaluable. All it takes is a few tweaks of a frame or to ask for exclusive colors or covers. Spending more time creating exclusive product means that retailing does not become merely a price game."

Expanding Horizons

Lots of retailers stay close to their businesses, repeating the same steps and visiting the same suppliers year after year. How can they expand their horizons and foster design innovation? How can they run a business without rules? How can they find more freedom and more success?

"First of all, retailers have to want to expand their horizons. Consider: every five to ten years they have a completely new audience and need to adapt. Retailers can stay within the same aesthetic, but should pay attention to influencers from the new generation and to what is doing well in the industry by simply logging onto one of many internet sites, like Wayfair or All Modern, and look for every item that is sold out.

"Diversity is King! The more a retailer has access to clients – has a way of actually communicating the breadth of their selection to

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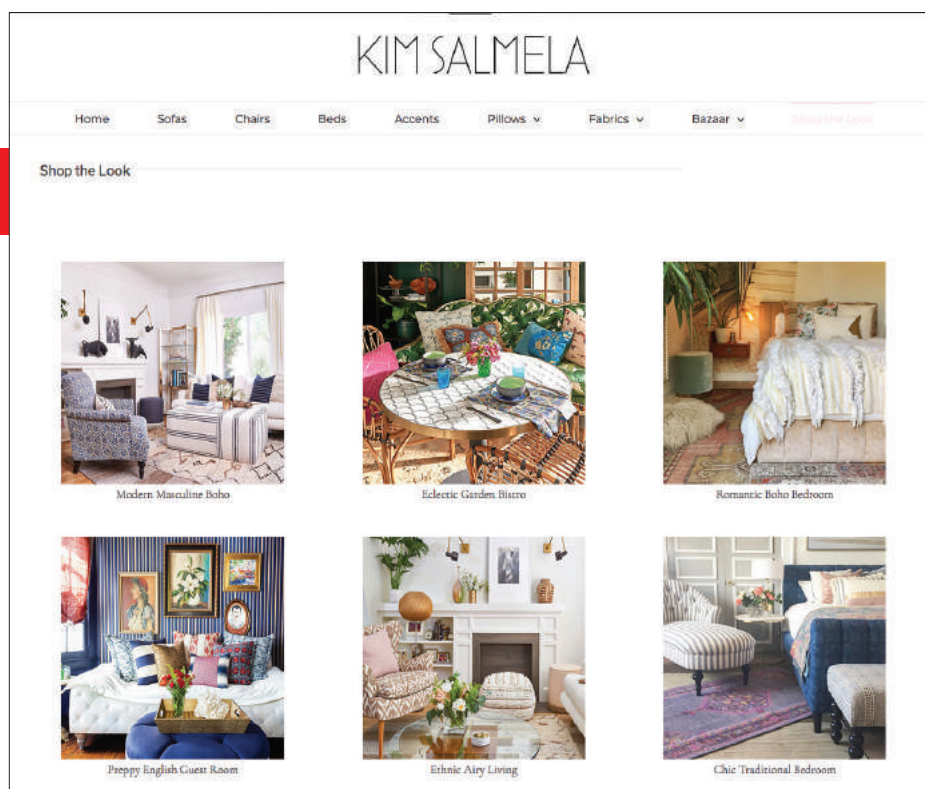
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For consumers who want to "Shop the Look" on www.kimsalmela.com (left), Modern Masculine Boho, Eclectic Garden Bistro, Preppy English Guest Room, Romantic Boho Bedroom, Ethnic Airy Living and Chic Traditional Bedroom are revealed. Kim feels these descriptors create more of a mood than the categories and lifestyle designations more often used in the furniture business.

clients – the better their chances are of making a sale. When I had my stores, I was the best sales person because I knew every line, and every product in every catalog. I also knew which vendors could make tweaks or customize products. At Alfred's Grand Petit Magasin, shoppers would come

in to purchase one item and I would end up in their homes taking measurements and doing whole houses. I never once had to do a sales pitch because my only goal was to get clients to choose the right items.

"Finally, space is limited for brick-and-mortar stores. Retailers need to treat their stores like they only represent 20 percent of what they actually have access to sell. But this means training, training, training of their staff."

Creating a Point of View

Is there value in having a story to tell, developing a point of view to differentiate oneself?

"My entire career has been about doing what isn't already out there; seeking the one-of-a-kind; giving my clients an exclusive home that reflects their taste,

not their neighbor's. Everyone has to find their own design passion and then go for it!

"My style is not for the masses, and I am OK with that. But I also don't claim to be unique. Others do what I do and sometimes do it better. The goal for my personal line is to offer value. If I am similar in price points to someone else, then I want to offer more design. If someone can offer a similar design, then I want to be lower in price.

"Using social media is one way of sharing your brand story. I used to say that social media is an incredible 'free' advertising tool, but then I realized that it is not 'free' when you consider how much time it takes to develop content and maintain a consistent presence. We are all sharing bandwidth with non-designer bloggers and influencers who have a high number of fol-

"European and 70s color palettes are much in use with colors like Evergreen, Vibrant Mauve, Bluish Lavenders and Pinks. Also, neutrals with ivory, black and camel as the base."

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Living room for a client featuring sectional and ottoman designed by Kim Salmela, both in Crypton performance fabric.

DESIGN TRENDS

lowers. All that being said, social media is really critical, especially for young companies."

Beyond Preppy English Guest Room

You have created rooms on your website with inventive names, such as: Modern Masculine Boho, Eclectic Garden Bistro, Preppy English Guest Room instead of using more pedestrian 'bedroom' or 'dining room.' Tell us about that.

"It all goes back to the mood you want to surround yourself with inside your home. Because each room has a different function, each should be looked at differently. I also joke that I can't ever use one or two descriptives because I always want a little juxtaposition, modern and vintage, feminine and masculine, light and dark.

Trends From Kim: In Brief

- "In style, juxtaposition is a trend word that includes both maximalism and minimalism. In short, just anything that speaks DESIGN. And curves, of course, are still very in.
- "European and 70s color

palettes are much in use with colors like Evergreen, Vibrant Mauve, Bluish Lavenders and Pinks. Also, neutrals with ivory, black and camel as the base.

- "Comfort still reigns, but added bonus features such as swiveling chairs, continue to be strong.
- "Sleeper sofas are making a comeback. In general, I tend to design for smaller spaces rather than mega-homes. I'm conscious of what is a realistic home scenario for people in their 30s and 40s – they are not necessarily living in big suburban houses.
- "Why settle for production-line furniture when you might find a source who can customize to your needs? That seems to be 90 percent of what I do!
- "The industry used to use 'multi-purpose' as a sales technique. Now, it's just practical design for living. It makes spatial and economic sense to buy something that serves multiple functions.
- "Outdoor space is truly an extension of our homes – especially here in LA. I'm disappointed that the options

here are limited. There's a massive opportunity for more comfortable outdoor upholstered furniture in the market."

How to Engage Customers

Do you have one last bit of advice for retailers?

"Get trained, talented designers on the floor, not SALES people. If it comes across to shoppers that they are getting free, educated design advice, you are engaging with your clients, and that can't help but translate into sales."

"Outdoor space is truly an extension of our homes. I'm disappointed that the options here are limited. **There's a massive opportunity for more comfortable outdoor upholstered furniture in the market.**"

Top European Manufacturer Delivers Innovative Craftsmanship

Istikbal Has the Edge in Customer Service and Quality

Quality, detailing and craftsmanship come to mind when American consumers think of European furniture, which makes continental brands perennial favorites in the US. Today, both manufacturers and retailers face significant challenges including changing American lifestyles and rapidly changing tastes. Also, while traditional brick-and-mortar retailers are still an industry mainstay, despite inroads made by online retailers, they will need to deliver more in the way of quality, variety, affordability, and availability if they want to remain competitive.

Space Saving Designs

Today, one of Europe's most dynamic manufacturers is providing North American retailers the products to keep them competitive in a highly volatile consumer market. For over 50 years, Istikbal Furniture (www.istikbalfurniture.com) has built a global reputation for style, innovation and customer satisfaction in nearly 5,000 retail outlets in 70 countries. In the US, its highly successful business model (\$21 million in annual sales since 2001, with a target of \$40 million annually by 2020) is based on the three pillars of "Sit, Store, Sleep." From retiring Baby Boomers seeking to downsize to Millennials choosing rentals over home ownership, Istikbal produces on-trend designs offering storage solutions and innovative space-saving ideas. In fact, virtually all of the sofas it makes convert into sleepers.

Case Study: El Dorado Furniture

Serhat Atay, General Manager of Istikbal, goes further about the demand for multi-functionality in the market, saying "El Dorado Furniture, one of the oldest US furniture chains and a key client has told us that our line's 'convert-ability'

has really addressed their customers' needs in a very unique way. The idea of a couch or loveseat that can easily transform into a sleeper, and also has storage underneath, has really attracted customers to their stores. But beyond our creating designs that fit in with our mantra of 'Sit-Store-Sleep', it's the quality, durability and variety that has formed a loyal customer base for our products at El Dorado."

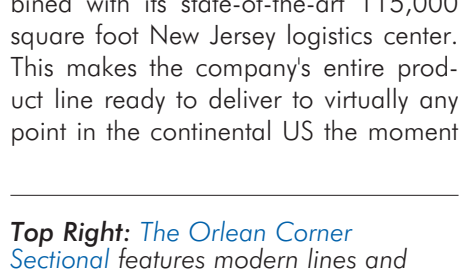
The company's continual strong growth, as reflected in a steady increase in sales and international expansion, indicates its deep understanding of trend. Istikbal's unique vision lets it stay ahead of fashion and societal changes in the marketing of products that both meet and anticipate demand.

NJ Logistics Center & New High Point Showroom

One problem that has plagued American retailers and customers alike has been inconsistent product availability from Europe. Istikbal has addressed this with its new High Point showroom combined with its state-of-the-art 115,000 square foot New Jersey logistics center. This makes the company's entire product line ready to deliver to virtually any point in the continental US the moment

an order is placed. Another big advantage of having this logistics center is the cost savings to retailers, and ultimately customers. This allows the better level of quality inherent in Istikbal's product line to be available at significantly lower cost than many of its competitors, translating into demonstrably better profit margins for retailers.

By prioritizing the highest standards of quality, the most efficient distribution network and responsive sales and customer service, Istikbal represents real value – something truly rare in today's furniture marketplace.



Top Right: *The Orlean Corner Sectional* features modern lines and classic details with a sleeper option for total functionality.

Middle Right: *Istikbal's 115,000 sq ft New Jersey logistics center* allows for rapid delivery of any items to any point in the U.S.

Bottom Right: *Santiago Deluxe Living Room* has elegant refined styling at home in traditional or contemporary interiors.



5-STEPS TO LUXURY BEDDING SALES SUCCESS

by Jeff Giagnocavo

The luxury sale isn't a buzzword, it's not a flash in the pan, nor is it a money grab. Luxury selling is a mindset!

If you are to survive in today's economy on Main Street selling mattresses through a brick-and-mortar-store, you have no choice but to level-up. This is especially true if you wish to succeed selling luxury mattresses.

Step#1 Elevate The Message

Elevate the marketing message about how your store is the premier destination for luxury sleep products in your market.

Consider the offers you include in your advertising including:

- *The process by which you sell luxury products.*
- *The actual products you offer and consider as luxury sleep products.*
- *The aftercare of luxury sleep products customers.*

Too often I look at mattress advertising and marketing and see a big pile of "me too". I don't blame you as retailers. It's not as though there is a formal college

degree for what we do. There are, however, ways to learn how to do effective marketing and advertising, but this must be done in your own time and on your own dime.

That said, I see far too many stores taking a boring "me too" approach. Too much price, product and promotion along with "best selection, we won't be undersold and lowest price guarantee" phrases make for a entire audience of consumers who are under-impressed and skeptical. Both are not conducive to selling anything, let alone premium and luxury mattresses.

By my definition, as applied to mattress retailers, marketing is the creation of messages that resonate with your ideal customer. These messages can and should only be unique to you, your store and your products. They cannot be undone with phrases like "largest selection, lowest price, and in business since...." All of these points are both old hat and easily topped by your competition.

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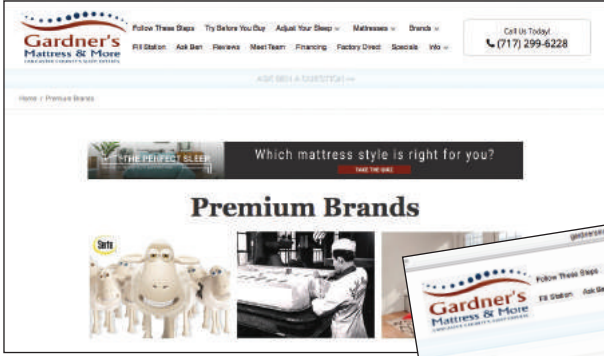
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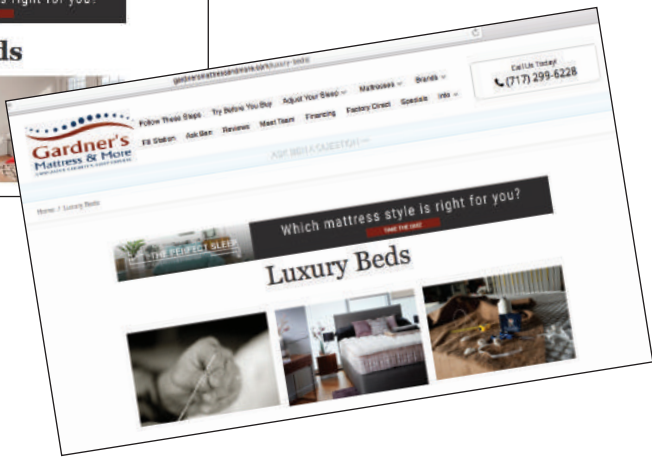
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7 STEPS



Visit <http://gardnersmattressandmore.com/luxury-beds> (see above) and see all of the luxury products at Gardner's Mattress & More. "Do your research," says Jeff Giagnocavo, "and find companies that are over-the-top radical and passionate about their products. They will support you in ways you've not seen, nor are accustomed to."

the distribution if you will, of the marketing messages you create. Core advertising tenets include the following:

- Your market. Who you are going after.
- The message you create and craft about how you best serve your ideal customer.
- The media your ideal customer is most likely to use and digest based on who they are - not what is most cost effective for you.

Luxury customers are typically not reading road signs or fish-wrapper type publications. Typically, I find luxury customers consume media that helps them find ideas for solving problems such as niche magazines, blog posts (found from an online search), online lead capture (as I use my mattress buyers guides found on our website www.GardnersMattressAndMore.com), and direct mail to targeted neighborhoods.

com) ,and direct mail to targeted neighborhoods.

Step #2 Use The Right Bait

Remember, the fish you catch depends on the bait you use. I am a novice fisherman, but even I know that if you use minnow bait, you haven't earned the right to be upset if you are left with only fishermen's tales and dreams of landing big sales.

When it comes to selling luxury mattresses, how you sell them is as important as how you get the opportunity in the first place and even more important than the product. This much I know... there is no shortage of premium and luxury mattress offerings out there. However, how you discuss these products, diagnose needs and present these luxury sleep systems is of utmost importance.

Step #3 Get Off The Sales Floor

My formula since day one has been to sit down with shoppers in a comfortable place like a customer lounge, away from the mattress sales floor, and have a focused conversation about how our luxury sleep products fit customers' sleep needs. This is not a conversation about us, about our tenure in the marketplace, or about how we have the best selection of the biggest name brands. This conversation is about discovering their needs and how we might help meet them. The end result is an understanding of what our customers are struggling with, how they want to solve sleep issues, what their expectations are from a superior bedding purchase, and ultimately about how we can help to connect all the dots.

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"When it comes to selling

luxury mattresses, how you sell them is as important as how you get the opportunity in the first place, and even more important than the product."

want to sell more high-end bedding is establish that your store is the right fit for your customer and that your service offerings exceed the product you sell. If you do this, you'll find that selling luxury mattresses is one of the easiest sales you can make.

Step #4 Buy Right

I am in awe of just how busy the name brand showrooms are compared to every other showroom I visit at Las Vegas Market. My advice is to do your research and find companies that are over-the-top radical and passionate about their products. They will support you in ways you've not seen, nor are accustomed to. But most important, you need to select programs that you are excited about, can personally connect to, manage, and train your staff on. The simplest way to succeed in most anything in life is to do the

polar opposite of what everyone else is doing - by this action alone you will be different and different in the mattress business is good!

Luxury mattresses offer wonderful retail margins, but if that is the only reason to consider them for your sales floor, move on. On the sales floor you need to exude a level of passion that transcends margin and offers the big promise of better sleep and pride from your customers.

Step #5 Care & Concern

Lastly, luxury customers expect and appreciate higher levels of care and concern throughout the buying process. From initial greetings and sales presentations, to follow-up and in home actions, the experience with you and your staff must be elevated. At Gardner's Mattress & More, we follow up with personal, relevant and timely messages. We take time to discover customer needs and present with them in mind. Once we make a sale, a series of welcome-to-the-family emails, direct mail thank you cards and personal phone calls begin. Along with this, our crew delivers a thank you bag filled with artisan cake pops along with every sale.

The luxury sale isn't a buzzword, it's not a flash in the pan, nor is it a money grab. Luxury selling is a mindset, a belief that you will elevate the experience from start to finish, and over-deliver all along the way. After all, if the divide in personal income is truly growing in our country, where would you like to have your feet planted? I know which side I choose to be on!

"Luxury mattresses offer wonderful retail margins, but if that is the only reason to consider them for your sales floor, move on."

About Jeff Giagnocavo: Jeff Giagnocavo is co-owner of the retailer 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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WAREHOUSE IMPROVEMENT

by David McMahon - Part 1

This two-part series presents scores of ideas to help furniture retailers improve facilities, processes and warehouse metrics.

I have seen it all when it comes to warehouses. The pristine, state-of-the-art purpose-built facilities. The chopped-up back rooms that remind me of Frankenstein's laboratory. Also, expansive underground caverns and dark containers jammed-packed storing who knows what with various creatures taking nest amongst the contents.

It seems like in this industry, companies for the most part will put up with their warehouse until they burst their seams. When they get to that point, usually when their business is doing well, they start to consider warehousing as a necessary part of doing business. Many furniture store owners believe that warehouses are costly storage spaces that eat away at profits and cash flow.

promises made by sales teams to customers. Without adequate warehousing, sales potential cannot be achieved.

Appropriate physical warehouse spaces and modern equipment add value, but focus must also be placed on warehouse processes and procedures. Inefficiencies, lack of coordination and poor training certainly diminish value.

And, one size does not fit all when it comes to warehouses. I've seen one-level underground warehouses with millions of square feet of temperature consistent, pristine affordable space and effective docks. Depending on the situation, I might select this type of warehouse over a four-wall, costly vertical box type facility.

Not A Storage Facility

The notion that a DC (distribution center) simply costs a business is invalid. Done right, a warehouse is a place where merchandise passes through, and value is added to products and services. A warehouse is NOT intended for storage. It is a temporary facility, the purpose of which is to fulfill

Effectiveness & Efficiency

DCs need to be both effective and efficient. Efficiency means doing things right. Effectiveness means doing the right things at the right times. An operation might accurately receive merchandise, but at the same time take five times as long as a top performing retailer to receive, due to flawed processes. Conversely, an operation



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WAREHOUSE IMPROVEMENT

may be the fastest at onloading a container, but cause frequent damages and quantity errors.

Below are several ways warehouse operations either add or take away value.

Physical Elements That Add Value

Ample Space. Provide room and designated areas for receiving, advanced picking, inspection and preparation, plus merchandise out-bound staging.

Racking. Facilities should be the maximum height allowable by local code. Air is cheap. Ground is pricey.

Layout. Design to minimize merchandise movement and time to pick.

Aisle structure. Incorporate a logical numbering sequence to minimize time for put-away and pick. Designated areas should be provided for the cross-docking of customer receiving, merchandise returns, new item store transfers, and back-up stock according to best seller ranking and turns.

Number of docks. The number of dedicated docks must be adequate for receiving freight, outgoing delivery trucks, customer pick up and trash removal... all at dock height.

Trucks. Trucks must have the ability

and be reliable enough to allow for an eight to 10 hour workday per full truck.

Moving Equipment. These include pickers and purpose-built rolling carts to move merchandise efficiently.

Physical Elements That Remove Value

Ground level doors. These reduce value by requiring the repeated lifting of merchandise, damages, and excess time.

Lack of picking & prep space. This always creates a chaotic environment where the work flow is difficult to control.

Inadequate racks. These can lead to location errors, damages, and increased labor time. Usually the cheapest space is up, and poor use of vertical space adds cost.

Containers or overflow storage facilities. A make-shift solution causing difficult-to-find products, time inefficiency, added rent cost, increased likelihood of theft, and damages.

Value-Added Processes

The name of the game with process execution is to be in control of the work, as opposed to the work controlling the tasks being performed. Examples of standard processes to control work include:

Vendor scheduling. Incoming freight must be scheduled. All POs and items expected to be received must be known. This saves time and enables proper scheduling of human and equipment resources.

Pre-receiving. Bar code labels should be pre-printed and sorted. Expected merchandise should be categorized by type of stocking merchandise, customer cross dock merchandise, and display goods. This enables a better plan for put-away.

Receiving. Label and scan as the merchandise is unloaded. Use packing slips if the label must be moved.

Put-away. Locate merchandise in the aisle that makes the most sense for faster future picking and

"Waste most commonly occurs when poor processes cause interruptions.

For example, if an employee is busy picking product for deliveries, and is interrupted."

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"The theory of constraints

is intended to help managers identify a constraint that causes work to pile up, solve problems, and enable the smoother flow of value-added activities."

minimal internal DC movement. Customer cross docking sales can be located together so orders are already grouped, and near the prep area. Fast turning best sellers that also sell together should be located together and positioned in easy-access aisle positions. Slower turning items can be located higher and further out in the DC. Showroom transfer can be in a designated area to speed the process of floor moves. All merchandise should be scanned with its exact location and with the label facing out.

Picking. Picking order (paper or digital RF scanner) should be initiated at a specific cut-off time and organized by aisle. Merchandise must be picked by location and scanned to delivery preparation areas. Either pick by order or batch-pick by line methods depending on which is quicker. Picking by order, picks one sale at a time. Batch picking by line,

picks multiple sales at a time.

Delivery preparation. Once delivery receipts are generated, outgoing freight must be grouped by customer and stop, inspected, and detailed where necessary. Merchandise should be held in a location corresponding to the outgoing truck number.

Loading. After the delivery manager signs off on merchandise being loaded onto trucks, delivery crews load their own trucks in reverse stop order, usually at the end of each day, for the following day's deliveries.

Delivery. Follow delivery routing as dictated by your GPS routing system. All merchandise must be placed and set-up, trash removed, product pictures and surveys taken, and customers' sign-off finalized. Any issues should be noted.

Pick-ups. These should be sched-

uled so that the warehouse can pull merchandise in time for the customer's arrival, and reduce daily interruptions.

Transfers. Times, days and cutoffs should be established for work scheduling.

Reverse Logistics. Returns are placed in an inspection area within the DC for the service manager to inspect every day.

Cycle inventories. Cycle inventories should be done routinely during downtime and directed by the accounting department so they can be randomized. Exceptions representing process or scanning errors should be less than one percent.

Processes That Take Away Value

Labels. Printing labels after merchandise arrives is a poor practice, causing merchandise to sit

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around on the receiving dock for longer periods.

Scheduling. Allowing truckload freight to just show up sabotages resource planning and worker productivity. The last-minute scheduling of deliveries, transfers and pickups after cutoff times has the same effect.

Scanning. Not scanning to a picking location causes cycle inventory discrepancies and increases the chance of a wrong item being picked. No matter what the size of a warehouse, not scanning to rack locations makes coordinated picking impossible.

Routing. Manual, non-GPS, routing wastes gas, labor time, and slows turns.

Inventory. Lack of scanned cycle inventories causes problems to go unresolved as well as inventory imbalances.

performance metrics, radios and headsets for hands-free communications, online customer issue forms.

Warehouse Waste

The acronym, TIMWOOD, is commonly used to highlight waste areas. Here I apply it to the common types of retail distribution waste:

Transportation. They say that time is money... and it's true! The longer merchandise takes to arrive, and the longer it spends in a DC, the greater the cost. Also, the

"There are three types of products in a warehouse that are the least wasteful:

customer inventory that is scheduled, best seller backup inventory, and new floor merchandise that is scheduled for transfer."

Necessary Technologies

- Bar coding labeling and scanning.
- GPS delivery routing.
- Merchandise management systems.
- Monitors to display incoming freight, picking notifications, customer pick up notification, customer surveys, warehouse

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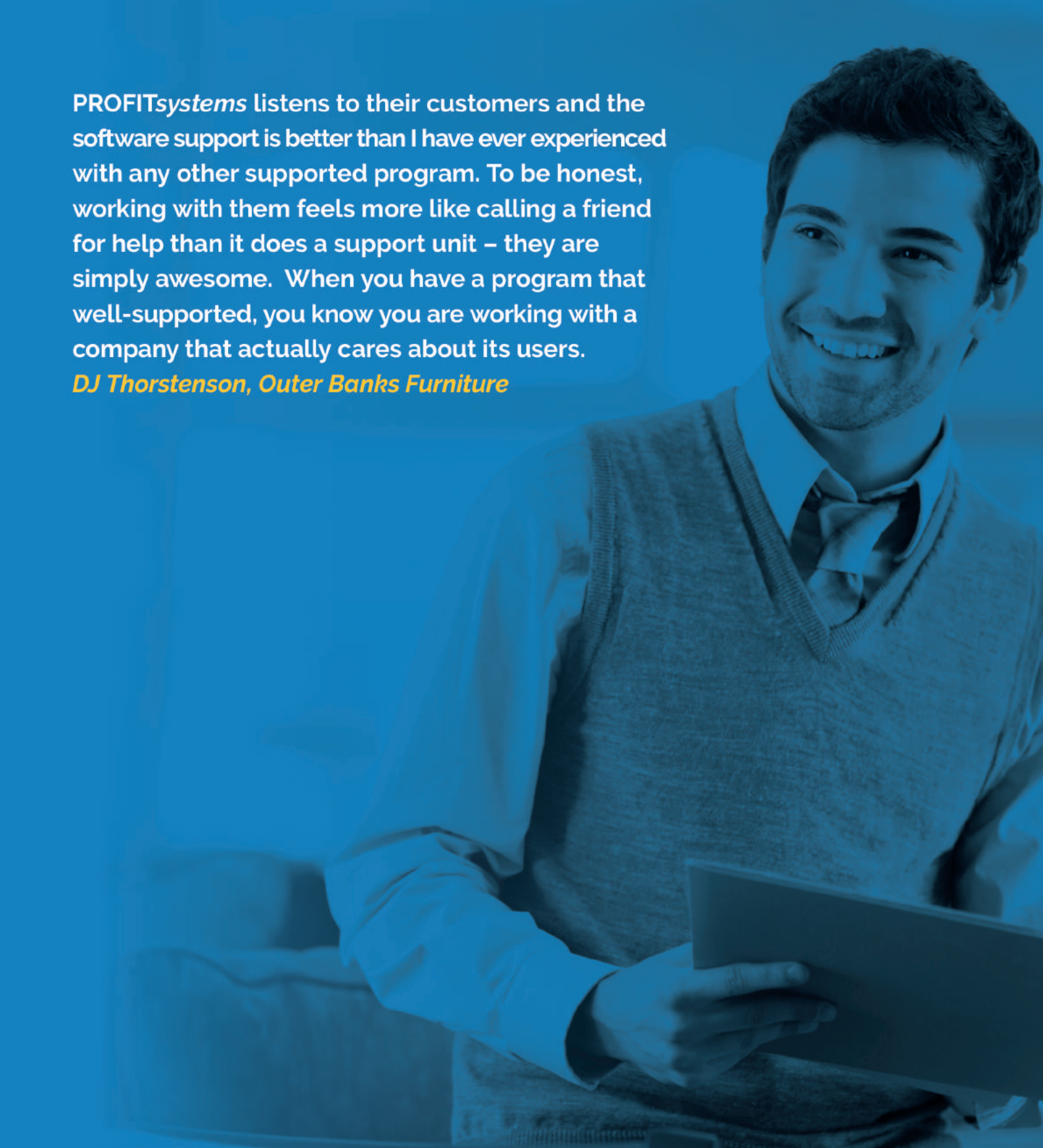
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more time warehouse employees spend moving around products, the more employee labor hours are incurred to the cost of product distribution.

Inventory. There are three types of products in a warehouse that are the least wasteful: customer inventory that is scheduled, best seller backup inventory, and new floor merchandise that is scheduled for transfer. Other inventory, either unscheduled customer sales, overstock of non-best sellers, undisplayed inventory, and damaged goods, are costly in terms of dollars invested, labor and space.

Motion. Employees doing the wrong work at the wrong time is wasteful. This most commonly occurs when poor processes cause interruptions. For example, if an employee is busy picking product for deliveries, and is interrupted by a manager who asks him or her to receive unscheduled freight, both tasks are less likely to be concluded less efficiently.

Waiting. Idle time equals lost dollars. Consistent flow and good management of employee work-flow creates less idle time. It is much better to work at the same pace than to be rushed or sit around. A group of value added daily tasks should be specified to fill down time. These might be facility and equipment maintenance, customer follow up calls, cleaning, cycle inventories, and ongoing training.

Over inventory. A warehouse is not meant for long-term storage. It is a pass through temporary facility that should add value, enable distribution and increase the ability to sell more. Carrying too much inventory causes cash flow shortages, slower turns, and decreases the ability to maximize sales volume.

Over processing. Doing too much of a particular task or having too many resources assigned is wasteful. For instance, performing daily cycle inventories on the same aisles with consistent perfect results is overkill.

Defects and damages. Vendor defects and internal product damage costs time and money. It is important to track how often defects and damages occur, also where and why they occur. The first step to eliminate waste is to find it, track and eliminate it. Here are some concepts to consider to counteract waste, and add value to warehousing, distribution and operations:

"Kanban is the practice of controlling the work-flow, instead of letting the work control you. Controlling chaos in a retail operation requires a specific 'signal' to begin a job or function."



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"The name of the game

with process execution is to be in control of the work, as opposed to the work controlling the tasks being performed."

Concepts To Consider

LEAN Operations: LEAN is the practice of continually looking for, and reducing non-value added activities and resources. It can be applied to product, processes and people. By eliminating things that take away value, additional value-added resources to propel the operation forward are added.

80/20 Rule: This rule states that on average, a minority of inputs produce the majority of outputs. Or, on average 80 percent of results come from 20 percent of resources. For example, most sales come from a minority of items. Most problems are caused by a small number of product items or people.

Kanban: This is Japanese for "signaling" work. It is the practice of controlling work-flow, instead of letting the work control you. Controlling chaos in a retail operation requires a specific "signal" to begin a job or function.

Kaizen: Also Japanese, Kaizen means change for the better. It is a practice of continually looking at business operations, finding challenges and opportunities, and executing actions to improve. The

performance groups and consultations I enable are all based on the practice of Kaizen.

TOC: The Theory of Constraints was created by Eliyahu Goldratt. It describes how work can only flow at the speed that the constraining element can handle. All operations have a constraint that can cause work to pile up. This constraint may be a strong or weak employee or process. For instance, an excellent worker who accepts more work than she can handle may eventually become unproductive and slow down the entire operation. Or the constraint might be a weak process that causes things to grind to a standstill. Regardless, TOC is intended to help managers identify a constraint, solve problems and enable the smoother flow of value-added activities.

5S: This is another LEAN concept that has its roots in Japan. Translated into English LEAN includes:

- *Sort – Review waste, messy areas, and unproductive spots. Divide everything into three parts: keep, move or return, trash.*
- *Set – Put everything in its prop-*

er place.

- *Shine – Make the area beautiful.*
- *Standardize – Put processes in place to keep things organized and beautiful.*
- *Sustain – Constantly review what is working and what is not. Commit to ongoing education and process improvement.*

Next Issue

If you want to improve something, step one is to measure it. In the September/October issue of Furniture World we will introduce suggested metrics to help retailers improve warehouse and distribution management.

About David McMahon: David McMahon is VP of Professional Services at PROFITsystems, a HighJump Company. He is Certified as a Supply Chain Professional, Management Accountant, and Kaizen Facilitator. David directs 5 performance groups, the Kaizen, Visionary, Gladiator, TopLine Sales Managers, and the LEAN DC Ops group as well as multiple consulting projects. He can be reached at david.mcmahon@highjump.com.



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LaDIFF

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

Richmond, VA based home furnishings retailer is a unique, experiment and also a contemporary style destination for customers in their mid-twenties to mid-eighties.

Legend has it, (and what is history but legend?), that the essence of LaDiff took flight almost four decades ago, eventually nesting in the heart of Richmond, Virginia, a state with many legends of its own.

The heritage structure that houses LaDiff today hosts two inspired docents. They are the providers of energy, guidance and definition to LaDiff's ever-expanding fan club of demographically diverse protagonists and believers.

Called by some visionaries as "an arbiter of the modern aesthetic", LaDiff is also known as a haven of "contemporary design in a bastion of traditionalism". Andy Thornton, Founder and Flunky of LaDifference International Home Furnishings, and Sarah Paxton, President, would perhaps add that LaDiff is also an ongoing "exploration and enjoyment of style and design".

"The location?" Sarah explained, "When we first looked for real estate in Richmond, agents said we needed two locations: the west end and the south side because customers wouldn't cross the river. (And NO ONE would go downtown.)

"So the opportunity arose to rent very very inexpensively in Tobacco

Row on the first floor of an old Philip Morris tobacco warehouse. Only the first floor had been renovated and, when it rained, the landlord used baby pools to prevent rivulets of tobacco stained water from reaching us on the first floor.

"What we saved in rent, we put into advertising. Encouraging people to come to downtown Richmond to shop for furniture required a lot of convincing, but we loved it. When the landlord sold the building, Andy found the massive Watkins-Cottrell structure nine blocks away, built in 1895 as a tobacco then hardware factory, that was bigger and was for sale. It was mighty derelict, too!

"In what would now be considered a RUSH renovation job (six months!) we transformed a pigeon-filled former 1910 wholesale hardware store into our three-story showroom (To the tune of \$8.5 million).

"Downtown Richmond is at the crossroads of Interstates 95 and 64, so we draw clients from northern Virginia and Maryland to the north, Charlottesville and beyond to the west, and Williamsburg and Tidewater to the east. We also have folks drive up from North



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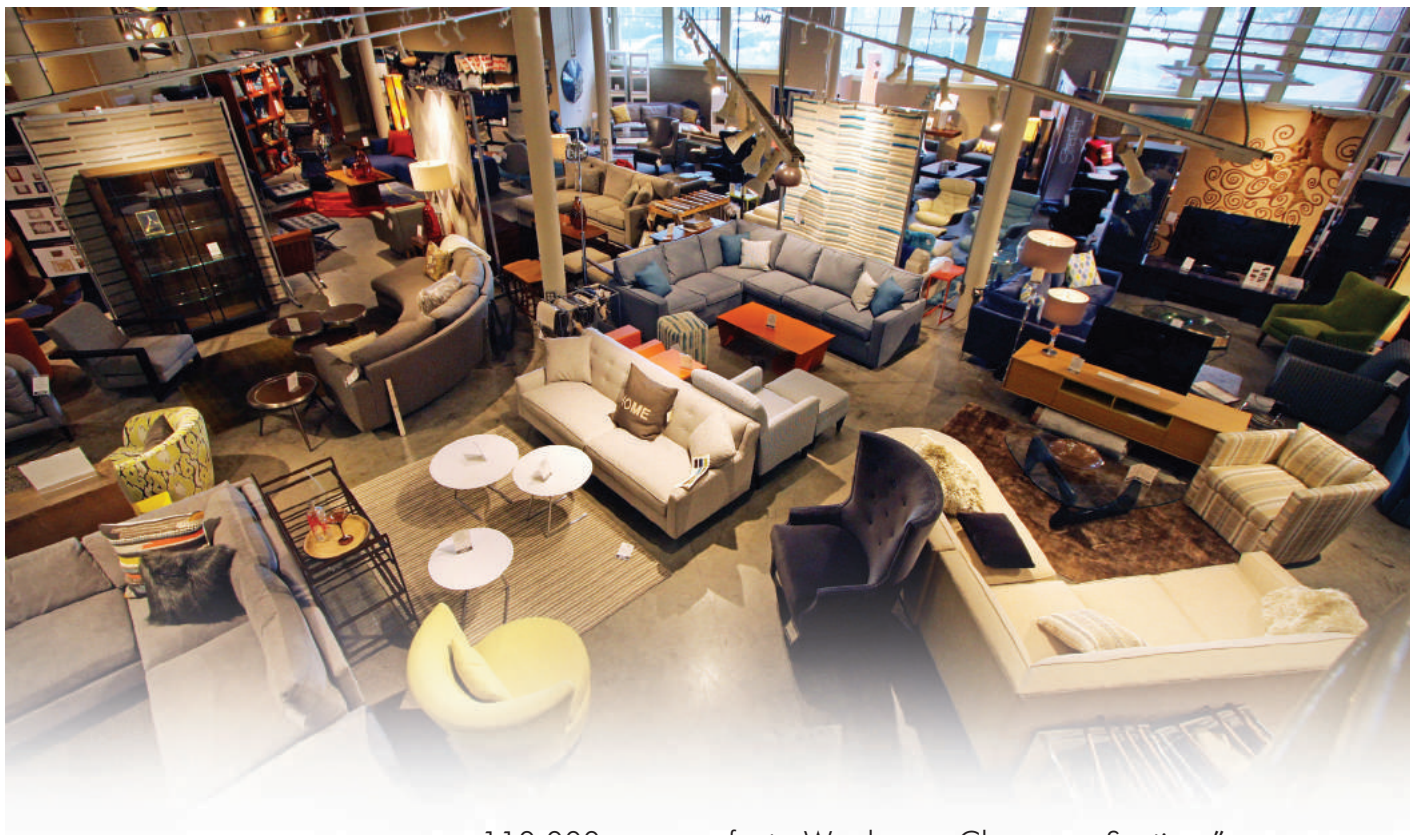
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"There's an area called LaDeals which is a play on words on LaDiff and is specifically geared to more urban, smaller scale, smaller price tag furniture and a large Clearance Section."

Carolina. We could not afford the amount of real estate we have in the Short Pump area and it is true that west enders won't go south. But everyone is enjoying the resurgence of a thriving urban downtown Richmond. We are in the right place at the right time. Plus, she smiled, "Renovating an old warehouse building is the ultimate in recycling, right?"

"The overall building is about

110,000 square feet. We lease out about 35,000 square feet next door to LaDiff, to a number of companies... marketing, finance, social media companies. LaDiff occupies the other 75,000 square feet.

"The retail platform is basically comprised of three floors, each of 15,000 square feet. We have a warehouse on site and we also had a large indoor parking area. But in the last couple of years we have incorporated that largely into an 'indoor/outdoor' area. We now have close to 8,000 square feet dedicated to outdoor furniture." More about this later!

"In the major retail block, the floors are laid out categorically. The first floor mostly living room furniture, the second floor is bedroom, dining and lighting. The third floor is office furniture, both residential and commercial. And there's an area called LaDeals which is a play on words on LaDiff and is specifically geared to more urban, smaller scale, smaller price tag furniture and a large

Clearance Section."

There have been space usage modifications over the years. "Besides the expansion of the outdoor furniture component, the biggest change in the layout has been with the area we now call LaDeals on the third floor. Getting people to go up each floor presents its own challenges, and there needs to be a rationale for the customer to want to make the journey. We found that office furniture was a destination that people would head for. And Clearance being on the third floor was eminently logical, kind of a LaDiff attic!

"The balance of space on the third floor was problematic, and we tried numerous iterations --- LaDiff Kid, LaDiff Loft, etc. etc., but success was elusive. We finally remodeled the space into smaller vignettes/apartments and created LaDeals, and it has become a huge success and a destination in its own right.

"I did recently convert part of the second floor into a high-

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LaDiff is located in what was Richmond's commercial heart, now called the Shockoe Design District, an emerging center of creativity.

"It's that great balance between what we stand for in preserving this neighborhood's heritage while remaining modern with our merchandise. Any kind of change is an opportunity."

end Italian gallery --- tested my wood working prowess, but I was pleased with how it turned out."

In its earlier life, when the modern furniture trend was in its infancy, LaDiff was located in Charlottesville, Virginia, where Andy's parents had retired. "In the years since, contemporary

"We found that office furniture was a destination that people would head for.

And Clearance being on the third floor was eminently logical, kind of a LaDiff attic!"

became more than just a passing fad."

LaDiff has grown and changed significantly since that first store opened in 1980. In Richmond, the long dormant building in Shockoe Bottom at 14th and Dock, "works now because it's a great juxtaposition between old and new. It's that great balance between what we stand for in preserving this neighborhood's heritage while remaining modern with our merchandise. Any kind of change is an opportunity. We ended up where we are with the scope and size because we wanted to be a flagship store. We bought the whole block and that allows us to be a lot of things to a lot of people."

In fact, Andy said, in the presentation of his community concept to Venture Forum RVA, "If you have a creative company,

you need to be in Shockoe. Shockoe was the commercial heart of Richmond for decades. It is re-emerging as a center of creativity in the region and is home to at least six architectural firms, numerous ad agencies, a litany of music, video production and web companies, a plethora of great, independently owned restaurants and bars, creative clothing companies like Ledbury and Shockoe Denis, Richmond-based venture capitalists, non-profit standouts such as PlanG as well as several thousand new residents." And it is now recognized as the Shockoe Design District."

To know LaDiff here and now in 2018 we surely need to know more about Andy and Sarah themselves, the people, their thinking.

"When I was 10 I used to draw house plans for fun," said Sarah. "My grandparents were shopping



*the différence is **style***

for a house on the Rappahannock River and I loved going through the home magazines and creating plans. My grandmother was an amateur architect, and I thought that's what I wanted to be, too. Instead I got a degree in Ancient Greek from the University of Virginia.

"My next thought was that I could be an archaeologist, the female Indiana Jones! I took anthropology classes and learned about how humans have evolved. That, too, didn't pan out, so I took a job at a gift and bridal registry shop in Charlottesville while I decided what I wanted to

do. I loved retail! I loved finding solutions for customers.

"My favorite memory was being the only employee who came to work on a snowy day. A woman came in to do her Christmas shopping. She presented an index card box. The cards held the names of everyone on her list, and what she had given in the past. Sixty-seven gifts later, to be shipped to over 40 addresses, and I was hooked!"

Intrigued by the possibility of becoming an active partner in LaDiff, Sarah joined the company in 1991 where she rapidly took on the mantle of retail "Jill of all

trades", and then, in 1994, she moved with LaDiff to Richmond, a happy rediscovery of the city's downtown.

"With LaDiff, my original love of architecture, art and design has combined with my attraction to retail. As for those anthropology classes? They've come in handy for understanding customers and employees better."

And Andy? "Travel has always been a part of my life, and we were fortunate enough that my father's job took us to many interesting places. We lived in England, France, the U.S. and Brazil, where I finished High

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School. Once you get the travel bug it is hard to lose it and it is something that has stayed with me all my life. Wanderlust has always been a part of my psyche.

"The interesting part of 'what did I want to be when I grew up?' . . . I haven't! . . . always revolved around travel. Strangely, it took me years figuring out what I DIDN'T want to be . . . a lawyer, doctor, engineer, corporate

business type, that allowed me to stumble on the business I have been in for 38 years. I didn't want to be put in too tight a box, and owning my own business has allowed me to become relatively proficient in numerous fields, design, merchandising, finance, marketing, human relations . . . and allowed me to continue the luxury of traveling constantly.

"I had no 'relevant formal schooling'. When I was in High School in Brazil, the Biafran War was in full swing in Africa and I had the delusion that I wanted to go there and help. Fortunately events turned out otherwise as I would probably not have survived the experience.

"I ended up going to Bard College in New York for a year, and dropped out to become a peripatetic wanderer. In the process I learned skills in woodworking, carpentry, house building and started my own business. At

25, I sold the business and made enough money to travel for a year across the U.S., throughout Western Europe and then Eastern Europe and into the Middle East.

"Not wanting to move back to the U.S., I ended up in Haiti running a business for someone in the States for a year and a half. This was the genesis of LaDiff when we moved back to the States.

"I never went back to school but did apply to UVS's Darden Business School for an MBA, and was accepted. There may be others who have been accepted in the program without an undergraduate degree but I don't know of any/many. I was talked out of attending by a couple of professors who thought that Darden, at the time, was not focused on entrepreneurialism and would not have been a good fit for me. Just about all my 'training' has been 'on the job'.

"A lovely garden, a wall fountain, a mural and a series of walkways and decks were put in place, a perfect setting for LaDiff's contemporary outdoor designs."



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"We are starting to see...

that there is a shift back to experiential selling, and a value in actually being able to see what options are and be tactile with your home furnishings."

"I love fun, good thing fun is. Besides travel I am intrigued with architecture and design and still build 'things' when I can. We are lucky enough to own a fair amount of land, and I spend hours on my tractor moving rocks and re-designing spaces. We have a vegetable garden and my job is the 'soil guy'.

"For sports I enjoy skiing; Switzerland is a regular stop after the Cologne Show in January, and scuba diving in the Caribbean.

"I still play the guitar. I was in bands in the U.S. and Brazil but just doodle now. My wife gets frustrated when I come back with a new guitar . . . I have four at this time.

"We also keep a boat on the Chesapeake Bay and spend as much time in summer there as possible. Our daughter and I go out boating, sometimes just to blow the wind through our hair and, more magically, to come upon a pod of dolphin and just troll along beside them.

"And I love to read. We have a super two story library at home. I normally have three or four books 'on the go' at one time. Just finished Walter Isaacson's 'Leonardo da Vinci', and delved into Ron Chernow's 'Grant'."

The monumental decision to

found LaDiff?

"Stupidity. Well, not exactly, but it wasn't a well laid out business plan! We basically backed into becoming retailers and probably should have stopped years ago. But I am a tenacious individual and don't like to fail at anything that I do."

Said Andy, "I would be giving myself too much credit to say there was a lot of visioning, at least in the first couple of years. The biggest 'awakening' was my first business trip to Denmark for the Scandinavian Furniture Fair. I was so intrigued by the quality and design and thoughtfulness that was ever present, and realized there had to be a demand in the U.S. if presented properly.

"Popular culture has helped fuel interest in contemporary designs."

The very important name? "From the Haitian motto, 'Haiti, Vive LaDifference'! On the advice of marketing friends, it was shortened to LaDiff in 2014. As 'La Difference' the name was hard to pronounce . . . truck drivers asked why L. A. Difference was in Virginia! We were mistaken for a French restaurant, 'Sorry, we can't take your reservation'! And, the worst part, potential customers thought we were snobby and expensive because the name

sounded 'haughty'!"

LaDiff's Outdoor Adventure

Two years ago LaDiff's magic wand quivered again. The economy was rebounding from recession, and Andy and Sarah started to see people getting more courageous and adventuresome. They briefly opened a second location in the Short Pump area of Richmond but soon closed it, focusing instead on Shockoe Bottom as a regional destination.

But they created additional excitement at 14th and Dock. For some years LaDiff had inventoried and sold outdoor furniture. Then, in 2015, as such things happen, there was a chance meeting with the owners of Ashland Berry Farm, a Richmond company that specializes in outdoor water features. Andy and Sarah immediately saw a new opportunity, a display area to present outdoor vignettes. They worked together with Ashland Berry's Ken Gustafson to re-design an existing outdoor fenced space. And the imaginative collaboration was yet another excuse to have fun! Profitable fun. A lovely garden, a wall fountain, a mural and a series of walkways and decks were put in place, a perfect setting for LaDiff's con-



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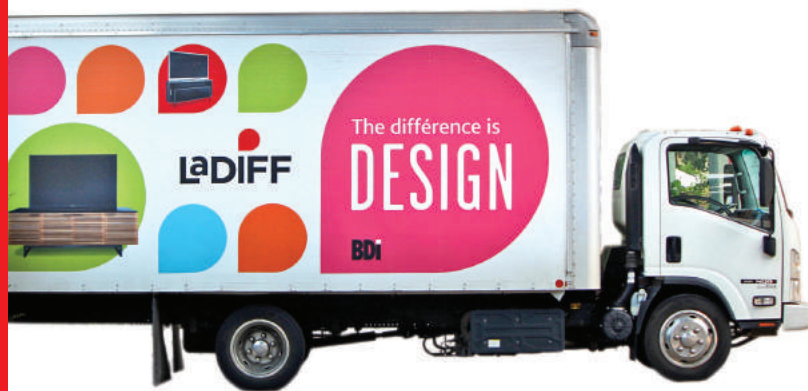
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LaDiff's warehouse is on site. Warehouse and receiving managers are integral parts of the management team.



"'La Difference' was hard to pronounce . . . truck drivers asked why L. A. Difference was in Virginia! We were mistaken for a French restaurant. And, the worst part, the name sounded 'haughty'!"

temporary outdoor designs.

"Two of the water features are visible from the inside of the store and they draw one's attention. We accented these with special LED lighting that we got by partnering with a specialty lighting company here in town, Inaray. The light shimmers as it bounces off the water.

"Outdoor kind of transcends some boundaries, the gap between traditional and modern,

that we haven't been able to do indoors. A teak bench can be both a traditional item and a very contemporary item. It resonates with people who are used to seeing teak benches in gardens as more of a traditional item, but it has a modern design. Our outdoor offerings are a continuum of the cultural and design aesthetic of the store, modern, clean design.

"It's not only an eye-catching setting for our furniture, it also helps build ambiance and exudes a kind of happy, relaxed feeling.

"The effect of the water features is three-fold. One, they ground the entire area. Two, the sheer amount of rock involved is pretty impressive and it's obvious a lot of work went into the area. And three, the sound of water falling adds a great soothing background. Combined with the music, upbeat Caribbean, that we play in the area, there's a real sense of life to the entire space."

There are plans, maybe, for the "outdoor room" to evolve, adding more sound and perhaps scents to further accentuate individual vignettes.

"One of the things we've always believed is that retail is like theatre, it's all about the presentation and you've got to wow people. There are a few stores I go into and just say, 'Wow, these people really have a finger on the pulse,' and that's what we're aiming for here."

Humor and Integrity

So how do they hold it all together? There's certainly no clipping of LaDiff's creative wings anywhere in sight.

"Our staff is terrific! Integrity and humor are our two most important internal company values and, while they are incredibly professional, you'll often hear laughter ringing somewhere. When recruiting new team members, it is important that new staff fit into the ethos of LaDiff. Besides having their individual job descriptions, each employee is required to be an ambassador for LaDiff with our visitors and for our neighborhood and city.

"The sales team goes through an intense two-week training. "The first week is PRODUCT. The

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"We invariably do

Cologne and Milan every year. We do High Point twice a year... We do the New York Gift Show, ICFF in New York, Casual Show and Neocon in Chicago. We're planning on Shanghai and Thailand this September."

second week is policies, procedures and learning our point-of-sale system. We also routinely have reps and vendors visit for product training, or our team goes to them. We have two visiting Copeland Furniture in July for a 'training camp' in Vermont!

"We're a small business with good benefits, health insurance,

dental, vacation pay, sick/personal pay, a 401(k) plan with match and that always-important employee discount.

Marketing & Media Mix

"And what don't we do with our marketing and media mix?! With the assortment of generations shopping us (our customers truly range from their mid-twenties to mid-eighties), we are everywhere they are. Because we consider our store a 'visual' experience, the only radio we do is our local public radio station (The Community Idea Station/WCVE). Our customer type matches their listeners who tend to be very loyal to sponsors, so it's a good fit for us.

"TV, digital banner ads and pre-rolls, e-mails, social media (Facebook & Instagram mostly), some magazines, and . . . yes . . . even newsprint. We are probably one of the last furniture stores still advertising in our local paper. We still get a return on our investment, though, so it works out.

"We've had www.ladiff.com since about 1996, when people accessed the Internet through

dial-up, and the 'You've Got Mail' message actually made you excited! Over the last 22 years, we've had five major updates/renovations of our site with the most recent just last spring. Quite purposefully we do not offer click to buy. Nearly every page of our website encourages a visit to experience LaDiff LIVE and in person.

"And we are very proud of our Google and Facebook reviews on customer service. Our delivery teams in particular do an exceptional job and receive high praise from our customers. (Check out our reviews online for a sampling!)

"Since the warehouse is part of our building, our team is on site, too. We do our own deliveries, and our warehouse manager and receiving manager are integral parts of our management team."

Shows & More Shows

"We do a LOT of shows. As you know, fortunately we like to travel, so this isn't a chore but a bonus of the business! We invariably do Cologne and Milan every year. We do High Point twice a year . . . I



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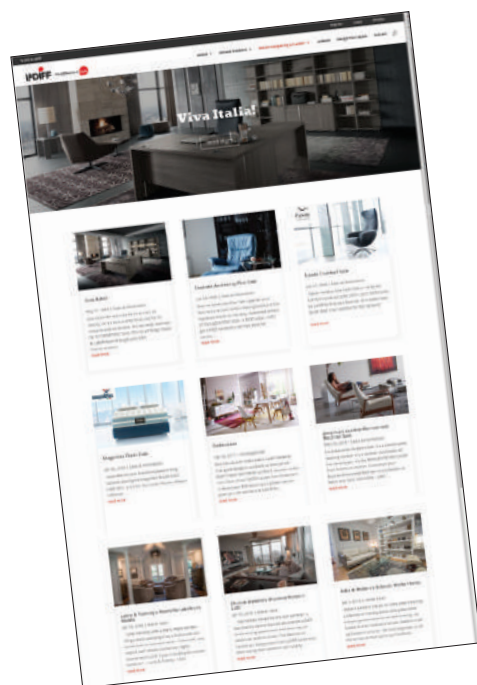
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worked out that over 38 years I've spent more than a year of my life at High Point doing some 70-plus shows, a week at a time.

"We do the New York Gift Show, ICFF in New York, Casual Show and Neocon in Chicago. I used to do the Asian circuit religiously – Donguan, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Ho Chi Minh, etc., along with side trips to Indonesia,

Thailand, Malaysia, etc. It has been a while since I've done the shows in Asia," said Andy, "but we're planning on Shanghai and Thailand this September.

"After 38 years, we are friends with so many of our suppliers, and relationships are integral to our buying process. Although we are always on the lookout for new trends, new manufacturers, new designers."



LaDiff's website section "What's Happening at La Diff" lists an Elite Modern Summer Sale, North American Design Sale, Viva Italia!, Ekornes Accessory Plus Sale, OohLaLess, plus other upcoming sales and promotions.

"The only radio we do is our local public radio station (The Community Idea Station/WCVE),
Our customer type matches their listeners who tend to be very loyal to sponsors, so it's a good fit for us."

Pioneers & Leaders

Andy and Sarah were chosen as 2017 RTD Person of the Year honorees. An excellent article covering the founding of LaDiff and their lives and careers thus far, provides details of their community outreach over the years. They were described by James E. Ukrop, a prominent figure in the area's civic and business affairs, as, "pioneers and leaders whose business, civic and philanthropic work has made Richmond, especially downtown, a better place to live and work. They are just wonderful citizens."

The story describes other projects. "On a smaller scale, they create display and sales space, for free, for a coterie of Richmond's finest makers of handcrafted furniture and lighting.

"On a larger level, they have served as advo-

cates for the retail community, speaking with members of the General Assembly and Congress.

"They also were instrumental in the 2006 creation of Venture Richmond, a merger of downtown advocacy groups."

Sarah's service has also included Retail Merchants, the Cameron K. Gallagher Foundation and the Noah's Children pediatric hospice organization. Andy has served a number of causes, including the Capitol Square Preservation Council and ChildSavers. He co-founded and chaired the RDA (the River District Alliance) and was a member of the board of the Richmond Economic Development Council.

Andy's comment, "We strive to be good corporate citizens and to give back to the community that brings us business. We help out local nonprofits through dona-



Sarah Paxton, President, and Andy Thornton, Founder and Flunky

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tions, loaning furniture for VIP areas and even hosting events."

Founder & Flunky

We asked about his rather curious title, "Founder and Flunky". He explained, "A couple of years ago for Sarah's birthday – at least it was the night before – it was Valentine's Day, we went out to dinner and I gave her a gag gift of a mug that said, '50 and Fabulous'. In the mug was a small box with some new business cards with her name and her new title of President. As I explained to her, she was the real glue that held the business together and was the one with the passion. It



was time to pass the baton.

"Sarah asked me what my title was going to be, and I came up with 'Founder and Flunky'. (Spelling on Flunky deviates from English to American spelling.) The Founder part was obvious. Flunky, well, I was still around to do all the menial tasks and take the trash out – or at least the recycling!"

Furniture Future

And the future of LaDiff? "Good question . . . and one that is in the air. I am 66, and Sarah is 52, so we are at different points in our lives. I can't decide if I want to retire fully or just need to take a sabbatical, but I have so many other things that I want to do, so 'retirement' wouldn't be boring.

"Sarah is coming fully into her

stride as President and is still very passionate about LaDiff. We will see where this all leads."

What about the future of the furniture industry? "Damn good question! I may be ridiculously optimistic but I believe the future for people who are proactive and constantly evolving is bright. It would be a huge shame if everyone just stayed home and ordered everything online.

"We are starting to see – or maybe we just want to believe – that there is a shift back to experiential selling, and a value in actually being able to see what options are and be tactile with your home furnishings. We keep hearing how much online is growing but statistically over the past couple of years our brick and mortar business is significantly outperforming online sales growth. And, guess what? We are actually making money doing it!

"LaDIFF warehouse employees separate all packing materials from incoming product that will be useful at a later date to ship outgoing product."

RE-USE & RECYCLE AT LADIFF

"We are drowning in a sea of plastic, and it is going to come back to bite us all in our collective rear ends!" said Andy.

"We have always tried to be as environmentally conscious as possible and re-use as much as we can – waste not/want not! We recently started a new plastic recycling component, and I introduce our Warehouse/Service/Shipping Manager, Jamie Stellwag, to provide details."

Recycling at LaDIFF

Said Jamie: "Here are some of the ways we are making an effort to recycle and reduce waste at LaDiff:

Recycling Bins: "We have recycle bins located at every desk, every office, in employee break rooms and centrally located in our warehouse that are available for employees to dispose of any recyclable waste. Bins are emptied weekly by our Maintenance Superintendent into a recycle dumpster that is conveniently located in our store parking lot."

Reuse Packing Materials: "When opening merchandise, LaDIFF warehouse employees separate all packing materials from incoming product that will be useful at a later date to ship outgoing product. We store these goods in our shipping office until needed. In the five years that I have been the Warehouse Manager

at LaDiff, I have only purchased packing materials one time, a bag of shipping peanuts that cost over \$60.00 (far too much for packaging)."

Cardboard Handling: "When opening product, we stack all cardboard on a flat bed cart that is later transferred to a stack tucked out of the way in our garage. Every week, multiple times a week, we have a gentleman who picks up the cardboard at no charge to take to a recycling facility. ABSOLUTELY NO CARDBOARD IS THROWN IN THE TRASH, and we never pay to have it recycled."

Plastic Bags & Film: "We are currently working with a company called International Paper that recycles plastic bags and film. The company delivers a stack of broken down gaylords as needed. We fill the gaylords with clear plastic stretch wrap, plastic sofa/chair/mattress bags/upholstery packaging, pretty much any clear plastic they will accept. Once we have a gaylord full, we store it in our garage. We call as needed to have the gaylords picked up. They are required to be palletized (which conveniently means our pallets are being recycled and removed as well). Not only is all of this equipment and service provided at no charge, but we are also paid \$35 per ton for Loose Cardboard and \$40 per ton for Loose Shrink Wrap Grade B. Should our future recycling

needs surpass the point of being able to keep up with the gaylords, International Paper can also install a no-charge baler on-site. My contact at International Paper is Crystal Hart-Newton, 804-201-2655, Crystal.hartnewton@ipaper.com. They do provide service internationally, and Crystal can help any East Coast stores with starting a recycling program or assist with finding someone in her organization who can."

Sustainable Furnishings Council

Said Susan Inglis, Executive Director, Sustainable Furnishings Council (www.sustainablefurnishings.org), of which LaDiff is a proud member, "I love the name, LaDiff! AND I love the people. Andy and Sarah have all it takes to make a difference in business – they are principled, fair-minded and willing to take responsibility for helping to create the future."

"They also have great imaginations and an excellent design sense. I think they know that good design can save the world, and apply those principles in their operations as well as in their product choices."

"They have been part of the Sustainable Furnishings Council for over 10 years and I love having them involved. As you talk with them, be sure to ask about their recycling habits – recently expanded!"

✓ strategies for

HIGHER-END BEDDING SALES

by David Benbow

Whether your high end bed is 4,000 or 40,000 dollars, here are strategies to help you better present and sell your top of the line.

Editor's Note: This issue includes a series of articles and sidebars from industry experts, David Benbow, Kurt Ling, Jeff Giagnocavo and Pam Danziger; each has a unique perspective on the factors that drive higher-end and luxury bedding purchases.

What exactly is luxury bedding? If you've been held hostage in a third world dictatorship for a few months, the advertised \$199 queen set would probably seem heaven sent. I've been in the business for more than a few years now, and the definition of luxury bedding has gone through quite an evolution since I first set foot in a mattress store showroom.

There was a time not too long ago, when anything over \$1,000 was considered luxury. But, is that luxury, by today's definition?

To find out, I Googled a recent

article from Money Inc., written by Maria McCutchen and entitled "The Most Expensive Mattresses in the Entire World." Ms. McCutchen starts by giving some sound advice on why everybody needs a good mattress. She also, interestingly, suggests that "for some, it can mean paying \$1,000 or more..." She then goes on to list seven sets in numerical price sequence, starting on the low end at about \$3,000. We all know that there are dozens of SKUs on the market priced higher than \$3K but she's giving an illustration of the ladder upon which mattress prices ascend. As we go from \$3,000 on up, we run into some familiar names at \$13K, \$20K, \$30K, with number two being at \$67,000. But, to get to Number One, we make a supersonic leap to \$1,600,000 for the "Floating Bed." It actually does float, sort of, being held in mid-air by a "magnet system that allows it to



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"How you start

at-the-top is often the difference between success and failure."

hover approximately 16 inches off the ground." It goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway; the market for this product is limited. But, what about those sets from \$67,000 on down?

Race To The Bottom & Race To The Top

Before we start talking about the future of higher-end bedding sales, let's recount the recent past. The majority of the inner-spring mattress business slumbered along for many years until early in the 2000s, when Tempur-Pedic arrived on the scene. This company did nearly everything different. First, they only offered premium, luxury sets. Some of their offerings were \$3000 or more for a queen set. They had a limited line-up of products, somewhere between six and a dozen models at any given time. None of their beds were of the inner-spring variety. They introduced a new, "revolutionary" viscoelastic foam, which was the main selling point. They rigidly enforced MAP (minimum advertised price) pricing. No name or model differentiation was allowed; every retailer had the exact same beds. They spent a fortune on advertising. Their advertising was aimed at an intelligent, upscale audi-

ence. It proved to be effective. Before you knew it, they were the most demanded mattress set in the United States. Little children, coming into my store with their parents, would immediately recognize and excitedly identify the Tempur-Pedic models. This was a new experience for a very mature bedding business.

After a while, the rest of the industry woke up and began to produce competitive visco models. These industry giants also ramped up their innerspring sets, inventing a new category of "hybrid" bed. All of this change and innovation was accompanied by MUCH higher prices. Of course, there was a race to the bottom on cheaper visco by manufacturers specializing in promotional bedding, but the premium category flourished.

Needless to say, Average Unit Selling Price (AUSP) went up along with the increased sale of higher-priced mattresses.

Counter-Trend... The Millennial Shift

Then something happened. Maybe it was a cultural shift or related to the Millennial generation and their seeming preference for adventure, experience, technological toys and "tiny



houses" rather than traditional upscale consumer products such as \$5000 mattress sets and rambling suburban four bedroom houses with three car garages and a riding lawnmower.

Whatever happened, some smart people realized that there were consumers out there who would actually buy the promise of a good night's sleep without even trying out the mattress first. It didn't hurt that these marketing geniuses developed some extremely effective advertising.

Now, all of a sudden, bed-in-a-box is the hottest thing going. And, where are the prices? Way down from where they were. Now, that doesn't mean that the market for very expensive luxury beds has gone away.

I suspect that overall, higher prices for luxury bedding since about 2005 facilitated the market for mattresses sold online for \$800 to \$1,000. Bed shoppers became accustomed to the notion that it wasn't unreasonable to expect to spend at least \$2,000

"As we go from \$3,000 on up, we run into some familiar names at \$13K, \$20K and \$30K, with number two being at \$67,000. But, to get to Number One, we make a supersonic leap to \$1,600,000."

Are you a sales representative or agent?

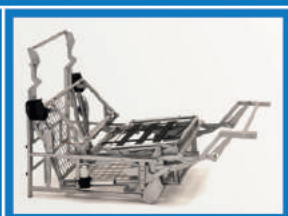
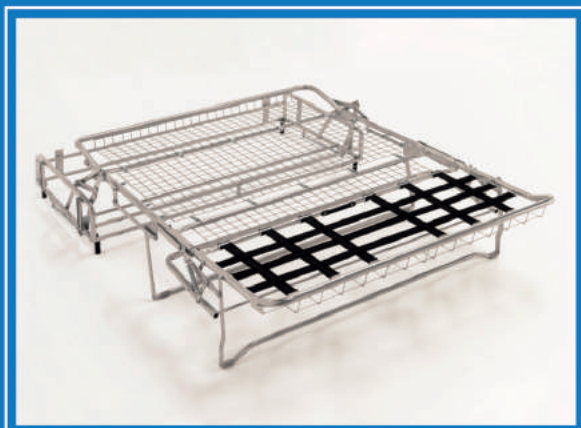
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"This all sounds great

on paper, but should the RSA just greet every 'up' and then frog-march them directly to the umbrella bed?"

for a luxury set. Then along came the internet offerings, promoted by effervescent, exciting advertising that promised a premium mattresses experience for only \$800 or \$900. And better yet, buyers could try it for 100 days and send it back if they didn't like it! Their ads also implied, insidiously, that mattress stores were "out to get you" with those high prices. When the idea took root, sales took off. Some industry experts now estimate that online purchases represent as much as 15 percent of all retail mattress sales in the United States, and, they are growing. That is a very large bite out of the bedding pie.

Of course now the rest of the industry, meaning the old line companies, are trying to get in on the bed-in-the-box phenomenon. The downside to this strategy (for the major manufacturers) is that average unit selling price (AUSP) is taking a smart punch in the nose.

This trend, however, is likely to be a short-term phenomenon. Although online mattress sales are likely to continue a fast-growth trajectory, fast-growth bed-in-a-box companies are likely to introduce more premium

priced models.

So, the more things change, the more they stay the same. The online operators want to get into the brick and mortar stores and raise prices, (and AUSP).

Future Of The Luxury Bedding Market

This will be a very short section, because I have no idea where the luxury bedding market is going. As long as the country remains prosperous and grows even more prosperous, I suspect the luxury bedding market will flourish. Not everybody is a Millennial, and it won't be long before the Millennials will evolve. Sooner or later, every generation, to a certain degree, slips into the habits of their forebears.

Promoting Luxury Bedding

I will leave it to the other contributors in this issue to give advice on how to advertise and promote any new advances in luxury bedding. If you think you have a really hot new luxury bedding item, and if you have the money, hire a really sharp adver-

tising agency who can give your product the positive exposure it needs to catch on, or catch fire.

Sales Strategies

I feel like I'm on a little firmer ground talking about selling bedding, luxury or promotional, on the showroom floor. That, of course, is what my book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual" is all about.

So, how do the Retail Sales Associates sell luxury bedding? "Start at the Top" is what all the reps tell you.

"By the time the RSA has gone through the first three steps of the sale, she should have a pretty good idea of why the customer came in the store."



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HIGHER END

MATTRESS SALES!

Starting At The Top

What does it mean to “start at the top?” The theory behind this marketing and sales strategy subscribes to the notion that if a shopper is shown the most expensive bed (often called the “umbrella bed”), then when shown a less expensive bed, the price of

that bed will seem like a bargain. For example, doesn’t \$67K sound like a bargain after hearing about a \$1.6 million dollar bed? Another pillar of wisdom in this sales strategy is, if you don’t show the most expensive bed, they will never buy the most expensive bed. As self-evident as these concepts are, I genuinely believe that most

RSAs violate these principles, and as a result, regularly fail to sell the customer the best bed possible. And, every RSA, store and manufacturer wants to sell customers the best beds possible.

Now, this all sounds great on paper, but should the RSA just greet every “up” and then frog-march them directly to the

Luxury Mattress Psychographics

by Kurt Ling

The beautiful part of the luxury mattress market is that it serves two different consumer segments; those with a lot of disposable income and those who believe their bedroom is the most important room in the house. I think it is intuitive to everyone reading this article that consumers with a lot of income will spend more on their mattresses. However, one of the greatest opportunities in the luxury mattress business is recognizing that consumers love their master bedrooms and use them as a place of refuge.

The luxury mattress business is as much about a psychographic consumer segment that prioritizes their bedroom as it is about disposable income. The luxury mattress consumer buys based on “feel” and details. Ultimately, one of the single most defining

characteristics of today’s luxury mattress buyer is that he or she wants to experience the mattress in a retail store. They have to feel it, they have to touch it, they have to see the details.

Luxury mattress customers also want to customize their mattresses. This desire is similar to buying bespoke, tailor made or tailored clothing versus a dress or suit off the rack. The ability to “make the mattress exactly as I like it” enhances and differentiates the buying experience, the sleeping experience, and ultimately the retail ticket. It is a win-win-win for all involved. Custom layering inside mattresses or even offering detachable pillow tops has long been the standard across Europe in luxury bedding for a very good reason.

The luxury mattress business has changed over the last cou-

"Luxury mattresses need always be shown in king and have twice as much room as the rest of the store between models."

ple decades. Natural materials have become more important as a key differentiator in luxury bedding. These materials are valued because they are long-lasting and authentic. Additionally, they have great story value in setting apart luxurious mattresses from those mass produced. Natural materials not only outlast man-made materials but offer true temperature regulation, mois-

umbrella bed? Believe it or not, a lot of sales trainers believe this is the right way.

You might ask; "But, what about the qualifying step, and the selection step? What if the up came in for a twin mattress only for a pop-up trundle?" Well, now it becomes quickly clear that some qualifying still needs to be done.

Now, the hard-core "start at the top" trainers will say, "I don't care if they came in for modi plates, you still need to show them the umbrella bed, and the umbrella bed should be sitting on your top of the line adjustable base!" (If modi plates is a new term for you, Google it.)

I don't disagree with this idea,

either. However, HOW you Start-At-The-Top is often the difference between success and failure.

Steps Of The Sale (And Getting Permission)

There are very few occasions when the RSAs should break with

ture management, and a healthier place to sleep. The value of wool and cotton in a luxury mattress has become where luxury "begins." Leonardo DaVinci said, "Simplicity is the ultimate form of sophistication," and the luxury mattress customer agrees. There was a day when a really tall, hand tufted mattress with fancy corner guards was the pinnacle of luxury in mattresses in America, but that is no longer the case. Today's luxury consumers are looking for extraordinary design, a unique and credible story, natural materials, and mattresses that are beautiful to the hand and to the body. Less is more in terms of profile and decorating.

Above all, luxury mattress displays need space. In all types of retail, mass produced, mainstream priced merchan-

dise is typically displayed close together, while luxurious products are given more space in stores. Luxury mattresses need to always be shown in king, and be allotted twice as much room between models. This is more important than the POP on the beds or on the walls.

About Kurt Ling: *Kurt is the co-founder of Posh+Lavish, maker of mattresses he describes as "The ultimate expression of caring for both our bodies and minds*

while we sleep." Kurt spent the first half of his career working for Maytag Appliances. He entered the mattress business in 1999 as VP of Beautyrest at Simmons where he led the brand to its non-flip design which ultimately changed the industry.

Kurt founded Pure LatexBLISS in 2009. After selling the company, he founded Posh+Lavish. Questions and comments can be directed to him at kurt@posh-andlavish.com

"The ability to 'make the mattress exactly as I like it' enhances and differentiates the buying experience, the sleeping experience and ultimately the retail ticket."

HIGHER END

MATTRESS SALES!

the Steps of the Sale protocol. That includes:

- *Meet and greet*
- *Qualify*
- *Select*
- *Present*
- *Close with the same discipline and rigor, even if you start at the top.*

Most buyers have a budget. For many, that budget is inflexible. John F. Lawhon, in *Selling Retail*, says the RSA should ask questions to determine the buyer's budget goals and then respect that budget. The problem with this seemingly honorable approach is the RSA can never be sure if the buyer is being honest about his budget. He may tell you \$499 when he is perfectly able to buy that \$10,000 king that reigns in a glorified corner of the store.

So, how do you get your up over to the umbrella bed? By the time the RSA has gone through the first three steps of the sale, she should have a pretty good idea of why her customer came in the store. She should also have generated some rapport with the customer. This rapport should be strong enough then to bring up the subject of the "top of the line bed", For example, she might

say, "I know you came in for a twin set for your son, but while you're in here, I want to show you something I think you'll really like. Would you like to see it?"

The RSA introduced the umbrella bed and then requested permission to show it. This removes the pushiness that some RSAs are correctly accused of. Asking permission in this way will usually yield the desired response.

Perils Of Starting At The Top

What about qualifying? Let's say the fledgling RSA heard the sales manager say, "Always start them at the top." He goes on the floor, gets a mattress up, and just like that, walks the up over to the \$10,000 king set and in his best authoritative voice, says; "Lay down on that bed." The up's response to this ungrammatical command may range anywhere from anger to amusement. But, either way, it is unlikely to be a successful sales approach. So, right away the RSA may have made a bad first impression.

Okay, the RSA has learned a hard lesson. On his next bedding up, he remembers what he read in this article (up to this point) and then more tactfully persuades the more willing customer to take a

look at the umbrella bed. Sure enough, the up lies down on the bed. Of course, he is going to like the bed, but he's probably not going to buy it. There's no way he's spending that kind of money. So, the RSA begins to regale the up with all the spectacular specifications found in the bed. I mean, it has everything, (except floating on thin air, of course). I've watched too many of them make this mistake. What mistake, you might ask? The mistake is "pitching" a bed when the customer has not shown any buying signals for that particular bed.

This happened to me several years ago when I mystery shopped a major chain store. The RSA greeted me and my wife. Then after a brief introduction in which I told him that I was looking for a plush queen set and I didn't want to spend more than about \$900, the RSA immediately led me over to a \$2500 queen set and asked me to try it out. Then he began to pour on the impressive specifications that were built into this bed. I told him, yes, it's very nice, but it's too much. So, we went to the \$1700 queen, also very nice. But all the RSA could talk about was how inferior this \$1700 bed was to the \$2500 bed. Again, no sale. Finally, I was getting tired of this, so I asked; "Can you just

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show me your plush \$900 bed?" He finally led me to it, but you would have thought it was the \$199 Gentle Firm ADV promo bed from the way he talked about it. It fell short of the \$2500 bed in so many ways. All he could talk about was what it DIDN'T have.

Let me stop this story to suggest this is NOT the right way to start at the top. When the RSA invariably must "step down" to less expensive beds, he must make positive comparisons to the umbrella bed, not negative comparisons. There is one exception to this advice. If the RSA perceives there might be a chance that the prospect might pop for the top of the line bed, one or two beneficial features might be saved in reserve to use to close the deal on the better bed. Here's a possible RSA monologue; "This \$1700 queen is a great bed, and I know you like it. But, I notice you keep looking back at that \$2500 set. You know, it does have the

added feature of gel structures embedded in the four inches of plush latex, which will help you sleep cooler at night. I think I heard you say that you tend to throw off covers at night because you sleep a little too warm. Let me point out that \$800 price difference is really only 22 cents per night over the ten year life of the mattress. Does that seem like something worth considering?"

But, if the up insists on his \$900 budget, he's still getting a great bed. Make sure he knows it.

Stepping Up

If you don't start at the top, you can often step the customer up to a better bed. Many people come into your store completely unaware of how much mattresses cost. They see the ads; "\$299 Luxury firm queen set! On Sale Today Only!" The customer thinks, "That sounds just like what we are looking for. I'm tired of sleeping on Grandma's 40 year old full set. Let's go look at that."

So, they come in the store, ad

in hand, and say "Show us this one." It is my opinion, that if customers point to an ad, and ask to see a bed, then the RSA should take them straightaway to that bed and ask them to try it out. But, you say, "The sales manager said start at the top every time." Let me say this, if you insist on showing the umbrella bed when the customer has asked to see the \$299 queen, you may get accused of "bait and switch" by an irate customer. This is when the strategy of stepping up might be considered as an alternative approach.

Stepping up is similar to stepping the customer down from a top-of-the-line bed. When a customer is shown a \$299 queen, it is possible he won't like it, and may also feel as if he's been deceived by false advertising. The next move by the RSA requires great skill. The RSA must step the customer up gracefully, tactfully and believably or he will leave and never come back. I have seen customers stepped up from a \$299 ADV queen to the top of the line. It can be done.

"If you don't start at the top,
you can often step the customer up. Many people
come into your store completely unaware of how much
mattresses cost."





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*Prodigy Comfort Elite shown with the Navarree headboard, which expands from twin to king size.

Summary

Every manufacturer, every store and every RSA wants to sell expensive luxury bedding. Why not? You make more money, the customer is more satisfied. Everybody wins all the way around. Yet, many RSAs are afraid to show high priced beds to their prospective buyers. It's the same motto that we use for selling adjustable bases. "If you don't show 'em; you won't sell 'em."

About David Benbow: A twenty-three year veteran of the mattress and bedding industry and owner of Mattress Retail Training Company offering retailers retail guidance from small store man-

agement 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 sub-

jects 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.

"When the RSA invariably must 'step down' to less expensive beds, he must make positive comparisons to the umbrella bed, not negative comparisons."

Luxury Mattress Perspectives

by Pamela Danziger

Innovation is challenging luxury brands from below with new lower priced entrants into the marketplace. Companies in luxury market, no matter what the specific product category, can't afford to overlook competition that's coming from below or new technologies being introduced into the market.

Positive Demographics

The most positive factor for the luxury mattress segment is the rich are getting much rich-

er. If you look at the data for U.S. households, the percentage of people with annual incomes over a hundred thousand dollars has grown over 20 percent in the past several years. Households with incomes of 250,000 dollars and above, have grown even faster (see chart). So, what might have been defined as an expensive mattress five years ago for higher earners, might be considered today to be affordable or average.

How much a mattress costs

is less important to the affluent than the experience it delivers.

Another positive factor for the bedding industry is the huge amount of research and media attention regarding the importance of sleep for proper health and quality of life. It's money in the bank for retailers who carry higher-end mattresses that can be positioned to deliver a better quality of sleep.

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sulting for luxury brands has focused on the concept of presenting authentic luxury. One bedding company that does a good job in this regard is Hästens, a company that uses the same manufacturing methods and quality of materials they started with in 1852. But what's old can be new again when a bedding brand differentiates itself with an updated look and a brand promise that resonates with what consumers want today.

For luxury bedding a brand promise might be simply, "The best sleep money can buy". For Hästens it's also about creating a look that stands out from a sea of white boxes on sales floors with a distinctive trademarked blue-and-white check cover. Hästens brands its beds on the outside as well as the

inside.

On the retail side, Chicago luxury beds, with two showrooms in the Chicago area has done well by developing a clientele that has the means to buy the best for their multiple large homes.

These are clients who can afford to fly to Chicago to shop for mattresses and have them shipped to their houses in Aspen, Palm Beach or wherever.

Marketing Innovation

At the high end there's also room to think out of the box to reach high-end consumers. Consider, for example untethering luxury mattress sales from local markets by showing them in airports or other destinations where well heeled consum-

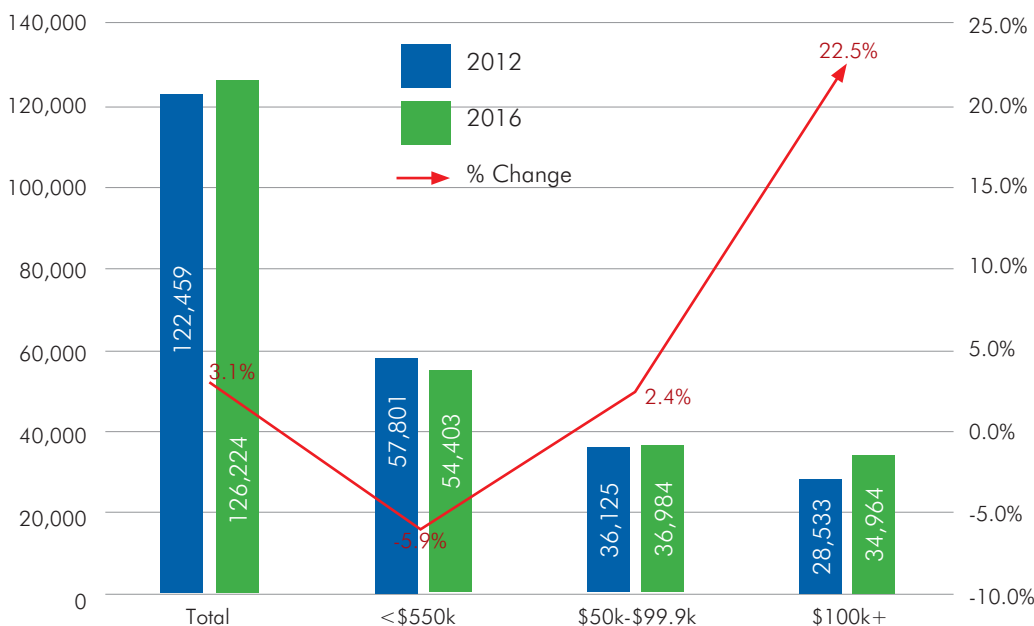
"Why not reach this jet-lagged demographic when they most need an amazing sleep experience?"

ers are headed. Other luxury brands already do this successfully. Why not reach this jet-lagged demographic when they most need an amazing sleep experience?

About Pamela Danziger:

Pamela N. Danziger is an internationally recognized expert specializing in consumer insights for marketers targeting the affluent consumer segment. She is president of Unity Marketing, a boutique marketing consulting firm she founded in 1992 where she leads with research to provide brands with actionable insights into the minds of their most profitable customers. Questions and comments can be directed to Pam at pam@unitymarketingonline.com.

Number of Households & Percent Change 2012-2016 by Income



SOURCE: US Census Table H-7 & Unity Marketing.



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Contact information on page 128.



Dimplex

Country charm meets modern design in the Sophia Media Console. Finished with fine details, including felt-lined drawers, this centerpiece embraces its surroundings.

Contact information on page 128.



Null

Small scale round pedestal end tables, part of a new accents program featuring painted and two-tone wood finishes in a number of shapes and sizes.

Contact information on page 128.



Fashion Bed Group

Add comfort and leisure to displays with the Balboa Daybed. This sleek bed is made with Pebble Gray fabric, providing a finished look with or without the optional trundle.

Contact information on page 128.



Craftmaster

This charming, comfortable rocking chair is perfectly at home in a living room, bedroom or nursery. It has a wide seat, padded arm rests, gently curved arms and is shown in a weathered oak finish. Contact information on page 128.



Kas Rugs

Brooklyn is hand-hooked with Bohemian and global patterns in multi-dyed and textured wool. Made in India with 1/2" pile.

Contact information on page 128



Furniture of America

Tolstoy features a large wooden slab resting atop U-shaped wooden table supports. The table's edges have a rough cut appearance finished smooth and pleasant to the touch. Side chairs provide ample seat cushioning. Upholstered in coffee brown.

Contact information on page 128.

Palliser

Masterpiece, adapts to the body point by point, providing support while feeling remarkably soft and comfortable.

Contact information on page 128.



Best Selling DESIGN



Night And Day Furniture

The Nantucket Sofa Sleeper is available in twin, full and queen sizes. Shown here in Cappuccino. It is also available in Light grey and Charcoal.

Contact information on page 128.



Muniz

The StarBurst dining table is constructed of individual hand-cut, polished and beveled pieces of acrylic in varying sizes and thicknesses.

Contact information on page 128.



Modus

The rough and tumble Townsend collection is crafted from solid hardwood planks with heavy saw marks and pitting. A nine step finish creates a rustic collection with a uniquely vintage feel.

Contact information on page 128.



Fermob USA

The Alize offset table, available in twenty four colors, provides a handy space poolside to place valuables and drinks. The offset design is easy to reach from a lounge chair or sun lounger.

Contact information on page 128.



Palecek

The Pismo Swivel Chair features a hardwood frame and pencil pole rattan, with a 360 degree swivel mechanism. Comes with an upholstered seat and two loose back cushions. Available in all Palecek finishes.

Contact information on page 128.



Capel

Gypsy is a new group of hand tufted, 100 percent wool designs made in India. The group features five patterns, including two florals and two medallions. Five color-ways are available in a mix of bright, lively tones. A 5' x 8' rug may retail for \$449. Contact information on page 128.

Ave Home

The Chloé Stool features a leather sling seat with top stitched detail. The decorative gold leaf accent was inspired by the laces of a ballet slipper and is the perfect balance to the matte black finish.

Contact information on page 128.



Norwalk

Mansfield, has a classic style with a straight track headboard and footboard. It provides a convenient spot for lounging during the day. A trundle pops-up to align with the twin mattress above it to form a queen size bed.

Contact information on page 128.

Best Selling DESIGN



Legends

Sophisticated, cottage inspired collection offers graceful shapes and turnings with soft, dry finishes and custom antiqued hardware.

Contact information on page 128.



Meridian

The Carter Chair shown here in aqua velvet, features plush, comfortable seating and stainless gold finished steel legs. Available in navy, burgundy, green or aqua. Retail under \$499.

Contact information on page 128.



Durham Furniture

The Escarpment is a highly distressed collection crafted of solid Wormy Rustic Maple. Presented in two new finishes, Stone Dust and Desert Sand. The collection is also available in more than fifty custom finishes. Hammered metal single knob pulls in a black nickel finish complete the look.

Contact information on page 128.



Standard Furniture

The Dakota is a tasteful two-tone round dining table designed for smaller spaces. A perfect conversation spot.

Contact information on page 128.



Lazzaro Leather

The Maddox Collection features tapered wood legs, an angled cushioned armrest, and deep cushions. Collection includes an ottoman.

Contact information on page 128.



Nourison

Deep grey abstracts roll like clouds across the beige and cream surface of this Silk Shadows Collection area rug. Hand knotted from New Zealand with wool and silk-like bamboo fibers, this contemporary rug is hand carved and hued to create eye-catching contrasts that fit into any décor.

Contact information on page 128.

Whittier Wood

The Addison Living and Media Collection features beautiful hardwoods providing form and function. Made of sustainable solid American Alder and Black Walnut.

Contact information on page 128.



Best Selling DESIGN



Klaussner

The Jasper County from the Trisha Yearwood Home Collection has classic graceful fluid lines. Its gentle curves and sculptural air creates impact without being fussy.

Contact information on page 128.

Country View Woodworking

This dining group is part of the handcrafted American Modern Dining Collection by designer Michael Robinson. Available in solid and two-tone species.

Contact information on page 128.



Twin Star Home

The geometric components of the Wright Collection fit together with architectural precision. The oak veneer is stained a rich Cambridge Oak to emphasize the grain of the wood and accented with a darker Cottage Revival finish. Group is finished on all sides for maximum versatility.

Contact information on page 128.



Collection Tuff

This Reclaimed Pine bookcase has a maze-inspired design that turns ordinary books, framed pictures and curios into an artful display. The surface is protected with a matte lacquer finish.

Contact information on page 128.



Surya

Presidential is machine made in modern abstract design with a medium, high-low pile.

Contact information on page 128.



A.R.T.

The Chambers Bed is constructed of Parawood solids and cathedral Elm veneers. The broad footboard opens to reveal a cedar-lined storage chest. The bed comes in Parch, a light open-grained finish, or Mist, a neutral aged gray paint.

Contact information on page 128.



Omnia

The Power Solutions motion upholstery program offers custom arm and leg choices, power tilt headrests and a new comfort lumbar option with the touch of a button. Available in a broad range of 100 percent top grain leathers, fabrics and multiple SKUs for custom configurations. Made in America.

Contact information on page 128.



Pelican Reef

The Cubix collection is a sleek contemporary collection that offers a unique thick weave pattern. The powder-coated aluminum frame allows for years of hassle free use.

Contact information on page 128.

✓ technology

POINT/COUNTERPOINT

VR/AR Technology: Visualize The Solution

by Bill Napier & Ed Tashjian

Everybody is buzzing about VR/AR. Will the early adapters... the Amazons, Wayfairs, and Frontgates of this world eat your lunch?

Editor's Note: Here's more from Furniture World's point/counterpoint duo, Bill Napier and Ed Tashjian. This is their fifth installment, having previously debated celebrity licensing, digital advertising overload, the millennial myth and whether or not furniture brands matter.

Point: Ed Tashjian

Everybody is buzzing about VR/AR/technology. Does it make sense for furniture retailers and manufacturers, or is it just a passing fad?

My view is augmented reality will become a mainstream tool in home furnishings, the same way it has in clothing. It is still in its infancy, and the challenges of modeling three dimensional furniture are greater, but there are many providers offering this service now. It is getting cheaper, faster and better and it won't be long before everyone offers it.

Definitions A/R & V/R

First, let's define what these terms mean, and how they can be applied to the furniture purchase process. VR is the acronym for virtual-reality. AR is an acronym for augmented reality. Virtual reality is the computer-generated simulation of a three-dimensional image or environment that can be interacted within a seemingly real or physical way by a person using special electronic equipment, such as a helmet with a screen inside, or gloves fitted with sensors. Augmented Reality is a technology that superimposes a computer-generated image on a user's view of the real world, thus providing a composite view.

In an applied sense, the technical difference between the two is that VR is all computer simulation. AR can take an image of an existing room in the consumer's home and superimpose a piece of furniture, a rug, or any other home furnishings item.

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As a marketer, I believe that anything that results in a consumer purchase is a worthwhile investment, and I am especially bullish on augmented reality. Let's face it. Human beings in general are lousy visualizers. Among other deficiencies, we tend to underestimate the scale. This was one of the great failures of early

e-commerce, when as much as 30 percent of the furniture was returned. It looked great online or in the showroom, but when it came home it didn't fit.

AR is not a for everyone. This type of technology is more likely to appeal to Millennials than to Boomers. In the olden days, consumers would invite an interior designer into their home. He or she was skilled in visualization, knowledgeable about what was available, and could make recommendations about everything from paint color to furniture. I have tremendous respect for interior designers. They have an encyclopedic knowledge of furnishings and day-to-day experience putting rooms together. They can imagine what a paint chip no larger than a thumbnail will look like in a whole room and prevent consumers from making a mistake.

when a screen representation is inconsistent with the installed design scheme. In the early days of fabric to frame computer mapping, the visualization was both too perfect and cartoonish. It always perfectly flow matched fabrics. People were disappointed with the final result. With time, and much more powerful computers, the results were much more realistic. Today, even that is not enough. Consumers want to see that rendering placed in their own space, and AR is the tool that can do that on any computer or smart phone. In some ways, it reminds me of the evolution of the music business. Some of you may remember going to a record store and browsing through albums. The salespeople in those stores were musicologists who asked about shoppers' likes and made recommendations. Now, we simply go to iTunes or Amazon where we not only sample the music, but use sophisticated algorithms to identify other tunes we might like. This kind of buying experience is coming to furniture stores sooner than you think.

"Now, you simply go to iTunes or Amazon and they not only let you sample the music, but use sophisticated algorithms to identify other things you might like. This kind of buying experience is coming to furniture stores sooner than you think." - Ed Tashjian

Evolution Of The Technology

A current pitfall with at least some AR applications occurs



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"Anything that results in a consumer purchase is a worthwhile investment, and I am especially bullish on augmented reality. Let's face it. Human beings in general are lousy visualizers." - Ed Tashjian

Another problem with the early days of fabric-to-frame computer mapping was that it was available only in stores. People were more impressed with the technology than they were with actually buying a sofa. They would spend hours in front of a computer, waste the sales associate's time and eventually get bored, leaving the store without buying anything. The difference today is that they do their browsing at home on their own time and only come to stores when ready to buy. The result is fewer store visits and faster transactions. It is something we all should celebrate.

It does not take a keen sense of observation to notice that people seem to spend a majority of their waking hours checking cell phones. This tool has become the

quintessential Swiss Army knife. For AR technology to work, therefore, it needs to be so intuitive, and so easy, nearly anybody under the age of 40 can use it. It's not there yet, but it is only months away.

As more business moves to e-commerce, AR will be especially important and retailers that don't have an ecommerce strategy in place soon will be toast. To be a successful retailer in the 21st-century requires giving consumers what they want, how they want it and when they want it. Most Millennials prefer emails, texts and chats over speaking to a live person. They tend to shop by inspiration and buy for practicality. They need to be able to visualize a solution.

The furniture industry is typically

slow to adopt new technology. There are many reasons for this, but I believe that it is mostly a lack of imagination. When new technology emerges, it tends to be pretty rough. By the time it evolves it is too late. It takes a special kind of retailer to see the oak tree in the acorn. AR is a technology that you will avoid at your peril. The Amazons, Wayfairs, and Frontgates will eat your lunch.

Counter Point: Bill Napier

I'm supposed to be writing the counter-point for this article, but before I do let me state, I agree with Ed that these technologies are sorely needed. Those brands and retailers that don't adopt these platforms will fail with impunity.

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"When people search for furniture, they shop 'The Look' first. They don't want to use some archaic and outdated style generator from 2004!" - Bill Napier

Ed writes, "everybody is buzzing about VR/AR/technology." It's true that, like a swarm of bees, marketing people in our industry have created a real buzz regarding these technologies. In a real hive, female worker bees do the work that ensures long-term survival of the hive. Male drones, in contrast, show interest at the appropriate time, but have a dismal rate of success at execution.

I won't take the bee metaphor much further, but buzzing about technology isn't the same as successfully adopting it. And, my experience dealing with marketers in our industry does not give me much confidence that many companies who have the most to gain from the successful adoption of VR/AR technologies will move

forward.

Problem With Poor Content

Let's examine how our industry has traditionally reacted to leading technologies.

It seems like ancient history, but back around 2004 there was certainty among most marketers in our industry that consumers would not want to see, nor ever buy furniture online.

The reasoning made sense back then, but today it seems quaint. And even today, manufacturing brands in particular have not fully embraced this technology.

First, the content manufacturers put out on their own websites for use by their retail customers is horrible. Look at the descriptions they write, it's minimalistic and borderline pedestrian at best. It's neither engages nor educates. It's

not written to be found in search. Even though over 85 percent of all furniture searches start on the internet, manufacturers have not invested in this basic marketing premise either out of laziness or ignorance.

No Product Standardization

Second, most manufacturers do not "standardize their products" so they can be pushed out to retailer's websites and/or POS systems, even in a simple excel

TECHNOLOGY COUNTER POINT

At a recent High Point Market, users got a taste of walking through a 3-dimensional virtual furniture showroom using technology from MicroD (below).



"Manufacturers' website content neither engages nor educates. It's not written to be found in search. It's minimalistic at best." - Bill Napier

format. But that's not the scary part, most companies don't even know how to do it! I can state this because for two years I offered a program to standardize furniture manufacturers' content for FREE! Yep, we offered to do all the work and not charge a cent.

I'm sorry to say that manufacturing marketing gurus' response to this offer was a total "deer in the headlights" scenario. They had no clue what it was or how they'd even get access to the content.

We got the same result when the topic of API feeds was brought up. An API is a software intermediary that allows two applications to talk to each other in real time. The benefit is that manufacturers' products, inventory... everything, is automatically fed to retailers' POS systems and websites.

My conclusion is if manufacturers can't or won't even invest in these basic technology elements so that 85 percent of web search-

es can find/learn about their products, how and why would you think they'd invest in the technologies Ed is referencing or any advanced business technologies for that matter?

We worked with Cimagine, a company sold to Snapchat in 2017 to penetrate the furniture industry with an Augmented Reality App. It was simple enough, one line of code placed on a retail website allowing an "AR rendered product" to be placed into a room setting photo taken on a phone or tablet. Jerome's implemented this AR APP in 2016.

Here is what happened:

- *Jerome's experienced a 65 percent conversion to e-commerce sales for consumers using the app vs. those who did not.*
- *The app nearly quadrupled the time users spent on Jerome's website to 15 minutes for users, vs. four minutes for other website visitors.*

This was well published in the industry, but the results were met with a collective yawn by retail and manufacturing marketing executives who either showed no interest or were put off by the cost.

To render an image might cost about \$40. That's \$120,000 for 3,000 SKU's. Yet think about this! The average room shot runs close to \$1,200 and a product shot,

\$200-\$350. So why would anyone continue to spend five times more and get left behind?

The big vertical furniture companies and online giants are already implementing these technologies, leaving the rest of the industry to catch up. It's my view that the future does not belong to paper catalogs, driving Oldsmobile's and other comfortable Neanderthal marketing tactics.

Retail & Brand Websites

Now let's talk about simple websites. At best, there's a huge disconnect between what furniture brand marketers and furnishings retailers expect (personally) when they shop for goods online, and what they offer up as marketing professionals to their own customers who are shopping for furniture.

More specifically, folks who work for retailers and manufacturing brands expect, when shopping for their own homes, to be served up a ton of results from different companies so they can comparison shop, yet they refuse to give their "paying" customers the same option. Worse yet, brick and mortar retailers have been unbelievably slow at adding e-commerce, showing lackluster interest in selling online, even though by 2020 it's expected that

"Today this scenario is repeating itself, only in reverse. The insiders are ignoring the outsiders and these insiders will fail miserably!" - Bill Napier

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The 42nd China International Furniture Fair (Shanghai)

10-13 September 2018

home / home decor / home textile / outdoor / office /
hotel / commercial / machinery & raw materials



National Exhibition and Convention Center (Shanghai) in Hongqiao

"My experience does not give me much confidence that companies who have the most to gain from the successful adoption of VR/AR technologies will move forward." - Bill Napier

over 30 percent of all home furnishings will be purchased there.

Outdated Terminology

Even how the furniture industry describes products is holding us back. Who searches by style anyway? And what are Traditional, Contemporary and Modern styles? When people search for furniture, they shop "The Look" first. Consumers don't want to use an archaic and outdated style generator created in 2004! I've been in the furniture business much of my adult life and I don't know what a Transitional style is or what value it brings to the sales process. If you know the answer, please email me!

Most of us have used "Visual" search to find products when on Amazon, Google, Bing, and virtually everywhere else on the web. This technology shows customers products that are visually similar to ones they either see on a retailer's website or have uploaded from a different source. Using an AI (Artificial Intelligence) application, the shopper is automatically shown "Like" images by style/color, etc. It seems like visual search would be a no-brainer for most any furniture retailer, but

here again, most of the industry is lagging behind.

A Poor Track Record

Now let's talk about our industry's generally poor track record of working with technology companies. Yes, everybody is talking about Big Data, Retail Automation, Block Chain and more. But few have embraced it as they should. Many times I've seen technology companies and their ideas get shot down due to a lack of trust. They tend to be viewed as outsiders, insufficiently knowledgeable regarding the realities of the furniture industry.

This mindset may be rooted in past experience. Back in the 1960s and '70s outsiders, companies like General Mills came into our industry thinking they could market furniture like Cheerios from their remote corporate facilities in Minneapolis, NYC, etc. They thought it was a commodity that needed an infusion of creative and messaging to be more profitable.

The outsiders bought up many brands and ignored the insiders; the manufacturing people, furniture designers, logistics people and more, causing chaos, plant

closures/failures and ultimately the demise of many furniture companies. Back then, the outsiders ignored the insiders, with disastrous results.

Repeated In Reverse

Today this scenario is repeating itself, only in reverse! The insiders are ignoring the outsiders and these insiders will fail miserably! Who are the outsiders? Primarily technology companies. Who are the insiders? Primarily marketing and management people tasked with creating, engaging and educating consumers to buy their products. Marketers and management insiders are so concerned about their furniture markets and placements, they forget about what I believe should be a big part of their job description—enabling the technologies that consumers use to find, learn about, and buy their products. Instead, they rely on a strategy of HOPE, that retailers will purchase and be able to market their products correctly, without any help from manufacturers.

The conundrum for me is that technology runs everything in our lives and yes, furniture people's lives too, but rarely does our

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POINT-COUNTERPOINT

industry use business intelligence technologies to improve the bottom line. The Super-Regionals do, and that's why they are growing at independent retailers' expense even though these technologies can level the playing field by cutting costs, improving efficiencies and their GMROI while they do.

A Matter Of Survival

By now, you probably realize I am less optimistic than Ed, that "It won't be long before everyone

"Most Millennials prefer emails and chats over speaking to a live person and they tend to shop by inspiration and buy for practicality. **They need to be able to visualize a solution.**"

offers" AR/VR technology. Neither do I believe that most manufacturing brands and retailers will embrace the technological changes required for their survival. Still, I suggest that every manufacturer and retailer should set up a technology task force to study and learn about the technologies Ed discussed. We've lost thousands of retailers, over 400 factories, over 290,000 furniture jobs since 2004 mainly because we didn't embrace change and we still don't.

In summary, let me give you a one-word definition of your business should you ignore what Ed has outlined for your future if you don't embrace these new technologies... plus a final piece of advice.

The one-word is: Irrelevant.

The final piece of advice: You can't think yourself into acting, you must act yourself into thinking.

About Ed Tashjian: Tashjian Marketing provides senior marketing leadership to the Home

Furnishings Industry. It specializes in business analytics and in helping its clients to segment the market, define and communicate a sustainable differentiated value proposition. Get more information at www.Tashjianmarketing.com or call (828) 855-0100.

About Bill Napier: Bill 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.

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. Reach Bill at: billnapier@napiermkt.com or 612-217-1297.

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TIRESOME HABITS

OF MODERATELY SUCCESSFUL SALESPeOPLE

by Gordon Hecht

Here is a list of seven poor retail habits RSAs hang onto, but give your shoppers a negative impression of your sales staff and your store.

The original title of this article was going to be *A Shopping Trip with Kathy*. It's likely that you've been asked by friends and acquaintances to give furniture or bedding purchase advice at one time or another. That's how Kathy and I ended up shopping for a new mattress. Kathy is typical of shoppers that you may see in your store every day. She is in the 50+ age group, and due to a recent change in family status is setting up a new household as a single adult. Kathy has a professional occupation but not unending funds to purchase.

I spend a lot of time in mattress, furniture, flooring, and appliance stores. I try to view those stores through the eyes of YOUR shoppers, but shopping with a friend who, like many of your shoppers rarely buys a bed, was a new experience. We shopped one full-line furniture store, and that experience was less than dazzling. Based on that trip and other shopping trips, here is a list of seven retail habits that RSAs

hang on to, but give shoppers a negative impression of your sales staff and your store.

Habit #1

They Are In The Vulture Pit

Let's face it, many people don't like shopping, and many more fear having to buy a new bed. For them, seeing a gauntlet of sharpie salespeople at the door

"The RSA that greets a shopper at the door 'owns' that shopper.

Heaven forbid that another RSA talks to that shopper less they be accused of stealing an UP!"

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SEVEN TIRESOME HABITS

all looking like they want to pick meat off of the bones makes it even worse. Yes, I understand that RSAs have to be ready for the next UP, but there has got to be a better way than standing at attention within 10 feet of the door. It scared Kathy, and it was even a little uncomfortable for me.

Habit #2

They Lean Without Clean

We shopped on a rainy Sunday which meant that the store had a

lot of traffic. I could tell because the store was a mess when we arrived! Sofa toss pillows were tossed about, price tags, were on the ground or missing, and test rest pillows and foot protectors were askew. It's hard for me to understand this considering the five or six salespeople waiting at the door. You may straighten your store at night, but recovery is a constant ongoing job. If you have time to LEAN you have time to CLEAN. Plus, it's never a good idea for a salesperson to not look busy.

Habit #3

Not 'Theirs'... Not Friendly

I gotta tell you, Lowe's and Kroger's got us beat. Walk down the aisles of those stores and the store associates will say "Hi", or ask if you need help, or acknowledge your presence in some way. Walk around the interior of a home furnishing or appliance store and the RSAs treat you as if you are invisible. It's a RETAIL EGO thing! In our industry the RSA that greets a shopper at the door "owns" that shopper. Heaven forbid that another RSA talks to that shopper less they be accused of stealing an UP! The result is that your shoppers, the ones you paid \$25 to \$100 each to bring in to the store, become the unseen, ungreeted, and unattended. It doesn't hurt to say Hi,

and it's not an act of theft to do it. BTW, unless your RSAs are chipping in for advertising expenses, they do not OWN any guests!

Habit #4

Say They Are In 'Sales'

I learned this 35 years ago and it is still true today. When they BUY, shoppers hold the power, when they are SOLD, the RSA holds the power. I bring this up because the RSA who "helped" us told us multiple times that she "has been selling mattresses for 17 years". If it is true that people dislike SHOPPING for a mattress, you can be sure that they hate being SOLD a mattress, or any other home furnishings item. Simply change that phrase to "I have been helping people get the sleep they need for 17 years," and you'll move from salesperson to product expert. You can also

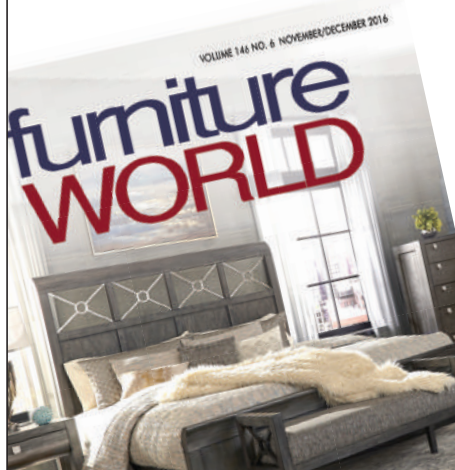
"If it is true that people dislike SHOPPING for a piece of furniture or a mattress, you can be sure that they hate being SOLD one."

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take the word sleep and put in beautiful and functional rooms.

Habit #5

They Don't Leave A Message

With the advent of robo-calls a lot of people are unwilling to accept a call from a number they don't recognize. My general rule for my personal cell phone is "No guts, no glory" meaning if you call me and don't leave a message, I will not call back. However, a lot of the messages I do get are garbled and hard to understand. And when the caller leaves their number they say it like the fast talking dude who used to do the FedEx commercials. Help your caller and your business

out. Be prepared to leave a voice mail message. Speak your name clearly and always SLOWLY say your phone number two times. Chances are you'll get a lot more calls returned.

Habit #6

Terrible Phone Greeting

I double dog dare you to do this today! Call your own store and listen to the greeting. If it sounds like "MATTRESS STORE" or "FRED'S FURNITURE" you have moved up on the list of unfriendly retailers! Every phone call is an opportunity to invite more business into your building. Even if it is a customer complaint, it is a chance to solve it and have these

customers move on to their next purchase. Start out with something simple like, "Hello, thank you for calling Mattress Store" or copy Metro PCS who answers the phone "Hi, Gordon from Metro PCS-how can I make your day sparkle?" I'll triple dog dare you to script something out and check to see if your people use it.

Habit #7

They Don't Thank

This totally blows my mind. I never received a THANK YOU note or call from salespeople at dealerships where I purchased my last four cars. I'm not a fancy car guy, so those four cars only totaled about \$110K, probably



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not a blip on their screen. But the guy I bought a suit from five years ago sent a thank you card and reached out to me every three months for years reminding me to refresh my ward-

"I double dog dare you to do this today! Call your own store and listen to the greeting. If it sounds like 'MATTRESS STORE' or 'FRED'S FURNITURE' you have moved up on the list of unfriendly retailers!"

robe. Darn, it's so easy to thank someone these days by phone, text, email, even social media. Check out Dustin Schmidt at Schmidt Motors in Bismarck, ND who shows a photo of every car buyer on the company Facebook page with their new car.

Habits are hard to break! But it only takes about 21 days of consistency to break a 20-year habit. If you love the habit of mediocrity then you never have to feel the discomfort. If you want to excel, then knock out these seven practices one at a time, one day at a time.

About Gordon Hecht: Gordon Hecht is a Senior Manager for Serta Simmons Bedding's Strategic Retail Group comprising over 400 locally owned and operated bedding stores across the country selling Serta Simmons branded and America's Mattress-branded mattresses.

He started his 30+ years' experience in the Home Furnishings industry in Las Vegas, NV as a delivery helper and driver, later moving to sales and management.

He has served with other organizations as Store Manager, Multi-unit manager and National Director of Sales. With his first-hand knowledge of our industry's front line, Gordon has devoted his career to guiding others to exceed their goals.

He has been recognized for outstanding sales and management achievement with Ashley Furniture HomeStores, Drexel-Heritage, RB Furniture, Reliable Stores, and Sofa Express. See all of Gordon's articles on the furninfo.com website at www.furninfo.com/Authors/List. Questions and comments can be directed to Gordon Hecht at ghecht@serta.com.

"Thanks Larry for Another Fantastic Event!"



MICHAEL BRUCE

This is the second time we have worked with Larry on a retirement sale for a store we purchased, and he was great again. The concept he uses to develop a story thru the marketing and then allows us to conduct the sale with our own people is fantastic and I believe provides for the best results. We were overwhelmed with the amount of business the first week of our event and Larry was able to adjust the marketing and event schedule to continue to maximize the opportunity after we attempted to catch our breath. Thanks Larry for another fantastic event!

Michael Bruce, of Bruce Furniture: Kearney, Hastings, Holdrege, Alliance and North Platte, Nebraska

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Years Ago

FURNITURE WORLD Magazine - 1925

Has the Orphan Asylum Outlived Its Usefulness?

Inasmuch as literally millions (of children) are tied up in "orphans homes" or as they are more generally known "orphans asylums, the furniture industry is interested in Dr. Reeder's contention that the orphan asylum has outlived its usefulness and must be supplanted by the home - particularly at this time. Having been an important feature of the (furniture) industry in the past, the equipping of institutions of all kinds, orphan asylums are objects of interest to furniture men, and if they are to be abolished it will be interesting to see what will take their place. Should it prove to be smaller and especially individual units the

change would be a marked one to certain manufacturers and dealers.

National Housewives League Denounces Sales Practice

Returns from a survey of the leading department stores of the country made by Mrs. Julian Heath, founder president of the National Housewives League, show overwhelming opposition to the so-called "hidden demonstration" system. The practice, familiar to the trade, but generally unknown to the public, consists of payment in whole or in part, of salaries of department store employees by manufacturers on the understanding that the employees will encourage customers to buy these

manufacturers' goods.

World News: Italy

In the last Italian election Mussolini polled 4,600,000 votes, to 2,500,000 votes recorded for all the other groups combined, and 379 Fascisti have been elected to the Italian Chamber against 160 members of non-Fascisti parties.

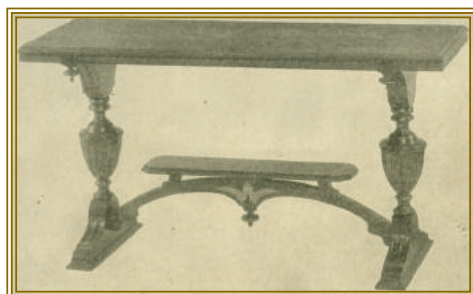
Mattress Sales Education

In hair mattresses there is always a certain per cent of short hair and a certain per cent of long hair. Horsehair is occasionally adulterated with fine threads of whalebone, goat hair, cattle hair and hog hair. The long hair is the best quality, but short hair must be



Ads from issues of Furniture World Magazine in 1925. Burt Bros., Inc., Philadelphia shows its 1155 Combination French Walnut and Curley Maple.

At right a "snappy new design" from Keil Furniture Company. 14th Floor Furniture Mart Chicago.



"In hair mattresses there is always a certain per cent of short hair and a certain per cent of long hair."

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Ads from 1925
issues of Furniture
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added in order that the long hair may be kept from interlocking and matting. The hair as we get it in mattresses is processed very carefully to make it sanitary, and then curled. Hair is the most elastic and resilient of all fillings, is not absorbent, will not a pack, is free from odor and sanitary.

\$50 Offered For Mattress Slogan

The better grade of mattress and pillow manufacturers affiliated with the Better Bedding Alliance of America, are offering a substantial cash prize for a slogan which will guard the public against second-hand or misrepresented filling materials in bedding, so the sale of better grade mattresses and pillows and induce the public to renew them more frequently.

Radio Craze

A radio sale conducted by Gimbel Bros, in this city last week is claimed that \$1,000,000 worth of radio sets were sold in one day at slightly less than \$100 each. It is pointed out as an evidence of the great growth of the radio craze that hardly three years ago the Gimbels began selling radios, and that its first month experience in its Philadelphia store, for example, netted them exactly one sale amounting to \$8.

Creditors Arrested & Accused of Conspiracy

Samuel Salef and Harry Liberman,

owners of Star Upholstered Furniture were arrested together with their wives, Leah Salef and Dora Lieberman, charged with conspiring illegally to obtain merchandise, also with assault.

Chestnut Blight

Because of the chestnut blight now prevalent throughout the country, it is feared that within ten years, the chestnuts will vanish from America. The United States Bureau of Foreign Plant Introduction is endeavoring to acclimate certain flight-resistant species of chestnut from China and Japan to replace our native trees.

Furniture Manufacturers Indited for Price Fixing

Leading furniture manufacturers of the United States are charged with combining to boost prices and monopolize the trade in a Federal Grand Jury investigation in Chicago. Books, sales records and cost accounts of 250 furniture manufacturers were ordered seized on subpoenas. This investigation disclosed, according Federal officers, that furniture prices are set in many instances two or three times as great as a just profit based on cost and operating expenses would warrant.

NY Bedding Crime Spree

- Max Eilenberg, 34 Allen street, New York City, fined \$20 for having six pillows labeled feather down while same contained plain feathers.
- E. Zimmerman, 57 Stanton street New York City, fined \$20 for having in his possession and for sale, four mattresses without labels.
- Mutual Mattress & Bedding company, Bronx, N.Y., fined \$50 for failure to label re-made or renovated articles.

"Books, sales records and cost accounts of 250 furniture manufacturers were ordered seized on subpoenas."

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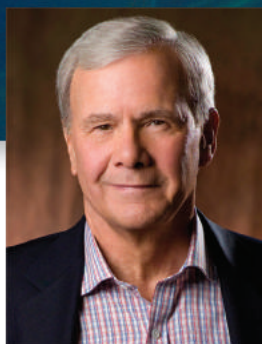


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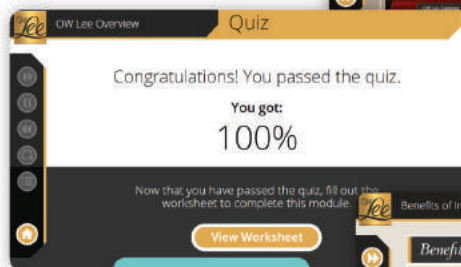
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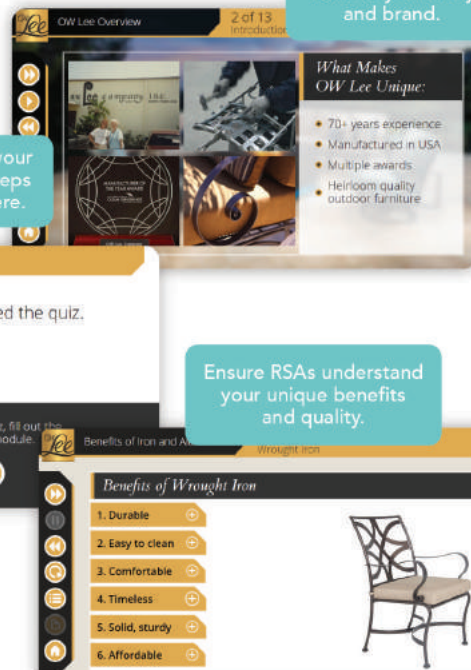
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ACA	800-882-8588	bob@4aca.com	102	Las Vegas Market		www.lasvegasmarket.com	111
Affordable Design Slns.	304-634-1450	conniepost@conniepost.com	46	Lazzaro	336-884-0184	lauri@lazzaroleather.com	47
Agio	800-416-3511	alicia@obrienetal.com	69	Legends Furniture	623-931-6500	cs@buylegends.info	25
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