

VOLUME 148 NO.5 SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2018

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Do No Harm?

While preparing for this edition of Furniture World I came across an article by Dimitar Vlahov. Mr. Vlahov, the Director of Content Development at Sustainable Brands wrote, "If there is one thing that brands and individuals have in common, it is that sooner or later their identity, character and internal dialogue are inevitably projected externally."

I suspect this is a chilling thought for a small minority of Furniture World readers and, a comfort for most. It should also be a call to action for industry brands that have not focused sufficiently on encoding corporate and personal responsibility throughout their organizations.

"Do no harm" is an obvious essential to avoid PR disasters, lawsuits and brand meltdown, but is doing good in the world a valid corporate imperative?

There are, surprisingly, differences of opinion. The good news is, whether you have a passion for saving the world or feel compelled to follow the money, there are strong reasons to embrace responsible and sustainable practices. Doing well by doing good are, long-term, synonymous.

There is a lot of information in this Furniture World issue, compliments of SFC's Susan Inglis and Giles Jackson, Ph.D., regarding changing attitudes toward sustainability. Sustainability, as Inglis points out, has become an umbrella term that includes climate change, healthy living, environmental safety, animal rights and social equity.

Research shows that among all demographic groups, but especially among Millennials, the desire to do business with companies who embrace an umbrella of sustainable causes is trending upward. Purpose-driven sales are on the rise, writes Jackson.

There are many take-aways, chief among them is, embracing issues such as sustainability and workplace harassment need to be structured so that everyone in an organization buys-in with enthusiasm. The results are better workplaces, better branding, better outcomes all around.

Best Wishes For a Sustainable Fall Season,

Russell Bienenstock
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DEL SOL FURNITURE

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

Phoenix-based retailer wants to do more than sell furniture. "We want customers to continue to come into our stores," says Alex Macias, "and, when they leave, think, 'That was a great experience!'"

From the beginning it was more than a dream. Factor in astute strategic planning, entrepreneurial skills, extraordinary persistence and very hard work.

Del Sol Furniture of Phoenix, Arizona, grew from a 2,000 square foot lease on the east side of the city in 1997, to an up-and coming three store chain serving a wide area surrounding the expanding metro area.

The evocative company mission is "Furnishing Dreams". And their motto, "Always With You!"

Said Vice president Alex Macias, "Del Sol Furniture now has three locations throughout the Valley of the Sun, each with similar structure and product selection. And store managers have leeway in merchandising."

The Early Days

Alex's parents, Venancio and Rosa Macias, are Del Sol's founders. "They met in Mexico City while my father was studying civil engineering," noted Alex. "After my mother graduated from the university, they moved to Juarez where dad worked as a civil engineer for the government, and my mom worked at Johnson Controls.

"They enrolled my older sister Minerva and me, at no small expense, in private school to learn English. And they obtained visas to enter the United States."

When the family settled in Phoenix, Arizona, the decision to make their mark in the furniture industry was based on an energetic process of elimination. Alex said, "As an immigrant, knowledge has value. But usually degrees earned in home countries don't. That's why lots of immigrants become entrepreneurs. In their own country they may have been a doctor or an accountant, but when they arrive here they have to figure out a way to put food on the table.

"And there aren't a lot of options. Lots of people are knocking on doors, but not a lot of doors are opened. My parents had never started a business before, but they wanted the American dream."

Phoenix is Arizona's capital and cultural center with a population around 1,500,000, the fastest growing city in the United States. Forty-three different languages are spoken in local schools, and it's the home for Fortune 500 companies. Phoenix is a diverse and fascinating city with unlimited opportunity. And, with almost 300 days of sun-

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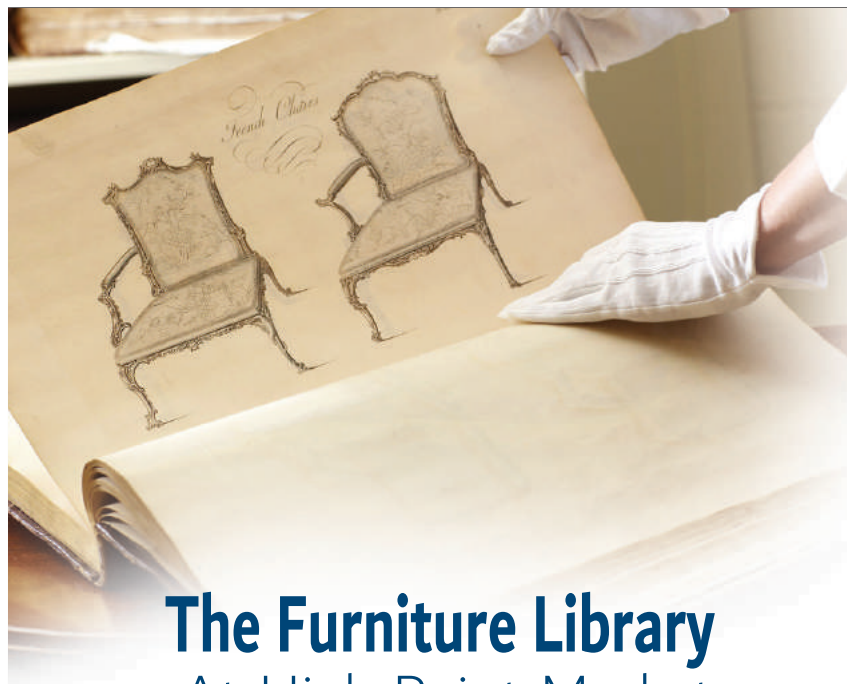
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The Furniture Library At High Point Market

It can be tough to get away from downtown High Point during the show, but it's worth a trip to visit the Bienenstock Furniture Library at 1009 North Main Street (just a mile north of IHFC). With over 5000 volumes on furniture and design dating back to 1540, the Library is open year-round for research, study, events, seminars and collaborations. You are welcome to tour the Library, check out our collection, and stroll through the sculpture garden.



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"When we show up. . . .

for a service call, we're the Super Hero there to fix the product or deal with an issue the first time!"

Del Sol Furniture offers delivery to a large geographical area surrounding the distribution center. Truck graphics are striking mobile billboards promoting Easy Credit and "superhero" customer service.

shine annually, a city waiting for entrepreneurs.

Said Alex, "Over the years my parents tried multiple businesses - shoe stores, dollar stores, a CD and cassette store and, finally the business my uncle was in, furniture. They ultimately came to the conclusion that it's a lot of work selling one-dollar items to make \$500, compared to selling one sofa!"

And the name of the business? "The Greater Phoenix area is known as the Valley of the Sun. And translated into Spanish, that's 'Valle del Sol'." So the

Macias's dream became reality in Del Sol Furniture.

"What made my parents' company successful was that they found a niche customer overlooked by traditional furniture stores back in the early '90s, Spanish speakers who did not have the cash to buy the furnishings they needed.

"But I can tell you that the start was not pretty. When my folks first started, our marketing consisted of going to the swap meets and the flea markets. That was our advertising.

"Our first store was in an area with absolutely zero retail traffic. So every Saturday and Sunday, as a family, we spent the day at swap meets. We brought some samples, a bunk bed and maybe

a sofa, a loveseat and some coffee tables. And we'd pass out our business cards. My sister and I were between ages six and 10.

"It was tough to find suppliers back then. Vendors and reps with established distribution tend not to look for start-ups, the up-and-coming furniture stores. They call on and support the big guys to try to keep their sales volume up. But back then there were some reps who traveled to a part of town that wasn't the best, found my parents and started selling them. Little by little we started creating volume at our first store location in 1989.

"I grew up in the business. As a kid, I assembled as many of the coffee tables that we gave away with purchases as I could in the



morning. Until I got bored. Then I'd count the number and think, 'Oh, man, I got 15 bucks, yeah, it's going to be a good day!'

"At those weekend swap meets my sister and I weren't allowed to get hot chocolate until we'd sold a bunk bed! I've always been around entrepreneurship in the different businesses we had, worked as a receptionist when I was in high school and at our dollar stores. My Dad had me making deliveries which gave me respect for our delivery and warehouse guys. It is not a fun job to do here in the heat of Phoenix!

Growth

"We moved three times before purchasing our first building in 2002, 23,000 square feet, at 32nd Street and Thomas.

"At that time there was a big influx of Hispanic immigrants into the Phoenix area so business was good. Merchandising then was much easier, just about anything we put on the floor would sell.

"When I went to college in 2002, the furniture business, as I said, was doing well, and my parents did not encourage me or my sister to go into the family busi-

Del Sol's founders Venancio Macias and Rosa Macias CEO. Vice President, Alex Macias (far right).

ness. They basically told us, 'We don't want you guys to run the furniture store. It's a lot of work.' At that point they didn't have the same management structure we do now and so they were working really long hours, six to seven days a week. I was going to go to law school, then the recession hit, so I put my law career on hold and came into the business at their request and never left. And I think that's why I'm so passionate



"Every Saturday and Sunday, as a family, we spent the day at swap meets. We brought some samples, a bunk bed and maybe a sofa, a loveseat and some coffee tables."

about my work with HFA's Next Gen group. In the 11 years that I've been in the business, I've met

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so many dads and moms who did not encourage their kids to enter their businesses. Their kids hear them complain about long hours at retail and how hard it is. So the kids become doctors and lawyers. There's nobody to run the store and, ultimately, they have to close up shop.

"We had a good ride from 1990 to 2007, and our community really helped us grow. And, again, it had a lot to do with other retailers not really paying attention, or not wanting to serve our customers.

"As our business grew, we had decided to expand to serve other parts of Phoenix. From 1997 all the way to 2007, we opened additional locations. But the recession forced us to downsize." A pivotal moment.

A Pivotal Moment

"After both my sister and I formally joined the business, the decision was made to expand beyond our focus of serving primarily Spanish speaking credit customers. We already had

the stores and the warehouse. I have degrees in computer information systems and accounting, so I knew that we needed to have a strong online presence going forward to evolve digitally, to upgrade our software. Minerva was very helpful to Del Sol during the recession.

"Del Sol lost 50 percent of its sales from 2007 to 2009. We had to close our leased stores and let go of employees. It was chop, chop, chop. But from 2009 on, we started to rebuild, signing on with FurnitureDealer.net to help us create a strong website presence. We upgraded our computer system and expanded our marketing.

"Our website and technology investments have really paid dividends in the last eight years. Back then, our competitors, even those doing business around the corner, probably had no idea who we were. And although we are still not the biggest furniture operation in town, some of the things we've done in marketing and technology have really put us on the map.

"If the best option...

for a customer happens to be lease-to-own with zero down payment but a higher overall cost, we report to the credit bureau to help them improve their credit."

"Recently we've started working with iConnect, a company that is helping us leverage technology to become more efficient, because we don't have 30 people to help us keep track of certain metrics to make decisions faster.

"I don't think our operation is unique, but we do measure traffic, sales metrics, our budgets and compute ratios. On the web side, we look at web traffic which everybody else does, plus bounce rate. Because of our credit operation, we do pay special attention to those metrics. My feeling is that the real secret to success concerning metrics is to actively measure and then make the time

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"We've found it isn't only the Spanish-speaking, credit-needing customer who has been overlooked or taken for granted."

to use them.

"All of this has allowed us to compete. From 2010 on, we've had double digit growth every year."

The founders are still "as active as they want to be" in Del Sol's operation. "My mother, Rosa, is Del Sol's CEO. She is our leader and she has the respect of everybody in the company.

"We own all our buildings. That's a lesson that my parents learned early on. With his background in civil engineering and

infrastructure, my dad enjoys the real estate business. That's great for me. One less thing to worry about! He makes sure the buildings are in good shape, up to code. Our tenants are happy."

Typically Alex spends a third of the time "hiring, motivating, leading our people, keeping everybody on task. A third is spent on merchandising, the rest on marketing and technology. Right now, in order to be successful, retailers have to be hands-on."

Customer Focus

Marketing becomes more complex in a multi-lingual multi-cultural community. "We've found it isn't only the Spanish-speaking, credit-needing customer who has been overlooked or taken for granted. Some retailers just don't want to deal with customers who have no choice but to buy their furniture from rent-to-own and lease-to-own places. But when

we changed our marketing focus, we found there are a lot of these people who want to furnish their homes. They speak many different languages. And they appreciate a store that treats them with respect, helps them navigate a very complex credit system to find the best credit option.

"Del Sol has a full disclosure policy for credit customers. We always explain two or three different finance options. If the best option for a particular customer happens to be lease-to-own with zero down payment but a higher overall cost, we report to the credit bureau to help them improve their credit. That way we can graduate our customers to zero percent interest financing with the Synchronys and Wells Fargos of the world.

"We treat our customers with respect and, more than anything else, it keeps our customers coming back.

"We do offer some credit



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"We treat all

customers equally regardless of their credit score, giving them lots of great options at affordable price points in stock for one day delivery. "



options directly online without the customer coming in. But at the end of the day our goal is to get customers into our stores. I don't see a sustainable, long-term model for online only credit stores at this point.

"The most important difference between customers who shop on line or in the stores is convenience. There are some age differences, but the online shopper wants convenience."

Technology

Alex expresses concern that there are many independent retailers "behind the curve" in implementing technology in their marketing range. "There are so many technology options for retailers. At every conference and Market we go to there's a new social media platform, a new add-on for your website, a new way to get positive reviews. Do you want kiosks? Are they touch screen? How about TVs all over your stores? There are a million different ways to implement technology! Independent retailers

need to choose carefully and ask, 'Is this new piece of technology going to help me sell more? Is it going to provide a better experience or save money? I think the independents need to look at this more closely than maybe some of the bigger guys who might have 50 people working on their websites. It's a bigger challenge for stores that have more limited resources, time and maybe talent to understand digital marketing, the newest and the latest and the greatest!"

Hiring & Retention

With the city's vibrant and competitive economy, finding good employees can be difficult. "Phoenix is a fast growing area and, yes, it has definitely been tough to find the right people. Businesses are paying over \$15 an hour for entry level positions. So companies have been forced to evolve if they want to keep talented people.

"We provide competitive salaries and great opportunities for advancement.

"During the hiring process we tell prospective employees that we are a mid-sized company that's going to listen to them. And we are more flexible with employee schedules than we've ever been. It's often more important for some of our younger employees to have some flexibility in their schedule than money.

"We've also partnered with Phoenix Community College here in town. Every employee who is on the management track can take community college courses completely covered by the company. The course must have a relationship to their job function. We have a business administration track and an interior design track.

"Other retailers might ask 'You're paying for their education! Aren't you scared that they're going to graduate and then get a different job?' My belief is that more often than not, they will see the benefit of working here. As we continue to expand we will create new, attractive positions for them to further their careers.

"We have seen benefit from



Del Sol has always been committed to helping the community and participates in projects year around.

"In-store employee training at Del Sol involves the development of personal empathy."

employees who take the design track. We don't offer our customers formal design services but customers do need design advice and a store manager who has taken design courses has the confidence to offer extra value to our customers. We don't want to be like some of those rent-to-own stores that offer customers one in brown, one in gray and maybe black. And then tell them they should accept that just because they are credit challenged.

Service

"We treat all customers equally regardless of their credit score, giving them lots of great options at affordable price points in stock for one day delivery. If they can't find what they are looking for we special order. All this because they deserve to have a beautiful home just like everybody else."

Del Sol's website invites customers to "Shop by Style". It offers design inspiration ranging from Traditional, Transitional, Industrial, Vintage Casual to Retro "Mad Men" with colorful supporting visuals; great incentive to visit the stores. And it offers an online survey to help with the styling of every room in the house.

In-store employee training at Del Sol involves the development

of personal empathy as well as the usual components of sales and customer service. Said Alex, "We have a traditional on-boarding process, training about policies and procedures. But what makes us different is we advise our line employees to put themselves in their customers' shoes. If they are not sure what a customer service decision should be, we direct them to do the right thing by the customer."

"For example, if a customer has an issue with a sectional that's a few days past its one year warranty, it's company policy not to 'nickel and dime' them. We're not going to tell them they are three days passed the warranty period. Our people have the authority to make the best possible decision in the moment. If they make the

"We empower our team to make the best possible decision in the moment."

wrong decision, that's OK. We figure it out later and learn from the experience. One bad decision is not going to put us out of business.

"We train our people to look at our mission statement and when they are not sure how to make a decision, read the mission statement, remember it and do what they think is best.

"We empower our employees to

make decisions, we trust them. And that's another reason why our employees like working for us."

Del Sol's Company Mission Statement. "Furnishing Dreams. Del Sol is committed to developing long term relationships by exceeding expectations in service, product quality and credit opportunities. Through honesty, credibility and the integrity of family ownership, we will provide genuine value and incomparable service that far surpasses our competition. Our entire team, both sales and support, will provide an exceptional experience and the highest level of professionalism through hard work, training and a sincere concern for the needs of our clients. Always with You!"



"We probably pay more attention than most retailers to our youth furniture offerings. For our Hispanic customers, family is very important."

Growth Areas

Alex sees two outstanding area potentials for big growth in product areas. "We probably pay more attention than most retailers to our youth furniture offerings. For our Hispanic customers, family is very important.

"We also take our mattress business very seriously, buying mattresses where we're confident that at any price point we offer the best mattresses available for our customers.

"There's a huge opportunity to offer mattress quality to mid-to-lower price point credit consumers. In many markets there isn't a good place for them to shop that has great bedding options that will positively affect the quality of their sleep and their health."

It's not always easy to flex to today's complex society. Said Alex, "At Del Sol we try to remain flexible, not attached to any process or any way of doing business. We are open to evaluate and change any store policy and every process on the fly.

"This has helped us to adapt to our younger consumers. People think our leadership drives this, but it's really our customers and sometimes our employees who

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"In many markets there isn't a good place for all customers to shop that has great bedding options."

are in the driver's seat.

"Lots of independent retailers have been doing things a certain way for a long time and don't want to look at ways they could or should change.

"Flexibility can be for something as simple as changing a dress code. For example, every retailer has administrative and service positions that are behind the scenes. We used to have strict uniform policy, business casual, with long sleeves and a Del Sol furniture dress shirt.

"As we started hiring younger people, the average age is now under 35, I noticed how uncomfortable they were in the clothing we were asking them to wear.

"So, we relaxed that rule to allow them to wear more casual clothing with the hope that it would make them work better, happier and stay with us longer.

"We made the back-end change, then transitioned into other departments and eventually all the way down to sales floors where we used to have an environment with dress shirts and ties.

"There are limits, but compared to other stores, the difference is night and day. I believe our more casual environment, including music, is much more in tune with what our customers really want.

"Nobody wants to enter a store and see four salespeople out front wearing ties, all ready to pounce!"

And then there's the large and attention-getting visual of the Super Hero! You'll see him dominating Del Sol Furniture's trucks. "A fun way, a visual cue, telling people that here at Del Sol we take customer service seriously!

"When we show up for a service call, we're the Super Hero there to fix the product or deal with an issue the first time!"

HFA's Next Gen Group

Alex is an enthusiastic member of Next Gen. "I love this industry and all the opportunities that it has given my family and our employees. My parents gave me a lot of freedom to make decisions, but I noticed that in other family-owned businesses that transition is not always as easy.

"I got involved with the WHFA and then the HFA. So, I figured I should also get involved with



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DEL SOL FURNITURE

HFA's Next Gen group to send a message to owners of family businesses that it's OK to trust your kids! Maybe it's not always the right decision to give them the keys and walk away. But it's OK to trust them, let them fail and find ways to experiment to ensure business growth into the next generation.

"I stay involved because I've met some phenomenal industry people, made some really good friends and get to help to create an environment where younger furniture industry professionals can hang out, create networks and become friends.

"Certainly many more young men and women can benefit by joining Next Gen if only because all of a sudden furniture market goes from, 'Oh man, I gotta go to furniture market, get up early, shop for furniture all day, go back to my hotel room, eat dinner by myself,' to 'Oh man, I can't wait to go to furniture market because I'm going to see all my friends,

we're going to have a good time and do our jobs and have fun at the same time!'

"We're always looking for more participants and future leaders to help us take Next Gen (Ngnow.org) to the next level."

The Future

"I think that we need to continue to stay true to our core consumer. I don't see that changing, but I can't tell you what our product is going to look like. I can't tell you what our stores are going to look like. I can't tell you what our website's going to look like. I probably can't even tell you what that's going to look like in five years!

"If anybody out there thinks their current business model will be the same 10 years from now, my guess is there isn't much hope for their business."

Alex said, "The bed-in-a-box guys have come in, disrupting the

"We're always looking for more participants and future leaders to help us take Next Gen to the next level."

market. Their mattresses aren't all that special, no different, better or worse, than any other mattress sold at retail. The only reason why they're succeeding is because they've created an experience they've been able to successfully market.

"And so, I think for us and furniture retailers in general, we should focus on the customer experience and on creating new and better experiences.

"For Del Sol, we want customers to continue to come into our stores, and, when they leave think, that was a great experience!"



"If anybody out there thinks their current business model will be the same 10 years from now, my guess is there isn't much hope for their business."

Pictured are Alex Macias and sister Minerva in the warehouse circa 1990.



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WAREHOUSE IMPROVEMENT

by David McMahon - Part 2

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

Editor's note: In the July/August issue David McMahon presented ideas to help furniture retailers improve their warehouse facilities and processes (see <http://www.furninfo.com/Authors/David percent20McMahon/6>). This time he introduces distribution center operations metrics essential to measuring the performance of any distribution center (DC).

The purpose of DC and warehouse operations is threefold.

- To fulfill sales promises to customers.
- Enable further sales.
- Add value to the products and services that the business sells.

Sales is mentioned three times in this definition because it's essential to reinforce the importance of the connection between customer-facing sales and customer-fulfillment operations. They are directly linked.

Too many companies fail to acknowledge this. Some operate as if sales and warehousing are an inconvenience to each other.

Let me be clear. There are no sales without fulfillment. There are no operations without sales. When both are strong and support each other well, businesses prosper.

DC Operations Measurement

What are the best ways to measure the performance of your sales and DC operations?

It is fairly routine in most companies to analyze sales floor performance. I've written extensively in previous Furniture World editions how sales teams use metrics such as revenue per customer, average sale, close rate, traffic, and GMROI.

It is less routine for home furnishings companies to analyze DC performance. So, the rest of this article will provide suggestions about metrics you can adopt to monitor the pulse of sales support operations. It is important to note that when using metrics:

1. Track what makes sense for your individual business sit-

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WAREHOUSE METRICS

uation. Don't track and put equal focus on every metric.

2. Set a "north-star" metric. This is the most important metric to improve.

3. Understand what other similar businesses can achieve, BUT focus on improving your benchmark average first, and adopt best practices.

4. Set actions, and be sure to review your metrics often.

Raw Data For XYZ Furniture

Here a real-life example for a company we will call XYZ Furniture that includes the following raw data for determining DC operation metrics:

- Annual sales volume supported by operations is

"Being too high here might mean an over capacity situation, while being too low can mean an ineffective use of resources and processes."

\$20,000,000.

- Annual cost of inventory related to that volume is \$10,000,000.
- The number of DC operations people is 25.
- The number of hours worked per week total is 1125.
- The number of trucks in use is five.
- The number of deliveries (shipments to customers) per week is 200.
- The number of deliveries per week at capacity is 250.
- The number of customer pick-ups per week is 50.
- The number of dock-height doors is 15.
- Total DC square footage (ground space) is 50,000.
- Total DC square footage used for staging for merchandise receiving, transfer, preparation and shipping is 10,000.
- The number of deliveries per week is 200.
- The number of delivery issues per week (customer complaints, damages, defects, returns, refusals) is 15.
- Inventory value reserved for customers in warehousing is \$800,000.

- Inventory value available for sale in warehousing is \$1,200,000.
- Inventory value non-sellable (i.e. damaged, missing) in warehousing is \$20,000.
- Total inventory value in warehousing is \$2,020,000.

Metrics Calculations

The chart on page 32 includes formulas for a number of warehouse metrics that can be observed using this raw data.

Metrics Interpretation

Sales per DC employee: At a volume of \$20 million in annual sales, XYZ's 25 employees support \$800,000 in sales volume each on average. I've observed ranges of \$300,000 to \$1.2 million for this metric in other operations.

Inventory cost sold per DC employee per year: \$400,000 is how much inventory is handled per employee. This disregards the margin salespeople sell at. Growing sales or cost sold per DC employee while maintaining operational effectiveness would produce more profit for XYZ Furniture.

Sales per truck: Each of XYZ

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"At XYZ Furniture,
one hour of labor supports \$342 in retail sales.
This is a top effective efficiency metric."

Furniture's five trucks currently ship \$4,000,000 at retail to customers per year. That would be \$100,000 per week each, or \$50,000 per week at cost sold. Calculating sales per truck helps measure the efficiency of each truck.

Sales per dock: \$1,333,333 at retail pass through the 15 docks in this operation per year. DC's are like a funnel with multiple spouts. The proper number of spouts (docks) are an important factor determining the speed of merchandise flow.

Sales per DC labor-hour per week: At XYZ Furniture, one hour of labor supports \$342 in retail sales. This is a top effective efficiency metric. I have seen ranges from under \$200 to over \$400. Being too high here might mean

an over capacity situation, while being too low can mean an ineffective use of resources and processes. It is important to calculate this metric and find your happy medium.

Floor space for staging: 20 percent of this operation's DC floor space is used for non-storage activities. It is critical to have the proper amount of room to flow inventory fast, without damages.

Number of DC people to operate per million in sales: It takes 1.25 people involved in warehouse operations to support \$1 million of retail sales. This metric is helpful when determining how to hire additional employees as sales operations grow, or reduce resources in the event of a sales decline. It also highlights the importance of a sales

force achieving a high gross margin. With higher gross margins, a given number of people can deliver a greater volume without adding extra cost. I've observed ranges of .8 to 2 people per million with this metric in other operations.

Percent of sales delivered (shipped to customer): seventy-five percent of sales at XYZ Furniture are shipped to customers. Twenty-five percent are picked up. Both require resources, and both have pluses and minuses. Delivery to customers generally generates extra cost. Appropriate shipping charges and/or margins need to be achieved to sustain DC costs with a high shipping percentage of sales. I've observed ranges of 50 percent to 100 percent with this metric in other operations.

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"Growing sales or cost sold per DC employee while maintaining operational effectiveness would produce more profit for XYZ Furniture."

Delivery success rate: ninety-three percent of the sales at XYZ Furniture are delivered without any issues. That means that seven percent have issues. These problems are costly in terms of customer satisfaction, labor hours, and lost margins. All operations should track this rate, identify the common issues, continually improve processes and setup incentive systems based on continuous improvement. I've observed ranges of 80 percent to 99 percent with this metric at other home furnishings operations.

Delivery percent to 100 percent : This operation is running at 90 percent to capacity for shipping. That means that up to 10 percent more could conceivably be delivered to customers before new resources need to be added.

Inventory value reserved for customers in warehousing (percent of total): Forty percent inventory is reserved for customers. There will always be a certain amount of inventory in any operation having reserved inventory status. The import-

ant thing to do is minimize the amount of time this inventory is kept in inventory. Shipping dates should be scheduled for just about all inventory housed in the DC. If this is being done, and there is still a significant backlog of reserved merchandise, additional capacity might need to be added, or existing resources and processes may need to be improved. I've observed ranges of 14 percent to 90 percent with this metric in other operations.

Inventory value available for sale in warehousing: Fifty-nine percent of inventory in XYZ Furniture's DC is salable. This should either be back-up stock of best sellers or merchandise that is currently in the process of being transferred to the floor for sale. Non-best selling merchandise or non-scheduled floor inventory in facilities other than showrooms, are cash killers.

Inventory value non-sellable (i.e. damaged, missing) in warehousing: One percent of inventory is total waste product in XYZ Furniture's DC. Operations should seek to keep this under one percent at all times and

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routinely perform cycle inventory checks to confirm. Ignorance of a problem is not the absence of a problem. I've observed ranges of .1 percent to seven percent with this metric in other furniture operations.

Warehouse Inventory Turns:

This operation turns its total warehouse inventory 4.95 times per year. Growing sales and margins while reducing the time merchan-

dise spends at DC facilities will maximize back-end operational effectiveness. I've observed ranges of 4 to 20 warehouse turns with this metric in other operations.

Days to Turn Warehouse Inventory: Speaking of time spent, in this example the inventory stays 72 days on average in the warehouse. I've observed ranges of 18 days to 92 days with this metric at other operations.

"Non-best selling merchandise or non-scheduled floor inventory in facilities other than showrooms, are cash killers."

Metric	Metric Formula	XYZ Furniture	Observed Range
Sales Per DC Employee	<i>Annual Sales Dollars / #Employees</i>	\$800,000	\$300M to \$1.2 MM
Inventory Cost Sold Per DC Employee Per Year	<i>Annual Inventory Cost / # DC Employees / 1 Year</i>	\$400,000	\$150,000 to \$600,000
Sales Per Truck	<i>Total Sales Dollars / # Trucks</i>	\$4,000,000	\$1.2 million to \$8 million
Sales Per Dock	<i>Annual Sales Dollars / #Docks</i>	\$1,333,333	\$0 (no docks) to \$4.5 million
Sales Per DC Labor-Hour Per Week	<i>Weekly Sales Dollars / Total hours Worked per week</i>	\$342	\$200->\$400
Floor Space For Staging	<i>Staging Floor Space / Total Floor Space</i>	20%	5%-55%
Number Of DC People To Operate Per Million In Sales	<i>#DC employees / (Annual Sales / \$1,000,000)</i>	1.25	.8-2
Percent Of Sales Delivered	<i>(Total Number of Sales - Sales Picked Up By Customers) / Total Number of Sales</i>	75%	50%-100%
Delivery Success Rate	<i>Deliveries Without Incident / Total Deliveries</i>	93%	80%-99%
Delivery Percent To 100 Percent Capacity	<i># of Deliveries / # of Deliveries at Full Capacity</i>	80%	50% - 99%
Inventory Value Reserved For Customers In Warehousing	<i>Inventory Dollars Not Scheduled For Delivery or Pick Up / Total Inventory Dollars</i>	40%	14%-90%
Inventory Value In Warehouse Available For Sale	<i>Dollars Of Salable Inventory / Total Dollars in Inventory</i>	59%	20% - 90%
Inventory Value Non-Sellable In Warehousing	<i>Non-Sellable Inventory / Total Inventory</i>	1%	.1%-7%
Warehouse Inventory Turns	<i>Cost of Inventory Sold / Warehouse Inventory</i>	4.95	4-20
Days To Turn Warehouse Inventory	<i>365 Days / Warehouse Turns</i>	74	18-92
Warehouse Inventory Dollars Per Warehouse Square Feet	<i>Warehouse Inventory / Square Feet</i>	\$40	\$15-\$50

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Warehouse Inventory Dollars per Warehouse Square Feet:

At 50,000 square feet of warehouse space and \$20 million in annual sales, this warehouse produces \$40 of sales per square foot. A good number here could indicate a facility that is purpose built with effective height and racking. A low number could also indicate a facility that is too large for its current volume, which in turn may indicate the ability to grow volume if it makes sense in the region's distribution market range. A very high number may indicate an operation that is at capacity and performing well for its sales volume. Alternatively, it could mean the facility is ineffective for the current operation and hindering sales growth. I've observed ranges of \$15 to \$50 with this metric in other operations.

Conclusion

When you interpret these metrics and apply them to your business you should consider your

unique situation, decide what is important, and develop actions to improve. Ultimately you should seek to benchmark against YOUR current standard, and use best industry practices to produce greater sales, margins, profit, and cash from your DC and warehousing operations.

Author's Note: In our LEAN DC operations performance group we compile a fair number of additional metrics, but the metrics presented in this article are a good start for any operation that wants to keep track of DC metrics itself. Additional measurements can include more detailed employee job functions, service related items, racking analysis, and expense spend for sales support facilities, equipment, supplies and people.

About David McMahon: *David McMahon is VP of Professional Services at PROFITsystems, a HighJump Company. He certified as a Supply Chain Professional, Management Accountant, and Kaizen Facilitator. David directs*

five 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.

"A high number may indicate an operation that is at capacity and performing well for its sales volume.

Alternatively it could mean the facility is ineffective for the current operation and hindering sales growth."

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Since the business was founded over 30 years ago, it has been a core company philosophy that in order to produce a superior product, it is of utmost importance to take care of the skilled artisans who create it, as well as the environment in which they live.

Wellness Programs

A large focus has been placed on the health and happiness of Huntington House employees through its Workplace Wellness program, which has been going strong for approximately 10 years. Through this program, employees receive incentives for healthy lifestyle choices and participating in preventive health screenings, and they are also provided the opportunity to meet one-on-one with a wellness coach and participate in on-site fitness classes.

Community Service

From the top down, many family members work together at Huntington House, so there is a strong connection between the company and the

local Hickory community. Every year employees participate in the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure as well as fundraising events for local schools and athletic team sponsorships.

Sustainable Design

Huntington House was a "green" company long before that became a trending buzz word. Since the beginning, its owners have felt it was their responsibility to run a manufacturing business that leaves as small a footprint as possible. The company is a proud member of the Sustainable Furnishings Council and continuously strives to find new ways to improve manufacturing practices to have a positive impact on the planet.

Huntington House is committed to building products that last a lifetime, using only the finest materials and time-tested manufacturing techniques. The longer its products last, the less they need to be replaced, ultimately reducing landfill waste.

Locally Made

The company has resisted the trend to reduce costs by moving production overseas. All Huntington House products are crafted by hand at their headquarters in Hickory, NC. To reduce waste incurred in transportation, they first seek materials that are produced locally, then domestically, and finally internationally.

Huntington House has instituted company-wide initiatives to reduce the amount of electricity, water and paper consumed and continues to seek oppor-

tunities to reduce the amount of waste materials that are generated as a result of their operations. They currently recycle paper, plastic, aluminum, cardboard, foam, fiber, fabric scraps, wood scraps and ink cartridges.

"A sense of corporate responsibility has always been deeply ingrained in our company's culture."

Eco-Friendly Materials

The company has also committed to using environmentally responsible materials. These include soy-based foams, regenerated fibers, recycled cotton padding, recycled steel springs and strapping, water-based paints, recycled cardboard packaging and fabrics using natural fibers.

Corporate Responsibility

President Corey Teague said, "A sense of corporate responsibility has always been deeply ingrained in our company's culture. We actively participate in taking care of our employees' health and well being, as well as local community outreach and charitable support in addition to our efforts to produce the most environmentally responsible product that we can."

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Posh+Lavish:

The Seismic Shift In Luxury Consumers

How This Ultra-Premium Mattress Can Make the World a Better Place

Posh+Lavish uses natural materials such as wool, cotton, latex, and certified non-toxic water based glue because they are what the “new” luxury consumer expects. “Our primary target audience is today’s luxury customer,” said Kurt Ling, Principal of Posh+Lavish, “one of the things that has made our brand and any one of its five collections valuable to retailers is we understand what is relevant to today’s ultra premium consumer.”

The luxury mattress category was like many other luxury product categories in the early 2000s according to most trend watchers. The luxury consumer was wooed by old world charm, external frivolities and a touch of gilding. A high ticket of a product was justified by mostly external touches. The automobile industry had gold emblems and Corinthian leather and the mattress industry had gold corner guards and Belgium Damask.

Today's Luxury Customers Want Tangible Benefits

Today’s luxury consumer is looking for something very different than the luxury customer of the 2000s. Today’s luxury consumer pays top dollar for products that have significant, down to earth, internal material differences that deliver a tangible benefit. Posh+Lavish designs mattresses using wool, cotton, and latex to create the longest lasting mattress

they know how to build. Additionally, these natural materials are superior at climate control for the sleeper. They help the mattress breathe, wick moisture, regulate the sleeper’s temperature, and can help muscles relax through the night.

A Luxury Brand That Uses Natural Materials

It is easy to put Posh+Lavish in the Natural or “Clean” mattress category because of their commitment to natural components. Their cotton barriers are stretch knit rather than woven and imported from Germany. They use a generous amount of wool on all four sides of their mattress; twelve pounds in a queen size mattress to be exact. The wool is long fiber wool for long lasting resilience, medium course grade so the mattress feels

richer, washed in infant shampoo and never chemically treated for cleanliness and imported from New Zealand and Australia. “Inasmuch as we use the finest, most luxurious, natural materials we can buy,” said Ling, “at the end of the day, we are really just a luxury brand that uses natural materials rather than a natural or ‘clean’ brand.”

Uniquely Different

What makes the company uniquely different than all others is their width of comfort in their collections. Posh+Lavish makes some of the firmest mattresses available and some of the plushest mattresses available in the United States.

A Socially Responsible Brand

Posh+Lavish not only builds their mattress with components that are more sustainable, healthier, and ethically sourced, but their commitment to social responsibility is second to none. Posh+Lavish donates 25 percent of its profits to CURE International which treats children with hydrocephalus, club feet, bowed legs, and cleft lips in parts of the world where care for these conditions is not available. Posh+Lavish funds hundreds of surgeries every year that are both life saving and life changing for children that will never hear of the brand.

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"Posh+Lavish not only builds their mattress with components that are more sustainable, healthier, and ethically sourced, Posh+Lavish donates 25% of its profits to CURE International."

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The Norwalk Furniture Story

Sustainable, Local, Healthy, Relationship Driven & Community Minded

A shift in focus at Norwalk Furniture toward sustainability and localism occurred in 2008 when twelve local families bought the 116 year old, Ohio-based fine upholstered furniture manufacturer.

"From the very start," recalls Dan White, Norwalk's CEO, "Norwalk's executive team was tasked with finding ways to become a 'locavore' organization, embrace sustainability, and be a great community citizen. The idea was that profitability would follow from doing the right thing."

Key components for fulfilling this mandate include all-important relationship building among craftsmen and craftswomen, Norwalk's vendors and customers. It doesn't end there. Norwalk's products are made in the USA with a focus on sourcing from American suppliers and local artisans.

Combined with a beautiful tradition of hand craftsmanship, unparalleled style, quality and options, Norwalk Furniture's sustainable, ethical, local story resonates with today's furniture-buying customers.



Sustainable & Healthy

- Locally sourced exposed wood is fashioned by talented Amish and Mennonite craftsmen.
- Sustainably harvested engineered hardwood frames are shaped by computer-aided precision cutting processes.
- Mortise and tenon joinery, glue, nails and superior craftsmanship ensure designs are built to last... in the home, not in the landfill.
- Sturdy recycled-steel springs and components are sourced keeping in mind their environmental footprint.
- Norwalk textile sourcing, including many of the leading performance fabrics, favors American manufacturers. Sunbrella, Revolution and Crypton constructions are popular family-friendly textiles, easy to clean when upholstered on Norwalk's beautiful sofas and chairs.
- Norwalk uses comfortable foams and fibers free from toxic chemicals. Foams are certified by an accredited lab to meet criteria for physical performance, content, indoor emissions and environmental stewardship. Cushions measure up to TB117-2013 flammability standards.

Community Minded

Part of sustainability and being a locavore is giving back to the community. Norwalk provides hundreds of jobs in its local area, including generational artisans carrying on the traditions of their parents and grandparents.

Where possible, Norwalk uses the services of local trucking, accounting, insurance and other support services. It is an active sponsor of the Norwalk Economic Development Council, which supports growth and development in the community. Whether furnishing the Fire House, supporting a women's softball or co-ed bowling team, winning the best 4th of July float (a giant chair), the Norwalk community spirit shines forth. For more information visit www.nowalkfurniture.com.

"From the very start, Norwalk's executive team was tasked with finding ways to become a 'locavore' organization, embrace sustainability, and be a great community citizen."

Generational artisans carry on the traditions of their parents and grandparents.

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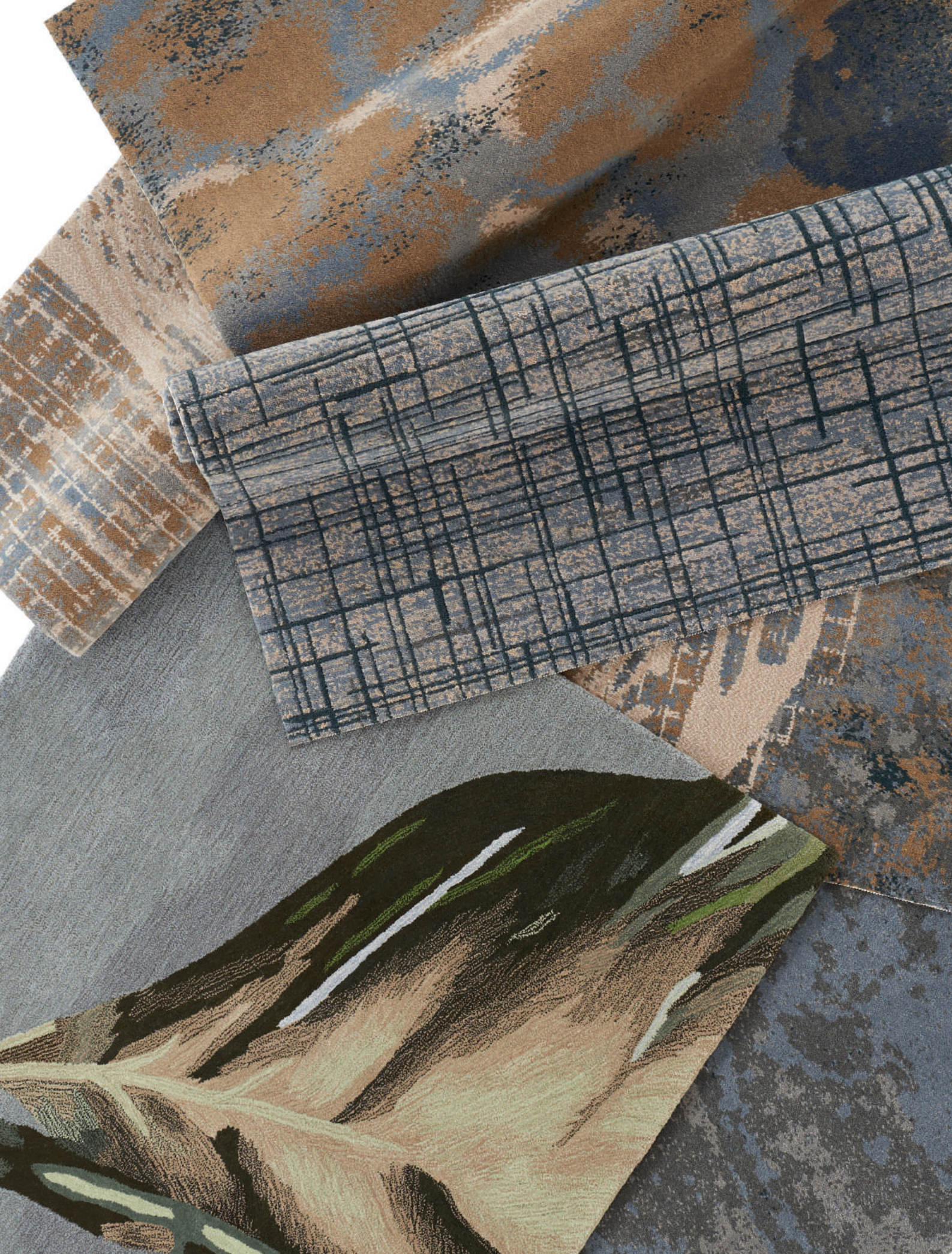


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FOOTPRINTS

SUSTAINABLE EVOLUTION

By Susan Inglis with sidebars by Giles Jackson, Ph.D.

Current research shows consumer priorities have shifted over the past nine years, representing a big opportunity for furnishings retailers.



As the sustainability movement has evolved, consumer attitudes surrounding sustainability have changed. Recent research by the Sustainable Furnishings Council (SFC) suggests that home furnishings retailers and manufacturers now have a potent opportunity to address these changes, better engage consumers, and serve pressing societal needs.

The Sustainability Umbrella

Since the SFC was founded 12 years ago, a number of causes have come to be associated with the sustainability movement, including climate change, healthy living, environmental safety, animal rights and social equity. Sustainability is an umbrella term, and it's important to keep in mind that each customer has his or her own personal concerns regarding sustainability.

Consumer Research

SFC's research targets people who purchased home furnishings over a 12 month period and match the profile of those likely

to be shopping for their homes; homeowners, aged 30-60, with at least \$50,000 in annual income. Consumers were queried on a range of sustainability issues and asked how concerned they were about each. When SFC started researching in 2009, approximately half the women we interviewed were worried about a range of issues, from climate change to extinction of species, to indoor air quality.

By 2017, that number had nearly doubled with just about all respondents worried about a range of issues. The updated

"A number of causes have come to be associated with the sustainability movement, including climate change, healthy living, environmental safety, animal rights and social equity."



Know what your furniture is made of.
Know where your furniture is coming from.
Know you are doing your part to sustain
a healthy future.

Join the Sustainable Furnishings Council for education, information, resources, guidance.
Shop SFC members for products and services.



WHAT WOOD IS GOOD?

Deforestation is a problem around the world.

LOOK FOR

- Wood certified by a reputable organization like FSC
- Solid North American hardwoods
- Reclaimed and recycled materials
- Plantation-grown wood, such as Mango
- Fast-growing renewables like Bamboo



WHAT FOAM FOR HOME?

Foams and wraps are usually petroleum-based.

LOOK FOR

- Natural latex from rubberwood trees
- Bio hybrids that mix soy and petrol
- Down, kapok or other natural wraps
- Spun wraps from recycled bottles
- No FR chemicals added



WHAT LEATHER IS BETTER?

Leather production uses land, transport, and chemicals.

LOOK FOR

- Vegetable-Tanned
- Non-toxic dyes
- US or EU leather production and manufacture
- Genuine leather rather than PVC substitute

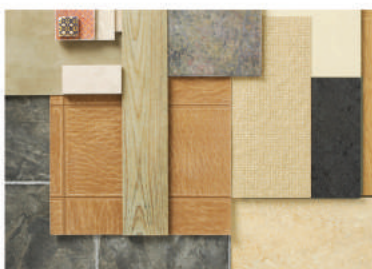


WHAT FABRIC IS FANTASTIC?

Textile production is chemical intensive.

LOOK FOR

- Certified organics, especially for cotton
- Other natural fibers such as wool, linen, hemp that require less water in production
- Recycled content, especially in synthetics
- No FR chemicals, fluorinated stain treatments, anti-microbials, or PVC



WHAT FINISH IS FINE?

Finishes can off-gas VOC's like formaldehyde.

LOOK FOR

- Water-based lacquers, not acetone
- Natural finishes like waxes and natural oils
- Certified No or Low VOC



WHAT IS AN LCA?

A Life Cycle Assessment tracks environmental impact of production from extraction of raw materials, through processing, manufacturing and transportation and the use, reuse and recycling of the product until it returns to the earth as a nutrient or toxin.



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"The premium they will pay is modest, about the same they often say they would pay for attributes such a brand they favor."

study reveals a large shift. When consumers were asked about their own experiences with indoor air quality and weather-related disasters, 94 percent said they believe hazardous indoor air quality is an issue, and 30 percent said they, or someone in their household, are directly affected. Eighty-three percent said they believe global warming is an issue, and 33 percent said they've had personal experience dealing with the issue. They are worried about these problems because they are suffering the consequences.

Sustainability & The Hierarchy Of Furnishings Needs

The consumers SFC survey already know that driving less makes a difference in carbon dioxide pollution, as does adjusting thermostats, drinking less bottled water and shopping differently. When shopping for home furnishings, sustainability is not the top most concern on their list. Their responses predictably reveal they shop first for style, quality

and price points that suit them best. But, over 90 percent express interest in buying environmentally safe home furnishing provided the cost and style is similar to other options. Half of them are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products. The premium they will pay is modest, only about 10 percent. That is the same they often say they will pay for attributes other than eco-friendly, such a brand they favor.

Looking at how consumers' priorities have shifted over the years, we also see a great deal of concern now over toxic waste pollution as a specific issue, but more significant is that consumers are registering their concern through their product choices.

Using Concern As An Engagement Tool

Shoppers' concerns can and should be considered by retailers as engagement tools. If your sales staff is aware that 94 percent of the shoppers who walk into furnishings stores are concerned

about indoor air quality, they can when appropriate, add a sustainable product feature/benefit to their presentations. Furnishings may include VOCs, flame retardants and other compounds (see below) that may be of concern to shoppers. This can make a difference in closing a sale or outselling an online or brick and mortar competitor.

Likewise, knowing that 83 percent have at least some inkling that there is a connection between carbon footprint and weather disasters, your sales staff may be able to point out products made by companies who share their concerns through a commitment to lowering their environmental footprint.

Complex Supply Chains

We do business in a global market place, and furnishings products have a complex supply chain. Raw materials may come from one continent, be processed on another into a furniture component, be shipped to a third manufacturer for assembly, then shipped once again for final sale. A robust sourcing policy will help you manage this complex supply chain. It will give your sales staff confidence, and empower them to engage consumers with a story that differentiates your retail operation through your commitment

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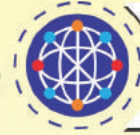
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for Daily Factory
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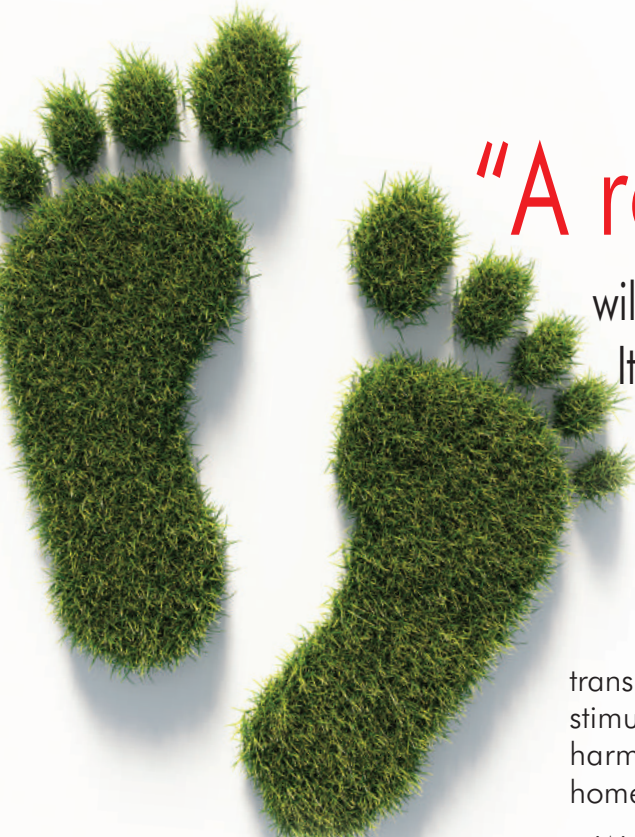


Textiles



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"A robust sourcing policy

will help you manage this complex supply chain.

It will give your sales staff confidence, and empower them to engage consumers with a story that differentiates your retail operation."

to implement best practices for sustainability.

Elements Of A Robust Sourcing Policy

The SFC can provide support and tools for companies to create robust wood sourcing policies, and help them determine what harmful chemicals might be in the products they buy. In 2017, SFC announced the "What's it made of?" Initiative to encourage

transparency in supply chains and stimulate innovation to reduce harmful chemical inputs into home furnishings.

Working in partnership with the American Sustainable Business Council, the Center for Environmental Health, and Parson's The New School Healthy Materials Lab, five harmful substances commonly found in furnishings products have been identified. VOCs like formaldehyde are found in many finishes and glues; flame retardant chemicals may be present in foams and fabrics; highly fluorinated stain treatments are sometimes applied to fabrics; antimicrobials can be incorporated into mattresses and textile constructions; and PVC, also known as vinyl, is found in faux leather, fabric backings, and many other products. The initiative includes a simple "Pledge to ASK". Industry professionals can find this pledge at sustainablefurnishings.org, and can also make use of a Supply Chain Questionnaire, which helps clarify what might be in the products they specify. So far, over 300 industry professionals have begun probing their suppliers to get good answers to that key question, "What's it made of?"

Harmful chemicals can be found in a range of furnishings products and components, so industry professionals frequently turn to SFC to ask, "Where to start?" The simple question, "What's it made of?" can set you on the path to providing your customers with more environmentally safe products. Once you learn what is in your supply chain, you can set your priorities and create a robust purchasing policy. Knowing you care will also inspire your suppliers to bring you more alternatives in future seasons.

Since healthy forests are key to climate regulation, the SFC also has an initiative to support companies that want to reduce their contribution to the problem of deforestation.

Other Ways To Reduce Environmental Footprint

Even before your next trip to Market, there are things to do in stores and offices to reduce a corporate environmental footprint.

Recycling: To start with, make sure you recycle as much as you possibly can. Do you have more recycle bins than trash cans? Are you recycling all packaging waste? Many companies save

"Gallery Furniture in Texas makes a large point of buying American-made goods, and emphasizes all the advantages of that choice."

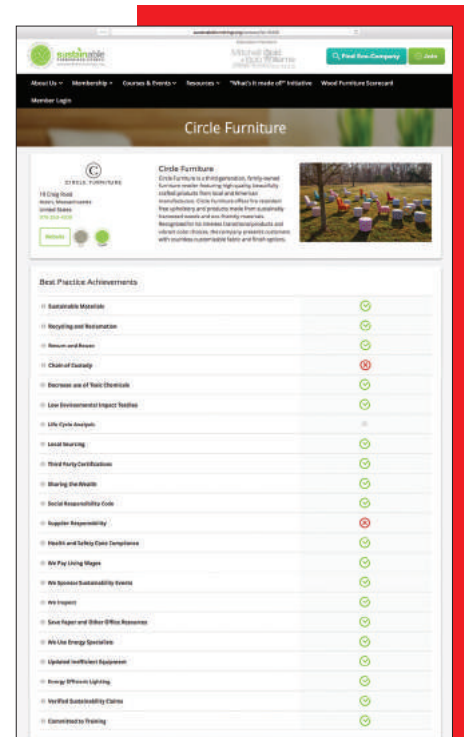
money and other resources by inviting their local solid waste facility to provide a free assessment. Since overcrowded landfills are a problem in every community, these pros are happy to help you figure out how to throw away less.

Electrical Usage: Another simple step to reduce resource consumption is to cut electricity consumption. Is your HVAC system running as efficiently as it can? Are you burning the most efficient and long-lasting light bulbs available? Using less electricity

Consumers can search for SFC member companies on sustainablefurnishings.org such as Circle Furniture (right), to see "Best Practice Achievements" for eco-friendly and environmentally safe furnishings.

will save money while cutting CO2 emissions. Since the grid is overstretched in every part of the country, your local utility will be happy to provide an assessment.

While you are at it, consider if you can make use of your roof. Will solar panels work for you? If not, how about installing a green roof? Either would give you much to discuss in your marketing cam-



paings, while also making a big difference in sustaining a healthy future.

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"SFC decided to look at the largest retailers in North America, and to engage them in a conversation about their wood sourcing policies."



Responsible Wood Sourcing Policy	Points
Responsible wood sourcing policy is on website	3
Policy contains commitment to avoid sourcing illegal and/or controversial wood	2
Policy includes commitment to source certified wood – any certification system	2
Policy includes preference for Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified and/or recycled/reclaimed wood	2
Responsible Sourcing Practices & Performance	
Company publishes quantitative responsible sourcing goals/targets	1
Company publicly reports on progress made towards responsible sourcing goals/targets	2
3rd party verification of public reporting	1
Company reports more than 25% of wood furniture purchased or sold is certified to any certification system	2
Company reports sourcing more than 25% FSC and/or recycled/reclaimed wood	2
Additional Actions	
Anything at all on website about sustainability?	1
Website has a statement on sourcing legal and/or responsible wood	1
Visibly offers on website that recycled/reclaimed wood products are for sale	1
Visibly offers on website that wood furniture certified under any forest certification system is for sale	2
Visibly offers on website that FSC-certified wood furniture is for sale	2
TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE	24

Transportation: Interestingly, transportation emissions recently overtook emissions from electricity production in the U.S. Most stores can reduce transportation emissions by planning more efficient delivery routes and choosing the most efficient delivery trucks available. But you can also make a difference socially when you encourage employees to use public transportation and to car-pool. You will find they appreciate working for a company that encourages and rewards a lighter carbon footprint.

Sustainable Marketing Ideas

Some people set out to change the world through sustainable practices. A few adopt sustainable practices to increase sales, but

most are somewhere in between. Here are five ways SFC's retail members have leveraged their sustainable inclinations to create branding buzz:

Circle Furniture: Boston-based Circle Furniture capitalizes on their conviction that a healthy home starts with a healthy environment. Circle shops their sustainable values and communicates these values to their customers.

Sklar: Sklar in Boca Raton has sent several staff members to SFC's accredited training, GREEN-leaders, and advertises that they have GREEN Accredited Professionals on staff, to answer customers questions.

Gallery Furniture: Gallery focuses on buying American-made.

The company communicates the advantages of that choice, including less pollution in production and transport, as well as support for the local economy.

Domaci: Bethlehem Pennsylvania-based Domaci runs a series of #SustainableSaturday. See <https://domacihome.com/blogs/domacidispatch/sustainable-saturday> for details.

Lawrance Furniture: Lawrance Furniture in San Diego includes a long list of their sustainability initiatives on their website as well as in-store signage.

What Are The Largest Home Furnishings Retailers Doing?

Furniture is the third largest user of wood resources, behind



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Sidebar 1:

Purpose Driven Sales

by Giles Jackson, Ph.D.

Purpose-driven sales are on the rise. A third of global consumers now choose to buy brands based on their social and environmental impact, according to Unilever's recent survey of 20,000 adults across five countries. Crucially, the fact that their claims were backed up with information on real purchasing decisions shows that the "say-do" gap is closing. Moreover, one in five respondents said they would choose a brand if its sustainability credentials were made clearer on packaging or in marketing.

An estimated \$1 billion opportunity exists for brands that meet this need, says Unilever.

This is borne out by the group's own financial performance. Of its hundreds of brands, those that have integrated sustainability into their purpose and products, such as Dove and Ben & Jerry's, delivered nearly half the company's global growth in 2015. "Sustainability isn't a nice-to-have for businesses," says Keith Weed, Unilever's Chief Marketing and Communications Officer -- "it's a strategic imperative."

"These are the Millennials and they have a completely new set of values. They want committed brands with authentic products."

There are multiple factors driving this, foremost among which is a major demographic shift. Global Millennial spending power is set to overtake generation X by 2020 and will continue to rise. That matters because the lifestyle and consumption patterns of this group (aged 22 to 37 years old) are different. As Emmanuel Faber, chief executive of Danone, put it: "Consumers are looking to 'pierce the corporate veil' in our industry and to look at what's behind the brand." These are the Millennials and they have a completely new set of values. "They want committed brands with authentic products," he says. "Natural, simpler, more local and if possible small, as small as you can." Since these values transcend product categories, this should play well for American furniture companies that pay attention to these trends.

SUSTAINABLE EVOLUTION

construction and paper production, so it is clear we have some responsibility to save the forests of the world. It has often struck us at SFC that companies might not know how to actually take responsibility. SFC, therefore, took a look at how wood and wood furniture are sourced in our industry.

Working with National Wildlife Federation, SFC engaged with some Top-100 home furnishings retailers regarding their wood sourcing policies. The results are published on a dedicated website (<https://furniturescorecard.nwf.org/scorecard/>). Of the 57 companies studied, seven scored in the Top Tier. Another six earned enough points to score honorable mention, and an additional two companies signed a pledge to make use of the available resources to improve their policies, and so their scores. As a result of the initiative, to date 12 companies have improved their scores, a significant percentage for the industry's impact.

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"The simple question,

'What's it made of?' can set you on the path to providing customers with more environmentally safe products."

resources for companies of any size that want to review their wood sourcing policies. More information can be found at <https://furniturecorecard.nwf.org/scorecard>, and at <https://sustainablefurnishings.org/resource-library/search?combine=&topic=232>. Further, using the guidance above, we suggest you talk about your purchasing policy from the moment you develop it. You will find yourself in as many interesting conversations for consumer engagement as for supply chain management.

Conclusion

This month, SFC celebrates 12 years of existence with the annual Open Membership Meeting during High Point Market. The first step toward reducing energy consumption, better managing supply chains, and inspiring others to take action, can be the hardest, but it's also the most important.

The World Economic Forum has identified climate change as the greatest threat to the world economy. It may be more of a threat to our home furnishings businesses than many in our industry have realized. Not all of

our customers are concerned, but SFC research has shown that most are. Some sustainable practices add to cost, but others reduce operational expenditures and create marketing and sales opportunities that will only increase over time.

About Susan Inglis: Susan Inglis is Executive Director of the Sustainable Furnishings Council, and resident expert with the organization she helped found in 2006. She has led SFC to work with industry leaders to establish criteria to gauge the sustainability of furniture products and practices; develop programs for educating all sectors of the industry; and attract hundreds of companies to membership. Inglis is also founder and owner of From The Mountain, a company that imports hand spun cashmere yarn from Afghanistan, providing safe income for over 100 women there. Inglis serves on the Board of the American Sustainable Business Council and was awarded a 2017 Visionary Leadership award by the NC Business Council.

About The SFC: SFC member companies make a public and verifiable commitment to sustain-

ability, to transparency, and to continuous improvement. Visitors to <http://sustainablefurnishings.org> can research companies, visit SFC member companies' websites, and make use of a rich resource library.

About Giles Jackson: Prof Jackson teaches sustainable business strategy at the AACSB-accredited Byrd School of Business at Shenandoah University and wrote among the first doctoral dissertations on the topic of business and sustainability twenty-five years ago at Virginia Tech. A practicing entrepreneur, he previously held executive positions in the wind energy and manufacturing sectors and recently completed a graduate course in environmental management at Harvard University. Giles serves on the international advisory board of a UNESCO biosphere reserve in Vietnam and on the standards committee of the Sustainable Furnishings Council. He's currently writing an article on ecotourism for the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Environmental Science and now offers bespoke courses in sustainability worldwide. Contact him with questions or comments at gjackson@su.edu or 202- 257 -4854.

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Sidebar 2:

Sustainability Price Tag

by Giles Jackson, Ph.D.

Recently, according to a survey of 30,000 adults by Accenture and Havas Media Group, people think business is as accountable as governments for improving their lives. Yet seventy-two percent say that business is failing to take care of the planet and society as a whole. The point is that while brands and companies impact positively on people's lives, this comes with a sizable price tag. According to The Sustainability Consortium, global production and use of consumer goods accounts for more than 60 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions, 80 percent of water usage, two-thirds of tropical forest loss, and

ipal solid waste will be generated annually by 2025. Furniture waste (f-waste) alone is an 8.5 million-ton annual trash problem in the U.S., according to Waste360.

What will happen as nearly 2.5 billion more people join the global consuming class over the next few decades? The benefits provided by our consumer goods will come with an increasingly sizable sustainability price tag. Moreover, as technology accelerates product life cycles -- pushing fast fashion

into more and more product categories -- these impacts are likely to worsen. It doesn't have to be this way. Incentivizing and supporting manufacturers and their suppliers to design more sustainable products, as SFC is doing, is one of our biggest levers for driving sustainability in the furniture industry globally.

The Sustainability Consortium (TSC) is a global non-profit organization working to transform the consumer goods industry by partnering with leading companies to define, develop, and deliver more sustainable products. For more information visit www.sustainabilityconsortium.org.

"As technology accelerates product life cycles -- pushing fast fashion into more and more product categories -- these impacts are likely to worsen."

75 percent of forced and child labor. Nearly 20 percent of industrial water pollution comes from textile dyeing and treatment, and if current trends continue, 2.2 billion tons of munic-

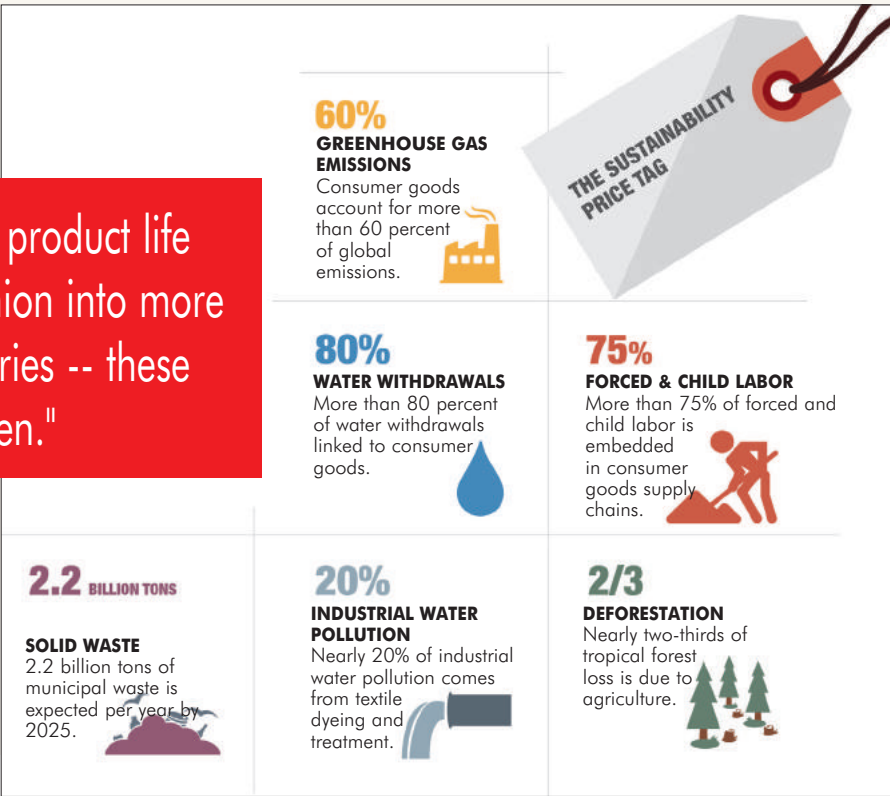


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The Circular Furniture Economy

by Giles Jackson, Ph.D.

The global economy has long run on a linear, “take-make-dispose” model. Taking inspiration from nature, the emerging “circular economy” model redefines waste as a material input. Accenture estimates that shifting to the circular economy could open up \$4.5 trillion in new economic potential by 2030. In an era of volatile input prices, this model makes practical sense. Business leaders are exploring whether greater resource productivity can help them protect their margins, and governments are getting on board.

According to the Institution

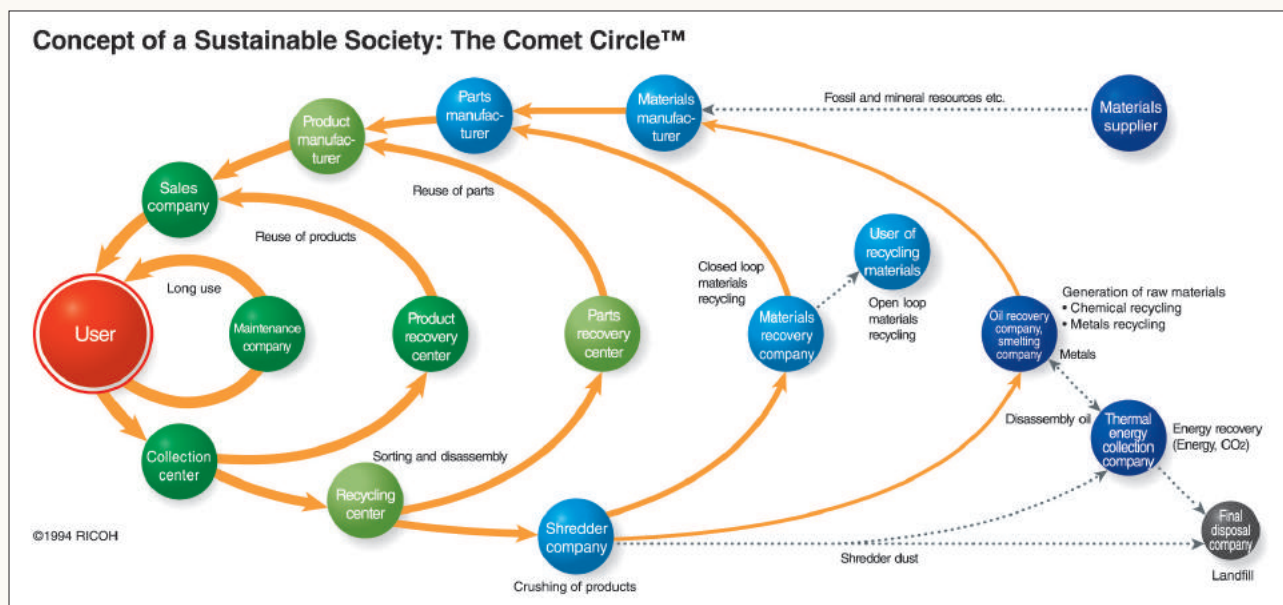
Concept of a Sustainable Society: The Comet Circle™ (below) has been reproduced with permission. Copyright© 1994 Ricoh.

of Environmental Sciences (IES), there are at least three good reasons for shifting from a linear model to a circular one. First, existing recovery systems are suboptimal. For example, in mobile phones, only 17 of the 40 elements used in their manufacture are recovered at all, with the rest ending up in slag, even in the best recycling plants. And according to the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, 95 percent of plastic packaging material value - \$120 billion annually - is lost after first use. This is not only environmentally damaging, it's also terribly uneconomical.

Second, the environmental burden of products is shifting upstream, from consumer use towards manufacturing. For example, around 75 percent of

carbon emissions from electronic devices are generated before they are sold. "This means that keeping products in use for longer, or recovering and reusing them, is the best means of reducing environmental impacts," says IES. Third, by decreasing the use of virgin materials, a

"There are countless examples of enterprising companies salvaging everything from fishing nets to aluminum, to make furniture for the modern world."





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circular economy can dramatically reduce emissions and negative environmental impacts. For example, the embodied carbon in recycled aluminum is typically one-tenth of that of virgin aluminum. In addition, reuse or recycling avoids mining waste risks, such as those relating to red mud in aluminum production.

While conducting research for my dissertation on business and sustainability, I happily stumbled across The Ricoh Group's Comet Circle™ model, which shows how Ricoh and its partners (suppliers, customers and recycling companies) put principles into practice.

The cycle begins with materials suppliers (see graphic on previous page) that harvest materials from the natural environment. These are converted into a product (such as a multifunction printer/copier) that is sold to customers and maintained for as long as possible. "The Ricoh Group puts priority on reusing and recycling products and parts, expressed as the inner loops of the Comet Circle, to return used products to their highest economic value," says the company. "When a part cannot be reused in a product, we will recycle it as a material. In such cases, we make every effort to recycle the part into a material with a quality as high as possible or to recycle it in the closed loop recycling system, or

a system which allows the recycled material to be used within the Group, thereby achieving the highest possible economic value. We also repeat recycling as many times as possible under the 'multi-tiered recycling system' to reduce the need to use new materials and ultimately reduce the volume of waste generated." In Ricoh's world, nothing but shredder dust reaches the landfill.

Such initiatives are commonplace in modern day Japan. Japan's lead is largely explained by the old adage, "necessity is the mother of invention." In a small, industrialized and resource-constrained country, economic survival depends on doing more with less.

From Wehler's of Denmark to Emeco in the U.S., there are countless examples of enterprising companies salvaging everything from fishing nets to aluminum, to make furniture for the modern world. The question, as ever, is how to scale things up. One lesson from Japan is that governments need to help design circular systems, so that businesses can design circular products and services. In Japan, the law requires consortia of manufacturers to run disassembly plants, ensuring they directly benefit from recovering materials and parts. "Companies therefore invest for the long term in recycling infra-

structure," explains IES. "And because they own both manufacturing and recovery facilities, companies send product designers to disassembly factories to experience the frustrations of taking apart a poorly designed product. Some companies even put prototypes through the disassembly process to make sure they are easy to recover."

This spirit of deep collaboration is also evident in Sweden, where 30 players in the furniture sector have joined forces to effect a paradigm shift. With a sizable grant from Vinnova (Sweden's Innovation Agency), a platform for a large-scale transition to circular business models is being created, including devising systems for labeling and certifying reused furniture, engaging customers around procurement and securing circular processes on the part of manufacturers.

"This spirit of deep collaboration is also evident in Sweden, where 30 players in the furniture sector have joined forces to effect a paradigm shift."

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CHIP WADE

by Melody Doering

Chip Wade, builder, interior & furniture designer, media personality and consultant has a unique point of view about the future of furniture design, sales and marketing.

In this Design & Designer installment, Furniture World speaks with Chip Wade, the craftsman, engineer, interior designer, consultant, furniture designer and media presence. He is the founder and CEO of the architecture, design and media firm Wade Works Creative. Armed with a ready smile, a degree in mechanical engineering and a talent for creating multi-functional furniture, he has a unique point of view about the future of interior and furniture design. Chip got his media start in 2007, lending his carpentry skills to the Atlanta team of HGTV's *Designed to Sell*. Since then he has been the host, designer and executive producer of the Emmy Award Winning series, *Elbow Room*, and appeared on HGTV's *Curb Appeal: The Block*, *Ellen's Design Challenge*, HGTV's *Showdown*, HGTV's *Design Star*, HGTV's *Wise Buys*, *Oprah*, and *CNN*.

We asked Chip how his educational background helped inform his work in home furnishings

design and marketing.

"There were always lots of projects going on in my family's house growing up. My dad had a workshop and taught me pretty much how to do everything. I attended Georgia Tech and studied mechanical engineering, which I thought would be a good fit. When I realized my passion was to design and build, I switched to structural engineering. Actually, that's what I was doing when I got cast on a series for HGTV almost 14 years ago. I was the sidekick character, the demo guy, the closet builder, custom furniture maker, remodeler, electrician,

"I never try to intentionally downplay the aesthetic, but I always say, making it look great is the easy part."

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"I've designed spaces, for large families, single folks, for people from different cultures, and those going through all kinds of life changes, from big entertainers to people who need to be entertained."

plumber. I basically just did whatever it took to get the job done.

"I built a reputation for being able to make a lot out of a little, which led to hosting my own series called 'Elbow Room'. I started a design and build firm about nine years ago, and also a production company."

Wade Works Creative

"Today, my company, Wade Works Creative, operates three businesses in architecture and design, real estate and production that all work together. We service mostly lifestyle brands like Kohler, Wolf, Sub-Zero, Mohawk Flooring, and Daltile, doing a lot of interactive content, video, and virtual space creation. We also offer real-client services for residential and commercial customers, both in North America and internationally. Our process is incredibly virtual – very interactive.

"Over the past 15 years, Wade

Works Creative has done a lot of space planning. We've done over 1500 renovations, new construction, custom home builds, and custom interior design. By working with many hundreds of families, we've identified repetitive issues and challenges that families face. Often these issues were solved by designing and building custom pieces, one-off multipurpose furnishings, so they could do more with less. This work led to a new project, a furniture line called "Xtraroom", which features transitional pieces that help people make the most of their spaces.

"I've designed spaces, for large families, single folks, for people from different cultures, and those going through all kinds of life changes, from big entertainers to people who need to be entertained."

One Piece – Several Uses

You are known for your multipurpose designs – what's your

methodology?

"Each situation presents challenges that need to be addressed. And so, having one item that has multiple functions is one of the exciting things I do. Sometimes no matter which way you position ordinary furniture in a space, it just doesn't work well. Often that's the genesis of a successful new idea that combines a number of functions into a multipurpose piece.

"Great furniture designs don't look complicated. As an engineer, just because I can design something, doesn't mean I should. It's not a good philosophy for design in general, and especially not for furniture. I would describe my designs as a delicate take on multipurpose. There isn't much bravado or engineering grandeur, just functionality and purposefulness for living.

"I also believe that if it takes more than just a few seconds to be able to transition from one function to another, multi-func-

DESIGN & DESIGNER

tional furniture becomes purposeless. It has to be seamless, quick, and of high quality. If it takes two minutes or even 45 seconds to transition a couch into the coolest thing you've ever seen, it still isn't necessarily great. It probably is more expensive to buy and become a problem if it breaks.

"I focus on the quality of the mechanism and the speed in which it can transition from one thing to the other."

Design Process

Do you have your own preferred design style?

"I never try to intentionally downplay the aesthetic, but I always say, making it look great is the easy part. There are lots of talented people out there who can create great style. Eighty percent of my process has nothing

to do with the aesthetic. The final style might be modern, transitional or coastal. We don't really consider the visual style until 70-80 percent of a project has been completed.

"A lot of folks skip over the most important part of designing interior environments, which is personalization. The practical functional layout of spaces should really be driving the show.

"If a customer is just changing one couch out for another, that's one thing. But many people jump the gun way too quickly when redesigning a living space. They go on a shopping spree before even starting with a functional layout. Doing things in the correct order really makes a difference."

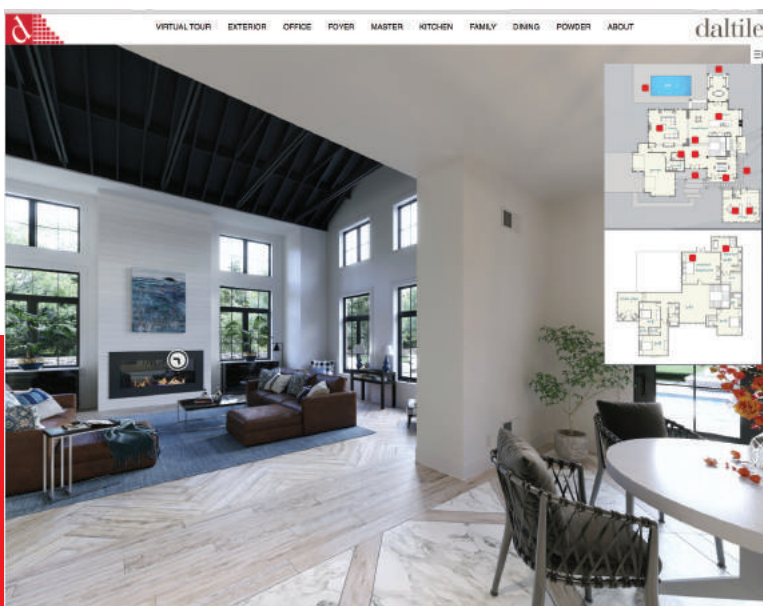
Creating Design Plans

"For example, when working with a client, I always create a

"Showing 500 different products in a brick-and-mortar location is not as powerful as allowing customers to interact with products and visualize how they will be used in their own spaces."

design plan for five to seven years out. When it comes to furnishing homes, a lot of people are stuck in the here and now. They're designing for next week, or even the next three months. Part of our process includes sending out a crew ahead of time to fully measure a property and build a virtual model in 3D. Then we establish relationships, get to know clients by engaging with them in an initial consultation taking up to three hours.

"Whether in-person or remotely, we can show clients an accurate three-dimensional model of their



Wade believes the furniture retailer of the future will use photo-realistic, ultra-high resolution, virtual 3D environment models, allowing them to take advantage of "all very high-yield future interactive platforms including websites, animation and video." Pictured at left is an image from an interactive virtual house found at <http://www.wadeworkscreative.com/dal-virtual-house/>.



This master suite remodel features a concealable, in-wall extending custom coffee and wine bar. Multipurpose and compelling design are integrated together for ultimate result.



spaces, plus do live-time analysis and planning. This provides absolute matter-of-fact direction and vetting of all possible options before they actually make a purchase. It gives clients confidence in their purchases and, an exact game plan for execution."

Long-term Planning

Do you think retailers do customers a disservice if they only sell to meet an immediate need without trying to help customers plan longer term?

"Most retailers focus more on presenting individual products than selling full solutions. Of course, not every retail sale or furniture category lends itself to a whole space solution, but many do. It doesn't help the consumer

to visualize the whole solution when they are just shopping for a lamp or a light fixture. Many people, however, are in an insecure place when shopping for their homes and benefit from retailers who've taken the time to create a more curated environment.

"Just giving consumers a sense of how a room will look and feel, so they can visualize how different pieces go together, and how function can ultimately change lifestyle, is something that I think is largely missing from today's retail environments. Furniture retailers are largely product focused rather than solution focused. At Wade Works Creative we tell the story of space solutions, curate and credentialize selections together to give people confidence that their purchasing choices will work and will also look great together."

"As an engineer, just because I can design something, doesn't mean I should. It's not a good philosophy for design in general, and especially not for furniture."

Changing Tastes

Are you seeing major changes in housing and furnishings?

"2017 was the first year in the last 15, where the average square footage of new construction homes has gone down, which is a really big deal. There is a trend

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"2017 was the first year

in the last 15, where the average square footage of new construction homes has gone down, which is a really big deal."

toward smaller living spaces of higher quality. We see this trend going on across all socioeconomic classes and demographics.

"Another trend I'm really excited about is a focus on creating utility for individual rooms. The standard model of 80s and 90s suburban homes – a foyer, office to the left, dining room to the right, kitchen in the back and living room – is transitioning to very specific-use rooms. These rooms are being updated to mirror trends in living. People are

looking for furnishings solutions that match their lifestyle choices.

"We are seeing 'tech-less' living rooms, where technology is removed so that family and friends can gather and interact. Bathrooms, however, are going in the opposite direction by incorporating tech solutions in toilet technology, vanities, voice-activated technologies, plumbing fixtures, showers, calendar heads-up displays, all integrated. The bathroom is turning into one of the tech hubs of the home.

"A slower moving trend, but one that will pick up steam, is that of small bedrooms – more affectionately called sleeping rooms. Bedrooms are getting smaller and bathrooms are getting larger. The master suite, the big open concept bedroom, is one that people are finally realizing doesn't make a whole lot of sense. When you walk into a massive room with a bed, a big fireplace, huge floor-to-ceiling windows and cathedral ceilings, while it makes for a pretty picture, it's incredibly impractical.



"There is a trend toward smaller living spaces of higher quality. We see this trend going on across all socioeconomic classes and demographics."

Starting at top and going clockwise: Chip showing clients how to operate a new bed that pushes effortlessly under their new elevated closet leaving only the custom sofa foot board exposed in the room; Chip going through 3D design concepts with his build team; and Chip revealing a new master suite renovation to the happy homeowners.



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DESIGN TRENDS



Chip sees trends such as small sleeping rooms (lower left) that can be closed off from the much larger lobby style bath with seating area, storage and fireplace. Other trends include tech-less living areas (top and bottom right images) where electronics are removed or hidden. At the same time high tech toilet, shower and fixture technologies are moving to bathrooms. "People are looking for furnishings solutions that match their lifestyle choices," he says.

"The standard model of 80s and 90s suburban homes – a foyer, office to the left, dining room to the right, kitchen in the back and living room – is transitioning to very specific-use rooms."

Today, people are catching on. They want to use square footage for something more practical that includes only what's really necessary.

"People are allocating additional square footage and spec-

ifying more integrated solutions to spaces where they are actually awake, moving around, and interacting."

Economy of Scale

Are economic forces driving any of these changes?

"Fewer people want to live in homes with massive square footage. With the cost of living going up, money buys a little bit less square footage. People don't necessarily want massive homes that need to be fixed and maintained. The design challenge for our industry, as far as space goes, is to make space work for people. I have spent the last 12 years of my life focusing on how to make the most of space to improve people's lives.

"Many of the big names are

spending lots of time creating strategic, cooperative partnerships inside and outside of the furnishings world. This is going to be interesting to watch. For example, brands that make upholstered furniture, will collaborate with paint and flooring manufacturers as well as art and décor brands, to create full-spectrum solutions along with visualization platforms that cover the entire range with fully shoppable rooms.

The End of the Trend?

You have said that you're not for or against trends. What did you mean?

"There are two different categories of trends. There are ones that cycle in and out without going completely out of style. Like white, for example. Has white ever gone

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Chip Wade says that today brands are working to develop full, interactive whole-home solutions that connect many different product categories. Whole-home renderings above by Wade Works Creative.

out completely? No, it gets hot and then it cools off a little bit. It's a staple, consistent across multiple generations.

"And then there are more volatile trends created by brands and retailers to focus attention so consumers can embrace an entire new design aesthetic. Products are coordinated by look and feel and come to define what we call a 'trend.'

"My feeling is that as visualization technologies become better

and easier to use, trends themselves are going to be less prominent. They won't be as necessary a selling tool. We're not going to need a color of the year. We're not going to need to know that shiplap is a trend.

"Visualization is becoming configurable, more personalized. Design professionals will be able to create more individualized curated looks that are more specific to people's real aesthetic and functional needs.

The power of a trend as a mechanism to consolidate confidence in consumer purchasing habits is going to go down as visualization technology and capability for personalization goes up. Consumer

needs will drive marketing and purchasing to a greater degree.

"I take a personalized approach to designing spaces. It's not

"Most retailers focus more on presenting individual products than selling full solutions. Of course, not every retail sale or furniture category lends itself to a whole space solution, but many do."

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Xtraroom (xtraroom.com) pieces designed in partnership with Chip are multi-functional. Shown is a coffee table that converts to a dining table with two benches in less than 60 seconds, a sofa that pulls down into a queen-size bed. Also, modular stacking units configured as a wall unit.



about whatever's popular for the moment. I tend towards creating spaces that are a bit more timeless, and use more aggressive styling that's scalable, approachable and responsible, to make things feel more relevant in the moment."

Retail Relevance

How might retailers start to do what you do, both online and in their stores?

"In our industry, retail experiences are generally stuck in 1990. Even though kiosks have been updated, I see showrooms full of random products with flashy graphics. The retailer of the future will need to intertwine the digital interactive point-of-purchase platform with the bricks-and-mortar experience so they are synonymous. Retailers are going to be forced to use their square footage in a much different way.

"They are going to have to elevate both user experiences and the immersive nature of sales presentations so that consumers can

visualize products in their own homes with physical touch and feel. Showing 500 different products in a brick-and-mortar location is not as powerful as allowing customers to interact with products and visualize how they will be used in their own spaces.

"Brands are working to develop these types of solutions – not just in furnishings, but also for plumbing, tile and flooring, rugs, and lighting fixtures – with full, interactive whole-home solutions that connect many different product categories.

"Retailers will need to ask themselves, 'What solutions are we providing to homeowners?' If the only solution they are providing is a picture of a product with specifications and basement-bottom pricing, they are going to lose out as competition for better shopping experiences continues to get more intense."

Retailers and Interactivity

How might retailers begin moving into more interactive arenas?

"Retailers need to craft stories about multi-functional furniture with a full-spectrum arc that allows consumers to resonate with the solution."

"My suggestion is that retailers should not necessarily be so concerned right now with augmented reality-type solutions that allow consumers to take a picture of their living room and then place products. This is definitely a 'thing', and it's a solution, but right now the rendering quality for these types of instantaneous solutions is not quite there yet – although it will be in the very near future.

"Better to start with the first foundational-level building block

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“People are specifying more integrated solutions to spaces where they are actually awake, moving around, and interacting.”

of planning for versatility in an interactive world. That means to virtualize product lines instead of relying only on physical photography or physical product samples. I believe that creating full photo-realistic, ultra-high resolution, virtual 3D environment models will position furniture companies to take advantage of all very high-yield future interactive platforms including websites, animation and video.

“Bottom line, the idea is to create a library of products, SKUs, colors and finishes for brands to put consumers in the driver’s seat, allowing them to do anything they want. There are a lot of companies that offer services in the virtual realm. Retailers should not cripple themselves by making an economic choice when it comes to modeling; it is essential to get the right resolution along with the right criteria suitable across multiple platforms.

“Interestingly enough, the smaller the retailer, the smaller the number of SKUs they are focused on, the easier this technology is to adopt. Retailers with fewer SKUs and curated product selections can more affordably create an entire virtual portfolio.

“Not every single sku has to become virtual immediately. Generally, 60 - 80 percent of profits come from 20 - 25 percent of the products carried. So, a retailer’s most high-yield inventory can be virtualized in a very short period. Over time, new incoming inventory can be added as an ongoing strategy.”

Remember the Story

“In retail, telling the right story to consumers is extremely important. Sometimes, having a couch that has a desk that changes into a bed is great, but when somebody comes into a retail

store, they have thought about their requirements. If a piece of furniture doesn’t seem relevant to those needs, the sale won’t be made. Retailers, therefore, need to craft stories about multi-functional furniture with a full-spectrum arc that allows consumers to resonate with the solution. This is a new type of marketing and a new type of storytelling for furniture retailers.

“Finally, retailers should be on the lookout for big changes in the way furnishings will be sold. Changes include exciting new products, technologies and interactive solutions, that help brands and retailers tell stories relevant to their customers’ lifestyle aspirations, while greatly improving the shopping experience.”

Pictured below is a barn conversion by Wade Works Creative featuring table-height fireplace, custom kitchen and large glass opening looking down to attached horse stalls. An equestrian lover’s dream.



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Great Style, Comfort, and Value

✓ strategies for I'LL BE BACK

by David Benbow

Why do we love it when the Terminator says it, but hate it when a promising “up” utters these three disappointing words?

Movie critics voted this three word sentence as the greatest catchphrase in movie history. Retail sales associates (RSAs) voted this sentence as the most dreaded phrase in retail sales history. Why do we love it when the Terminator says it, and hate it when a promising “up” says it?

Anybody who has toiled in the retail sales profession for more than 15 minutes is acutely aware of the phenomenon we affectionately refer to as the Be-Back. What is a Be-Back, you might ask? This, of course, is the would-be customer who is determined not to buy right now, but absolutely insists he will be back at a later time to make the purchase. Let me make a clarification of the term Be-Back, at least as I understand it. A Be-Back is ANY “up” that leaves the store without buying, whether he said he would be back or not. Some of them really do come back to buy. But, if they don't come back,

they become the Be-Backs that never returned.

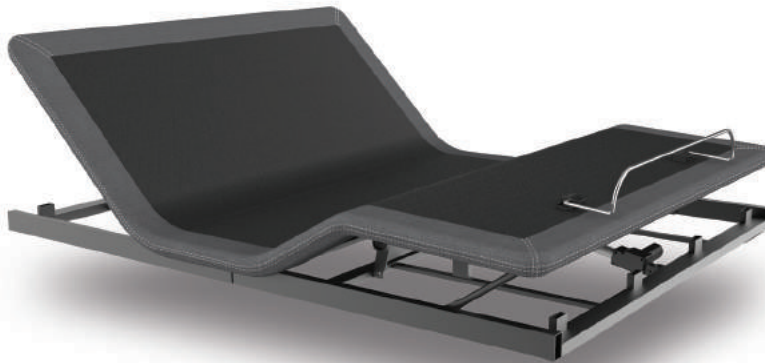
Why Do They Do That?

Before we examine techniques for coping with the Be-Back problem, let's examine the question of why so many people who visit your store seem like they are ready to buy, but decide instead to leave empty-handed. But not before promising faithfully and incorrectly, that they will return to shop with you another day.

"The most obvious antidote to the Be-Back disease is to follow the Lawhon prescription; which is to perform the sales job correctly."



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I'LL BE BACK!

I often cite John F. Lawhon and his book, "Selling Retail", in this Furniture World series, but Mr. Lawhon doesn't provide a lot of information about han-

"Let's examine

The question of why people come into your store, seem like they are ready to buy, but decide to wait, promise faithfully they will come back, and then you never see them again?"

dling Be-Backs. He just advises, if you do your sales job right, you will make the sale and won't need to worry about Be-Backs. I also cite furniture and bedding author Peter Marino quite a lot. He presents more insight in his list of why would-be customers dislike shopping for mattresses. They are often the same reasons why shoppers come to your store, but do not buy, despite the best efforts of professional retail sales associates. A few of Dr. Marino's observations are included in the list below.

Reasons Why They Leave Without Buying

1. There's something they don't like. It could be the RSA, the merchandise, the store, the price, or anything else. But, they won't reveal what it is, even following

highly skilled probing. I could write a whole chapter on this problem, but I'll save that for another time.

2. They don't want to make a mistake. Fear of being stuck with the wrong product at the wrong price is a huge factor in walking and not buying.

3. Shoppers never intended to buy, anyway. They are just seeking information.

4. They need someone else to help make the decision.

5. They are confused by the huge selection.

6. They are confused by conflicting information they received in other stores, RSAs or online.

7. Shoppers promise they will come back. But they don't





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"What is the ultimate

and most stinging of customer objections? Not ever coming back, when you just KNEW they were going to."

really mean it; they just don't want to hurt the feelings of the nice RSA. Or, they just want to get the RSA off their back. I once saw

an "up" offer an RSA \$5.00 just to let him leave the store and quit hounding him!



8. They promise they will come back, and they really mean it at the time, but something changes their mind after leaving the store.

9. They just don't want to spend the money. They get home and decide their old mattress will last a few more years. And, maybe the price of the mattress they liked is way more than the price in the advertisement that caught their attention.

10. They find something better somewhere else. It could be the merchandise, the store environment, or the salesperson.

11. They search on the internet and their mind is forever changed by that experience.

12. Friends, neighbors or relatives "educate" them out of buying.

You may have noticed by now, that this much of this section is rather similar to the "Objections" articles found in previous editions of this magazine. But, they are not the same in a Be-Back situation because a lot of these objections occur once the shopper has left the store, when the RSA no longer can counter them.

What is the ultimate insult and stinging rebuke to most any RSA? It's when a customer you just KNEW would return, never does, and you can't do a thing about it! Or, can you?

Yes, You Can! (Maybe)

The most obvious antidote to the Be-Back experience is to follow the Lawhon prescription; which is to perform the sales job correctly. This means:

- *The RSA knows and uses the five groups of knowledge;*
- *The RSA knows and uses the steps of the sale.*

Most "ups" would never become Be-Backs if every RSA did a professional job. For more information, consult previous articles in this series at <https://www.furninfo.com/Authors/David%20Benbow/37>. Or, consult the book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual" (www.bedsellersmanual.com).

What, however, if the RSA does a masterfully professional job and the "up" still insists on leaving, although protesting mightily that she WILL BE BACK.

Sales pros know, and have known for a long time, that clever customers use the technique of "walking" to get a better deal. Automobile sales people are very aware of this bargaining device. It probably happens less often in furniture sales, mostly because furniture retail has never quite developed the same reputation for price negotiation as the car lot has. So, what about negotiating the price with the customer before he leaves?

A lot of stores have a "one-price" policy on regularly floored merchandise, so bargaining is not always an option for RSAs

and sales managers. On the other hand, I have never seen a store that didn't have some discontinued merchandise lying around somewhere in a dark, dusty corner of a distant warehouse. Professional RSAs who want to do everything possible to stop these clever customers from "walking" should know every nook and cranny of their store's warehouse storage and all the items contained therein. I doubt if the "one-price" policy of any store would extend to old, odd, discontinued pieces. Some customers, and particularly men, if I may generalize, want a DEAL.

They aren't especially particular about what the item looks like, just as long as it is a DEAL. These discontinued items may be just

"Sales pros know, and have known for a long time, that clever customers use the technique of 'walking' to get a better deal."

Are you a sales representative or agent?

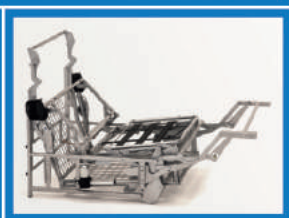
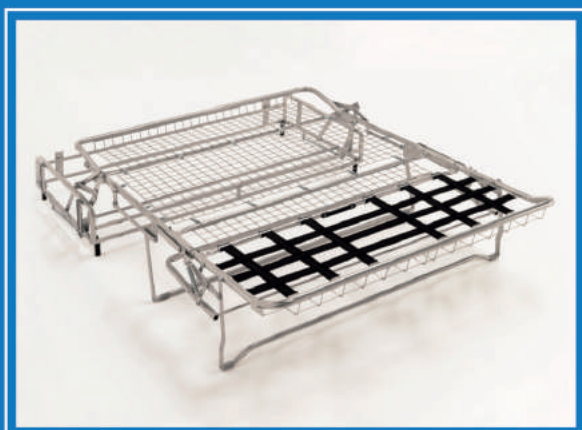
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"Some customers,
and particularly men, if I may generalize, want a DEAL. They aren't especially particular about what the item looks like, just as long as it is a DEAL."

the ticket to keep an "up" from becoming a dreaded Be-Back.

"Landing" The Customer

So, how do you get your Be-Back back? While there is certainly no guarantee of results, there are ways to motivate your shoppers to increase the chance that they will come back and buy. Before talking about these ideas, I need to make one important point. To have ANY chance for a Be-Back sale, the shopper must have found a product that he/she likes better than anything else they have seen, anywhere. They must love the product, like the price, the store and the RSA. I refer to this event as "landing on the bed." "Landing" can, of course apply to any product in a home furnishings store. When a customer is landed, the RSA knows she has a good prospect for a sale. If the shopper leaves the store without being landed, the RSA will never get a Be-Back sale. So, an RSA that does a incomplete job can just forget about hoping for a Be-Back sale.

If an RSA lands them, and they

still leave the store without buying? What then?

Set The Shoppers Up Before They Leave

Most shoppers arrive at your store with only a very sketchy education on bedding. They need help. Part of the RSA's job is to educate customers so they can make smart buying decisions. By the time a professional RSA has gone through her sales routine, the shopper should have received a great deal of valuable information to help make the right decision on an important purchase of a somewhat expensive product that will effect his well-being for many years to come. This education was free, costing only the time spent listening to the RSA for a few minutes.

If a customer is about to leave without buying, the RSA should remind the shopper about the value of that education he received free of charge from the RSA. Consider the following dialogue;

RSA Asks: "Do you feel like

you know more about bedding and what you need in a bed than before you walked into our store?"

Customer: "Yes, I really do."

RSA Asks: "Do you agree that you are much better equipped to make a buying decision now after talking to me?"

Customer: "Oh, absolutely!"

RSA: "If you feel like I have been helpful in providing you with the information that you need, do you mind if I ask a small favor

"When a customer is landed, the RSA knows he has a good prospect for a sale. If the shopper leaves the store without being landed, the RSA will never get the sale."



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before you leave?" (Without pausing.) "I know you said you need more time to make a decision. You don't want to make a snap judgment and buy right at the first store you went to. I do understand you would like more time to make sure you have made the right choice. I'm like that myself. But, will you do me one favor? Don't make a quick decision at the next store you go to, either. Give me another chance to earn your business. I believe I am correct in saying that you like our mattress and our price better than any other you have seen. Is that right? If you do visit another store and they have a deal that SEEMS to be better than ours, give me a call back before you make a decision. Give me the details of the deal, and I will give you my honest assessment of how the two deals compare. I will also give you some additional questions to ask the RSA at that store. Right now, I am confident that our deal will beat anybody else's, but I am also asking you to take my word for it. In other words, feel free to

use me as a bedding consultant. Take advantage of my years of experience. But most importantly, do yourself a favor. Take the time to call me. Make SURE you are getting the most for your money."

This approach has a better chance of working if the RSA has a really good rapport with the shopper.

Business Cards & Brochures

Handing out business cards to departing Be-Backs can be a tricky business. The purpose of business cards, I suppose, is to remind the Be-Back to ask for you should he come back to the store. So, what should be written on the back of a business card? If it's just the name of the bed and the price, you will probably lose the sale to a smart RSA down the street who will probably say, "Oh, that's the same bed as our Zillions Pillow Top, and ours is \$100 cheaper."

So, do you quit passing out cards? Well, no, not that either. The Be-Back will certainly not remember you without a card. I have a suggestion. This suggestion is based the fact that most RSAs do NOT know the specifications of the products they are called upon to sell. The suggestion is to load up your business card with every spec that exists about your bed; coil count, gauge of wire, warranty, founda-

"If you just jot down the name of the bed and the price on your card, you will probably lose the sale to a smart RSA down the street who will probably say, 'Oh, that's the same bed as our Zillions Pillow Top and ours is \$100 cheaper.'"

tion type, padding configuration, foam density, etc. You might have to use two cards to get all this written down. The first benefit of doing this is to show the shopper you know your stuff. You are a professional. The second benefit is to show the shopper that your competitor down the street probably does not know his stuff. Ask them to challenge any other RSA who claims his bed has superior specifications, at a better price, conditions and terms. And, insist that he show you those specifications IN PRINT because some RSAs make up stuff about their beds. The third benefit is, the more an RSA performs well, the more likely the shopper will remember him.

As mentioned in the last section,

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"Everybody's heard

the old saying, 'The Be-Back bus does not stop in front of our store.'
And there is a lot of truth in that old saying."

if the shopper calls you back, as you requested, you can then reinforce your points; increasing your chance of a Be-Back sale.

What if the RSA produces all the specs in print? Ask your shopper to get a copy and bring them back to you so you can compare. Then add those specs to your competition product knowledge files.

A Deposit?

While getting a deposit from your shopper

does not guarantee he will return, it increases the odds. The purpose of the small deposit is to hold the wonderful price offered. It is much easier to get a "hold the price" deposit if the shopper is told he is eligible for a full refund if he changes his mind. For example:

RSA Says: "I know you want to think about it, but our sale ends tomorrow. I can hold that sale price for X days, however, with a small deposit. That can give you longer to think about it. The deposit only obligates us to hold the price and the merchandise. It does not obligate you. It is fully refundable at any time if you change your mind. On a personal

"I found that it is much easier to get a 'hold the price' deposit if the shopper is told that he is eligible for a full refund if he changes his mind."

note, it will also make sure that I get credit for the sale when you come back in to pay it off and set up delivery." (Only include this last sentence if you have excellent rapport with a customer).

I have had remarkable success with this sales device in my years on the sales floor.

Incentives

Incentives sent to non-buying shoppers to encourage them to come back only work if you know how to stay in touch with your would-be Be-Back.

This can often be obtained by asking shoppers if they want to sign up for incentives, enter a contest, special offers, information about the latest advances in sleep technology, health, or design/decorating trends.

You can also find companies (online) that offer incentives for Be-Back customers. One such company offers, "immediate, customer-centric, valuable motive to return to your store... the program allows you to select an incentive value, issue it in the form of a time-restricted, redeemable card and offer it to custom-



IDEAS (power growth)

Jay Steinback, President and CEO, Art Van of St. Louis (formerly Rothman's Furniture)



If there is an issue or a challenge in our industry, from e-commerce to international logistics – and everything in between – you'll find a seminar in High Point to help you manage it better. The speakers are great, but they're just the start. The value increases as you talk with other retailers about what they're doing and planning, and then increases again after you exchange business cards and continue those conversations for months, and even years.

Answers. Found.

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I'LL BE BACK!

ers as a sales inducement... to return within a specified time to make a purchase."

Follow-Up

RSAs are wise to follow up with ALL shoppers, whether they are a Buyer or Be-Back. For more infor-

"While there is no guarantee of results, there are ways to motivate shoppers to increase the chance that they will come back."

mation on following up, see the "Follow-Up, The Key To Success" in the online archives of Furniture World Magazine at <https://www.furninfo.com/Authors/David%20Benbow/37>.

The Be-Back Bus Route

Everybody's heard the old saying, "the Be-Back bus does not stop in front of our store." And, there is a lot of truth in that old saying. When a shopper walks out without buying, never count on them to come back and buy from you. And, in spite of all the suggestions in this article, all you can hope for is increasing the ODDS that they might come back, even with your best efforts. But, selling retail is a numbers

game. Let's say one out of ten walking shoppers actually come back. What if you could increase that to two out of ten? How much would your sales volume grow?

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 management to training retail sales associates. His years of hands-on experience as a retail sales associate, store manager, sales manager/trainer and store owner in six different metropolitan areas qualifies him as an expert in selling bedding.

David is the author of the recently published book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual", a complete, text book for mattress and bedding retail sales associates, beginner and experienced professional alike. The book can be purchased on-line at <http://www.bedsellersmanual.com> or www.mattressretailtraining.com. He offers hands-on training classes for retailers on a variety of subjects and online classes that can be downloaded from the websites mentioned above. David can be contacted via e-mail at dave@bedsellersmanual.com or by phone at 361-648-3775.

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TAKE A CLOSER LOOK



There has never been a better time to consider furniture and accessories manufactured in Malaysia. Aside from a diverse collection of fresh and stylish furnishings, Malaysia offers retailers an excellent relationship with the United States and Canada that keeps the costs of importing low, and profits up.

Already, the U.S. is by far the biggest importer from Malaysia, accounting for a third of the export share. Located in the heart of Southeast Asia, Malaysia is the world's 9th largest exporter with approximately USD2.5 billion shipments in 2017 thanks to its ample supply of home-grown rubber wood and other hardwood lumber.

"MIFF IS THE WORLD'S LARGEST MARKET PLACE FOR TOP QUALITY MALAYSIAN WOOD AND PANEL FURNITURE"

A visit to Malaysian International Furniture Fair (MIFF) is a visit to Southeast Asia's biggest industry trade show and the world's largest market place for Malaysian hardwood furniture. Buyers from 140 countries converge on MIFF every March to choose from the extensive range of residential and commercial furniture and as well as component parts. New design trends and quality across a vast array at right price points deliver excellent value to customers.

Presenting The Furniture City of Malaysia – Muar

MIFF provides global buyers the fastest route to Muar which produces 70 % of the country's furniture exports. In April 2018, the southern city was declared "Furniture City of Malaysia" by the government. A 988-acre Muar Furniture Park was launched to expand export capacity. From a humble cottage industry in the 1980s, Muar now has 700

factories and ships 6,000 to 7,000 containers every month.

"MIFF is the best platform to view the latest productions from Muar all under one roof. Whatever type of furniture buyers are looking for is produced in Muar." - Mr Keh Wee Kiet, President, Muar Furniture Association.

Over 200 manufacturers from Muar will share the limelight of MIFF's 25th anniversary show in 2019 at the Malaysia International Trade and Exhibition Centre (MITEC) and Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC). Comprising half of domestic exhibitors, they will be showcasing in Muar Hall and curated zones i.e. designRena lifestyle floor, MIFF Office and Sofa Hall.

Style That Sells

MIFF has products across every home furnishing category for your store. It is also where you'll find the largest showcase of



office furniture in Southeast Asia via MIFF Office. MIFF 2019 will feature 650 suppliers from Malaysia and other top Asian furniture producers.

Mr Randy Fiser, CEO, American Society of Interior Designers, visited MIFF 2018 for the first time and here is what he has to say: *"We had a great experience here, and we were able to expose American designers to what Malaysia has to offer. It was great to see products similar to those offered in the U.S. here but they were more interesting to us because the designs had a Malaysian influence which was not found in North America."*

Family Legacy, Craftsmanship, State-of-the-Art Machinery

Most Malaysian furniture companies are family-owned and have been passed down to the second generation and beyond, keeping alive decades of skills, entrepreneurial spirit and long-term business relationships. Automated technology

has increasingly been adopted. Craftsmanship remains uncompromised and skilled manual labor devote meticulous attention to the finishing touches.

"NOW MORE THAN EVER BEFORE, U.S.-BASED FURNITURE RETAILERS AND WHOLESALERS CAN BENEFIT FROM CULTIVATING ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF SUPPLY."

Right Price Points for Extra Profitability

Not only do Malaysian manufacturers offer quality and style, they also have the capacity and ability to deliver exceptional value for their North American customers at the right price points, flexible order size and mixed containers.

Hedge Against Tariffs & Supply Chain Disruptions

Now more than ever before,

U.S.-based furniture retailers and wholesalers can benefit from cultivating additional sources of supply. Malaysia used to be a British colony and English is widely spoken. It is the the main language of major businesses

According to the World Bank's Doing Business Report 2017, Malaysia is the 23rd most business-friendly economy in the world. Travelers from the United States and Canada do not need a visa if they are coming for business or tourism for 90 days or less.

What Buyers Say About MIFF

"It is my first time here and I find it very nice. There's a huge global presence in the fair and I can clearly see what is going on around the world and in which country, like trends and new technology used in furniture. I came for sofas, beds and dining sets and there's really a huge variety. Coming here has

exposed me to so many things and I will surely be back next year.” – Sarang Waghmerer, Wishful Homes, India.

“This is my first time in Malaysia and I like it very much. Although both venues are good, I like MITEC a lot and I think it’s beautiful. My trip to Malaysia was fruitful and I felt my time in MIFF was well spent. I viewed some very nice furniture and saw new models of products. The furniture and other products are really creative and of good quality.” – Tarek Abasy, Wood Line Furniture, Egypt.

across 18 halls at MITEC and PWTC. Exhibitors increased 13% to 625 companies, orders rose 5% to US\$984 million and visitor attendance from 134 countries was 7% higher at 20,000 including 5,866 from overseas.

Malaysian International Furniture Fair

Held annually from March 8-11, MIFF offers a comprehensive selection of all kinds of home and commercial furniture including Malaysia’s renowned top-quality wood furniture and

most extensive office solutions in Southeast Asia.

Launched in 1995, the show is an UFI-approved event by The Global Association for Exhibition Industry. MIFF is organized by UBM Malaysia, a member of UBM Asia, which recently became part of Informa PLC, a leading B2B information services group and the largest B2B Events organiser in the world.

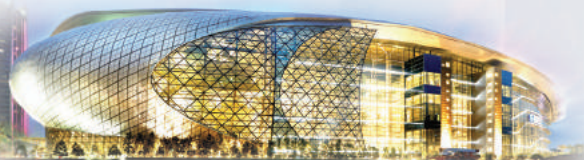
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In 2018, MIFF expanded 25% to fill a million square feet



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REFERRALS

PART 2

by Larry Mullins

Most business people believe that referrals are just something that happens. Here's how to create a buzz around your business so it can market itself!

Teaching your furniture store how to market itself is a tricky business.

Why? Because most business people believe referrals are just something that "happens." But referrals don't just happen. This is true even if your customers love you, your service, and your products. In fact, a study by Texas University found that once a customer has a positive shopping experience, 83 percent of them say they will provide a favorable referral. The problem is, only 29 percent actually do.

This article will show you how to bridge the gap, and make it simple and easy for your happy customers to fulfill their promise to provide you with a referral.

First you should reprise the last article, based largely upon "The Referral Engine... Teaching your Business to Market Itself" by John Jantsch, with insights from Jay Levinson, Seth Godin and Jay Abraham. (Check it out at: www.furninfo.com/Authors/Larry%20Mullins/9).

This second installment will

present ideas from the best selling book by Andy Sernovitz: "Word of Mouth Marketing ... How Smart Companies Get People Talking" (www.wordofmouthbook.com). Sernovitz takes a somewhat different approach to referral marketing. Over half of his book is devoted to "How to Do It," complete with informative templates and worksheets.

We begin by looking at the issue of incentives. It's an area of disagreement Andy Sernovitz has with most leading advocates of Referral Marketing.

Should Incentives Be Baked Into Your Referral Program?

Sernovitz believes that offering incentives to spread the word is not only a mistake, it can actually be counterproductive. He reasons that paying them makes them feel guilty: "People are engaging in word of mouth because they love you or it makes them feel good. When you add a monetary reward (or discounts, points or miles) for a referral, you make



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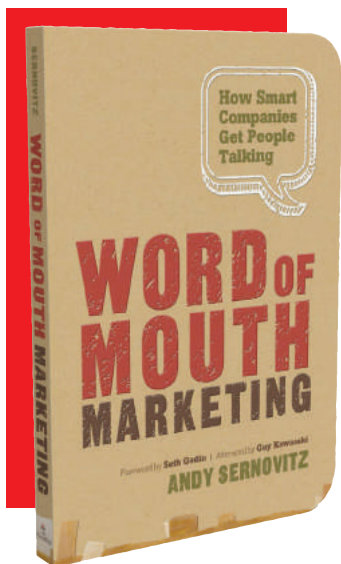


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"In every staff meeting ask your associates: 'Would anyone tell a friend about this?' If you don't get a resounding 'Yes!' You need to get to work and add some buzz."

it awkward and creepy. Just at the moment someone is about to recommend you, they think, 'If my friend finds out I am being paid for this, they're not going to trust me. I'd better not say anything.'" The take away here is: "The very powerful emotions that create word of mouth and the resulting affinity with your brand are nothing to be trifled with." He goes on to caution that a loyal, supportive client could be insulted if you offer to pay for a referral.

A Preliminary Action Plan

If you are impatient and want to

"The very powerful emotions that create word of mouth and the resulting affinity with your brand are nothing to be trifled with."

get started now, Andy also provides an immediate action plan on page 201 of his book, a page titled: "Sixteen Sure Thing, Must Do, Awfully Easy Word of Mouth Marketing Techniques." Try to launch one word-of-mouth project a week. Without much more ado you can have a devastatingly powerful word-of-mouth follow-up program rolling before your competitors know what hit them.

- Look on the web for people talking about you.
- Assign someone to join those conversations. Start today.
- Create a blog.
- Make a new rule: Ask, "Is this buzzworthy?" in every meeting.
- Come up with one buzzworthy topic. Keep it simple.
- Put something by your front door that will remind people to talk to a friend.
- Let your talkers sign up for a private newsletter.
- Pick one easy way to track word of mouth.
- Put a tell-a-friend form on every page of your website.
- Put a special offer in an easily forwardable email.
- Add a small gift and a word-of-

mouth tool to every package you sell.

- Have a private sale for your talkers.
- Apologize for mistakes and solve problems fast.
- Partner with a charity.
- Do something unexpected.
- Be nice.
- And don't forget: Do something worth talking about.

I would add: Create a simple handout to give prospects when they leave your store.

A Detailed 5 Ts Action Plan

Sernovitz presents his Five Ts of word-of-mouth marketing: Talkers, Topics, Tools, Taking Part, and Tracking. He drills down and provides an in-depth marketing plan. He suggests you walk through the 5Ts and apply them to selling home furnishings. Over half of Andy Sernovitz's book is devoted to a practical application of his ideas. In this section of his book he explains the most successful techniques for putting them to work. The Five Ts of word-of-mouth marketing listed above are detailed with specific, simple, and inexpensive suggestions.

RETAIL REFERRALS

1. TALKERS: Find and identify them.

Who will tell their friends about you? Your job is to find the people who like you, like your merchandise and service, and who like to talk about you. If, after reading this article, you would like more information on Talkers, download the Talkers Profile Worksheet at www.wordofmouthbook.com.

Happy Customers. When it comes to referrals, nothing beats happy customers. Especially when they are also talkers. How do you identify them? Look for extreme interest - people who know the names of your sales associates and overflow with enthusiasm. Make sure your sales team understands that these people (who can be annoying) are very valuable word-of-mouth assets. Make sure you tag people who fill out comments cards, sign up for newsletter,

submit questions online, or send you emails.

Online Talkers. Look for people who have posted a favorable comment about you on a website somewhere. The fact they took the time to write about you shows an unusual degree of interest. To find them, go to any search engine that mentions blogs and social media. When you find them, email them. They will be thrilled to hear from you.

Eager Employees. Your employees should be proud of what they do for you and can be great word-of-mouth representatives. To find the "talkers," look around. They will be self-evident. Identify them, encourage them, and feed them.

Listeners. They can also be big talkers. If they care enough to subscribe to your newsletter they are hungry for the latest buzz.

Find them on your subscribers' lists. Make contact.

Fans. They may not be big spenders. If you have high-end brands they could be fans if not customers. Chanel and Gucci did not build their brands from the few super rich who could afford their products. They built them from millions of fans who dream about affording them someday.

Create A Talker Program

This can be done in four simple steps. You will need to:

- Post a topic that you can use today.
- Create a campaign worth talking about.
- Become a buzzworthy company.
- Create a newsletter.

Once you find your talkers then your job is to give them some buzz. Think of it as a simple message that will spark interest and conversation, nothing long, cumbersome and formal. Check out the "do-over" promotion exhibit by Homecrafters in Helena, Montana. The Homecrafters team faced an awful blizzard when they attempted a Grand Opening Sale in February. So, to make lemonade out of a big lemon they created a buzzworthy "do-over" ad to run in the spring.

FOUR DAYS ONLY! MOTHER NATURE FORCES A "DO-OVER!"
Because Many Folks Could Not Take Advantage of Our Low Grand Opening Sale Prices Due to Bad Weather Conditions ... We are going to Offer These Low Prices Once More!

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DO-OVER

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GRAND OPENING SALE! \$299

NEWSPAPER DEADLINES
will not permit us to provide a complete listing of what will be on sale. However, for a brief time we are rebagging every item in every department with our Grand Opening Sale prices. It's a \$999,999 selection and every item in every department is tagged with a handwritten discount. Don't miss it!

"Word-of-mouth

messages are temporary. They are not intended to be your official marketing messages, so keep them fresh."

2. TOPICS: Ones they will talk about.

Once you find your talkers, your job is to give them some buzz. Think of it as a simple message that will spark interest and conversation, nothing long, cumbersome or formal. Check out the "do-over" promotion exhibit by Homecrafters in Helena, Montana on the previous page. The Homecrafters team faced an awful blizzard when they attempted a Grand Opening Sale in February. So, to make lemonade out of a big lemon they created a buzzworthy "do-over" ad to run in the spring.

Florida-based Leather by Design (LBD), drops flyers and ROP ads periodically announcing special limited time discounts. One unusual technique LBD uses is a two-sided broadsheet wrap (equal to two full color pages) repeating the exact same offer on five successive days. This retailer gets a big discount from the paper for this effective, buzzworthy strategy.

According to Sernovitz, word of mouth is as much about product features as it is about marketing. Leather by Design features a limited number of brands, all top of the line, each with a brief, buzzworthy descriptive han-

dle. Stressless, "The world's most comfortable furniture." Palliser, "Furniture designed by you." Natuzzi, "The world's best known furniture brand." If you want to create a brand for your store you will need to describe and demonstrate products that people fall in love with and who are compelled to share their new knowledge with friends. In every staff meeting ask your associates: "Would anyone tell a friend about this?" If you don't get a resounding "Yes!" You need to get to work and add some buzz.

The best word-of-mouth topics may come unexpectedly from customers. Listen carefully, and go with whatever buzz floats their boat. Word-of-mouth messages are temporary. They are not intended to be your official marketing messages; so keep them fresh. Special sales always create a buzz. So, create a hot offer, put it in an email, and ask your associates to share it with their friends.

The delivery team captain who suggests he is willing to dispose of your old stuff automatically generates extra buzz for the team and priceless word of mouth for their company. Sears lets you return or exchange major appliances, no questions asked, within 90 days. That's an important service if your refrigerator looked great in the

store, but looks terrible in your kitchen. More and more smaller independent home furnishings stores are offering "Free local delivery," and free removal of old furniture and mattresses.

3. TOOLS: To help you become a buzzworthy company.

Charities. Partnering with a charity affords immediate buzz. Charities come with their own built-in network of talkers. National or local, small or large, supported groups have a reason to talk about you. They are organized, committed, and feature ready-to-use communication channels. Count on people telling their friends: "Patronize that store; they support worthy causes."

Campaigns. Repeatable advertising, such as the aforementioned Leather by Design "wrap" series, always creates its own buzz. Staples came up with a good campaign featuring an "Easy Button" and the theme of "That Was Easy." They sold over a million of these buttons. People put them on their desks. It was talked about in a million offices. They created additional buzz when they donated the profits to charity. You put a lot of money into advertising, wouldn't it be

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Florida-based Leather by Design drops flyers and ROP ads periodically announcing special limited time discounts. One unusual technique LBD uses is a two-sided broadsheet wrap (equal to two full color pages) repeating the exact same offer on five successive days. (There is a big discount from the paper for this effective, buzzworthy strategy.)

nice if it was equally buzzworthy and repeatable?

Viral campaigns are email messages specifically created to generate buzz. They can be anything of general interest such as coupons, newsletters, or product updates. These are so common now that some people think they are the same thing as word of mouth, but they are really only one of the useful tools you can use. A viral campaign is often pure luck. A campaign offering free coffee at any Starbucks inside a Barnes and Noble went viral and created lines out the door. Who knew?

Long term, sustainable word of mouth comes when a buzzworthy company becomes truly immersed in a word-of-mouth philosophy. The best topic of all emerges when a business becomes worth talking about in every phase of customer contact. That transformation is the process by which your organization changes from one that is spending huge amounts on advertising to push their message

out, to one that is pulling in customers, virtually for free, by word-of-mouth advertising. Create your own "Prospect Touch Map" from the exhibit sample provided in this article and make sure you are providing the tools your associates need to do their jobs.

Products. Extraordinary merchandise creates sustainable, long term, company-changing word of mouth. Buy with this fact in mind. Your suppliers should update you and your staff about the unique benefits and features their products possess that make people's lives better. Everyone in your stores should learn to love the stuff you sell, extol the benefits it provides, and communicate that love.

Be Unique. Do things that are, by their nature, interesting topics of conversation. Somewhat like that old marketing principle of positioning, in which you strive to own a unique position in the client's mind. In this case you strive to own a unique posi-

tion in the client's conversation. Palliser Leather encourages clients to participate in the design of their home furnishings. In the "old days" Curtis Bros. Furniture in Washington, D.C. set aside a month to celebrate new brides. Brides could register to win an all-expenses-paid honeymoon, compliments of several participating companies. A modern version of this often neglected niche is sure to create buzz. Sernovitz reveals that Crayola's R & D geniuses came up with Color Wonder magic markers that work only on special paper and not on walls or children. Imagine the

"Involve anyone who enjoys being online, who has a passion for your products and what you do."

BETTER LIFE BETTER WORK CHINA GUANGZHOU/SHANGHAI INTERNATIONAL FURNITURE FAIR



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Adjust the prospect "touch map" (below) to fit your operation. When you complete the scripts/tools column on the right, you are well on your way to creating a business that markets itself.

and easy to pass along. If you don't have an email newsletter, start one today. Don't worry about giving out too much information. The material you share proves your expertise and attracts customers. It makes them want to talk about you.

Sernovitz believes the first formal word-of-mouth marketing began in the fifties, when they were called "fan clubs." Teenyboppers gladly paid fifty cents to join the

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ACTION		RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE		TOOLS/ SCRIPTS PROVIDED
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Prospect Store Visits	→	Sales Staff	→	Greeting Scripts
Prospect Leaves Store Without Purchase	→	Sales Staff	→	Script For Store Handout
Prospect Makes Purchase	→	Sales/ Office Staff	→	Greeting Script Sales Training Tools Office Script
Pick Up	→	Warehouse Staff	→	Customer Greeting Script
Delivery	→	Delivery Crew	→	Script To Reinforce Purchase Referral Request Script Get Permission To Market
Follow-Up Call	→	Sales Consultant or Sales Manager or CEO (best)	→	Script To Reinforce Purchase Ask If Delivery Captain Provided Referral Cards? Ask If Delivery Captain Requested Permission To Market?
Service	→	Service Manager	→	Schedule Service Script Scripts To Provide One More Opportunity To Exceed Customer Expectations
Follow-Up Call	→	Service Manager or Sales Manager or CEO	→	Ask If Issue Was Resolved Ask For Recommendation



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"Sernovitz presents his

Five Ts of word-of-mouth marketing: Talkers, Topics, Tools, Taking Part, and Tracking."

Buddy Holly Fan Club. "You can have a fan club for anything, even WD-40." Members get a membership card, a weekly newsletter with tips and tricks and "lots of fun." EBay does a great job of recognizing folks who interact with the company. "Status symbols like logos, icons and various enhancements demonstrate recognition of special people. Microsoft's MVP Program is a classic example of how to make your fans and talkers feel recognized and important." Check it out.

As a reminder, put the message "Tell a Friend" on every page of your website. Also put these words in every email you send. Train your staff to end each sale with a cheerful: "Please don't forget to tell your friends."

4. TAKING PART: Join in the conversation.

Who should be involved?

Everyone! Involve anyone who enjoys being online, who has a passion for your products and what you do, and has some time to do it. It's a great way to get your staff involved and an opportunity for them to become stars.

5. TRACKING: Listen to what they are saying.

Someone on your staff should be checking the web every day for comments on your business, your brands and your products. He or she should be qualified to answer their questions and address their issues.

Conclusion

This concludes our two part series on referrals and word-of-mouth advertising. If you want more information, check out Andy Sernovitz's website, www.wordofmouth.org.

You can also sign up for his free

newsletter there. It is outstanding.

About Larry Mullins: Larry Mullins has 30+ years of experience on the front lines of furniture marketing. His mainstream executive experience, creative work with modern promotion specialists, and mastery of timeless advertising principles have established him as one of the foremost experts in home furnishings marketing. Larry's turnkey Mega-Impact programs produce results for everything from cash raising events to profitable exit strategies. His newest, *Internet Leverage Strategies* have achieved record-breaking increases in sales and profits. Larry is founder and CEO of UltraSales, Inc. Call for a free, no-obligation consultation on your store's efforts to achieve your Mega-Marketing goals. Reach Larry directly at 904.794.9212 or email Larry@LarryMullins.com. more articles by Larry at www.furninfo.com.

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Best Selling DESIGN

Omnia

This Euro-styled sofa is available as a stationary piece, or with motion options including power box chaise recliners, power tilt headrests and a new power lumbar feature.

Contact information on page 136.



Muniz

The Chloe Console table features thick tinted acrylic, hand cut, sanded and polished. Clean and simple lines make this a treasure in both contemporary and transitional interior environments.



Nouveau Concept

The AV472, is a 56" TV base with a contemporary look. Available in 22 colors.

Contact information on page 136.

Legends

The relaxed contemporary Tango Collection offers champaign brass accents, and a warm, inviting style.

Contact information on page 136.





Maxwood

Despite the recent tiny house trend, longer, bigger kids beds and bunks are becoming the norm. When choosing the right bed for children, many parents are opting for the lasting solution offered with XL sizes. Contact information on page 136.



Kas

Vibrant metallic accents are the foundation that adds depth and dimension to the Montreal Collection. These stylish rugs have a trendy neutral color palette and offer elegant traditional and transitional patterns. Machine woven in Turkey of shrink polyester and viscose with a low 1/4" pile height. Contact information on page 136.



Norwalk

Doggy Digs, is designed to accommodate pampered cats or small to mid-size dogs. It is available in small, medium and large sizes. Specialty performance fabrics and vinyls are perfect on these nicely padded pet beds. Contact information on page 136.

Huntington House

The 7747-20 sofa adds a modern vibe to the classic Chesterfield style. Shown here in crimson velvet and faux skin throw pillows. Made to order in fabric or leather. Contact information on page 136.



Best Selling DESIGN



Elran

The Turner collection features modern, contemporary styling with box seats and wide arms. Features include chaise lounge seating and a two-motor design with dual controls for power recliners and power assisted headrest. Available in a variety of fabrics, leathers and leather/vinyl combinations.

Contact information on page 136.



Surya

The Newman is a traditional table lamp with translucent glass body and natural linen drum shade.

Contact information on page 136.



Adriana Hoyos

The Rumba Cocktail Table 200 features an oval shaped French Oak top with sinuous lines that rise from its base, repeating the beautifully shaped curves.

Contact information on page 136.



TÖV

The Orchid Accent Chair draws its inspiration from Hollywood glam design. Its sloping arms, luxurious velvet upholstery and gold tipped legs are sure to make an impression in any space.

Contact information on page 136.



Borkholder

The striations of canyon walls inspired the new Aurora Collection with simple, bold forms composed from slabs of solid Red Oak. This four-door credenza emphasizes the natural architecture of the earth with a strong, linear quality and visually uninterrupted deep cuts on the doors and side panels.

Contact information on page 136.



Bellini Modern Living

The Abstract Series features art inspired by artists such as Kandinsky and Pollock. A bold use of color throughout creates a focal point for any wall space in need of an aesthetic boost.

Contact information on page 136.



Cochrane

Haverford dining has classic styling in a choice of two finishes; warm vanilla bean (shown) and two-tone vanilla bean over white. Shown is 46" round top table with double X back chair.

Contact information on page 136.

Arason

The criss cross molding on this space saving cabinet bed is reminiscent of a Tudor style window. Available in white, black and ash, the Essex style has a 47-inch wide by 9-1/2 inch deep drawer for storing bedding. The drawer telescopes out on felt covered runners that support the fold-down front panel when open.

Contact information on page 136.



Best Selling DESIGN

Xcella Furniture Home

The Lancaster Chair introduction has a rain forest jungle satin fabric back and blue velvet upholstery on the inside. It's available with steel or wood legs.

Contact information on page 136.



Country View Woodworking

Featured in Brown Maple 117, this set is a leader in CVW's Premier Express Ship Dining Program, available within two weeks. The classic oval top with transitional trestle frame is complemented by a smartly rounded top rail.

Contact information on page 136



Klaussner

The Becks sectional has wide, bordered, low-standing track arms and wide, short legs. It features loose-back welt-bordered cushions, and down-blend seat cushions and arm pillows.

Contact information on page 136.





Benchmaster

The Power Chair from Benchmaster offers both comfort and style.
Contact information on page 136.



Nourison

This contemporary floral rug design features abstract flower patterns in ombre shades of beige, green, brown, and pink. The thick wool pile has sleek Luxelle highlights, hand carved for exceptional depth, sheen, and texture.
Contact information on page 136.



Jaipur Home

The new Industrial Lattice 4-Door Sideboard/Cabinet is part of the Structured Simplicity Collection. It is constructed using tongue and groove joint methods from a combination of reclaimed wood and new Mango timber in a blended finish and galvanized metal.
Contact information on page 136.

Istikbal Furniture

The Vals sofa is designed to look fabulous and offer incredible performance. The sofa features tufted back and seat cushions, rounded arms and elegant tufted sides and rear.
Contact information on page 136.



✓ *High Point*

POINT/COUNTERPOINT

by Bill Napier & Ed Tashjian

Ed loves the High Point Market. Bill, not so much. They share views about how they see the future of our largest show.

Editor's Note. A Bit of History: Furniture shows had their roots in the 1870s, when manufacturers held small cooperative displays, mostly in warehouses, bringing buyers to goods instead of bringing goods to buyers. This solution proved less than satisfactory for buyers who had to travel long distances to view goods without the advantages of modern roads or "horseless carriages".

Furniture Markets 1891

Twenty years later, Charles Spratt a traveling representative for Furniture World Magazine, believed he had a solution. Spratt arranged a series of meetings sponsored by the Central Furniture Manufacturers' Association. The result was the formation of the American Furniture Manufacturers' Exposition in NY on March 12, 1891. The new association took over a building on 3rd Avenue and 63rd street, renting space at 10 cents per square foot for the purpose of selling to the furniture

trade only. Retailing was strictly forbidden. At first, only Eastern manufacturers were permitted to show at the exposition, but these rules were soon relaxed and mid-western companies were admitted. Spratt believed that in order to establish a national market, there must be no limitations or advantage given to individual exhibitors based on their geographic location. The furniture Market system as we know it today had been launched. By 1895, furniture expositions had expanded to New York, Chicago, Rochester, Cincinnati, Boston, Philadelphia, Indianapolis, Rockford, St. Louis, Grand Rapids, Jamestown, and Shelbyville.

Since then, furniture show venues have come and gone, but in many ways, the basic home furniture marketing model has remained the same.

Furniture Markets 2018

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High Point Market

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Bill Napier and Ed Tashjian, thinking about the future of furniture shows, including that behemoth, the High Point Market.

I don't relish putting myself in the middle of Ed and Bill's discussion, but after visiting over 70 High Point Market exhibitions, and making many thousands of showroom visits, I feel justified in sharing the following observation. Whether you are a retailer or a manufacturer, preparation and

attention to detail are the keys to having a successful market experience. Large shows are complex ecosystems where manufacturers and retailers share responsibility with show management for their own success. Woody Allen noted that, "Eighty percent of success is showing up." That definitely isn't true for furniture shows, where the how, where, with what, with whom and why you show up count for more than 50 percent of any successful showing.

This is Bill and Ed's sixth installment in the series, having previously debated celebrity licensing, digital advertising overload, the millennial myth, whether or not furniture brands matter, and benefits to early adapters of VR/AR.

"Ed says retailers like Amazon, Wayfair and Hayneedle send large buying groups to furniture shows. I believe this won't last." - Bill Napier

short, they believe the concentration of dealers and new technologies will make it obsolete.

My point of view is that the High Point Market will not only continue, but it will thrive in the foreseeable future. And the smart money seems to support my position.

"Wayfair and Amazon send more people to market than any other institution.

Like everyone else, they want to be first to see the newest and the most interesting trends in fashion, logistics, and marketing." - Ed Tashjian

POINT: Ed Tashjian

There seems to be some conversation regarding the continued relevance of the High Point Market. Some folks think it's an institution and will last forever, and others, including my point/counterpoint partner Bill Napier believe its days are numbered. In

Follow The Money

In 2011, when Oaktree and Bain Capital formed a partnership to buy much of the real estate in High Point under the aegis of IMC, they spent over \$500,000 in research and used the talents of the smartest MBAs to determine whether it would be

"High Point Market is even better

if you are a buyer. For a week you are valued and admired, your jokes are funny and it looks like you've lost weight..." - Ed Tashjian

a good investment. For a cup of coffee, I could have told them it was a great investment! Fast forward to 2017 when Blackstone doubled down and purchased IMC. Blackstone, by the way, with over \$371 billion of assets under management, is unlikely to run out of capital for future re-development and acquisition. Further, on any drive through High Point, you can't miss the amount of new construction. These are massive corporate showrooms that are depreciating their assets over 30 years. What do they know that others don't? The first rule of business is to follow the money.

Consolidation

One of the arguments is that High Point isn't necessary anymore. The Top 100 retailers account for approximately 80 percent of the \$110 billion spent on furniture each year. They say it will be cheaper to simply bring the furniture to them. This is an erroneous argument. First, the math only works if you sell containers direct to fewer than 25 retailers. Second, there's still \$22 billion dollars on the table.

Too Many Markets

Another argument is that there

are too many markets. Some question why the consumer electronics industry can get by with one market per year and furniture needs four. It's because we are in the fashion business. Our furniture business is one of the most creative and nuanced industries in America, constantly searching the globe for the latest in materials and designs. And the buyers—those 50,000 interior designers, case and furniture buyers, demand freshness and creativity to serve their customers.

Buyers & Technology

I hear some people say that technology will obviate the need for seeing the furniture face-to-face. I embrace technology. Technology makes furniture better. Technology democratizes data and levels many playing fields. But technology will only grow the pie and will make High Point that much more important. In fact, technology will enhance High Point. Near-term, augmented reality and 3D modeling will be commonplace. That will only increase the desire to see furniture the same way it did for automobiles.

People ask me about e-commerce. Will Wayfair and Amazon co-opt the digital assets of High

Point and make furniture buying on a B2B basis easier over the Internet than in person? Here's the irony. Wayfair and Amazon send more people to market than any other institution. In April, Wayfair sent over 100 people. Like everyone else, they want to be first to see the newest and the most interesting trends in fashion, logistics, and marketing. Does anybody really believe that the designers and buyers in our industry are going to make it easy for them to get the upper hand by staying away from markets?

Fun?

Finally, let's face it. For furniture junkies like us, the High Point Market is just flat-out fun.

"They spent over \$500,000 in research and used the talents of the smartest MBAs. For a cup of coffee, I could have told them it was a great investment!" - Ed Tashjian

HIGH POINT COUNTER POINT

This is the most jovial and collegial of all industries. We like each other, are happy to see each other and look forward to shaking hands and breaking bread. It's our Disneyland. It's even better when you're a buyer. It provides a respite from the day-to-day headaches of demanding clients. For a week you are valued and admired, your jokes are funny and it looks like you've lost weight. You have more invitations for drinks and dinner than you can possibly attend, and for a brief while, you're the most important person on the planet.

Ed's Conclusion

High Point is the Mecca of the furniture world. It has scale with over 10 million square feet of show space and approximately 2000 exhibitors. There are around 70,000-80,000 attendees from over 100 countries. Yes, there are markets in Shanghai, Paris, and Milan—but High Point is the biggest and is highly regarded. If you're selling, you want to be where your customers are. If you are buying, you want to see the widest choice of the newest things in the shortest period of time. The High Point Market provides both of these, bringing buyers

and sellers together efficiently, effectively and joyously... and that is why it will be around for a long time.

COUNTER POINT: Bill Napier

In spite of Ed's persuasive argument in favor of the High Point Market, I see a dramatic decline coming in five years, seven at most. Here's why.

I started attending the High Point Market in 2000 and was amazed by all the buildings, all the people crowding the streets. Today, published numbers say 80,000 people from all over the world attend High Point Market. Sure, there is more square footage today than in 2000, but just look around. Remember when you couldn't get on an elevator without obnoxious waits and having to stop on every floor? And how many retailers attend the show? I bet Ashley alone sends 800 to High Point.

Bottom line, I see a number of trends that point to reduced attendance and lower manufacturer market participation.

Follow The Money?

I don't agree with Ed's analysis of Bain and Blackrock's investing practices. To me, it's

a short-term "flip" scenario. Buy all the markets, raise rates, ROI your investment and flip it. I believe that Vegas would make a great condo conversion.

As for all the building going on in High Point, it makes perfect sense, especially if you take a closer look at who is doing the building. The companies Ed references are large Asian manufacturers, many public, that need this presence. The remaining mid-sized and smaller manufacturers, ones that pay for the other 2000 spaces, will be dwarfed by these companies and a few other majors. What happens to most of the independent stores when a Wal-Mart comes to town? That's what I'm talking about. Interesting how history always repeats itself, especially in our industry.

"Ask yourself, where will these high volume retailers buy? Will it be at the shows or direct from factories, except for a few items?" - Bill Napier

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"Near term, augmented reality

and 3D modeling will be commonplace. That will only increase the desire to see furniture the same way it did for automobiles." - Ed Tashjian

Retail Consolidation

There has been a contraction of independent retailers since the recession. About 10,000 storefronts have been lost. Retail expansion with outside capital investments in Bob's, Art Van and others has accelerated. Ask yourself, where will these high volume retailers buy? Will it be at the shows or direct from the factories, except for a few items? I'm betting it will be the direct from factories scenario which won't be good for furniture shows.

Consumer Buying Behaviors

Once again, we are missing or ignoring trends in purchasing behavior. It wasn't long ago most people in the furniture business believed no one would buy furniture online. Fast forward to 2018 and look how much the world has changed. Online sales have doubled in the past five years to a projected \$42.7BN. According to the statistical website statista.com, over 224 million people shopped online in 2019. The online furni-

ture sales growth curve isn't going down, it's going up, and up.

According to a report by e-marketer in March of 2018, furniture was the top category U.S. Internet users preferred to shop digitally vs. in-store. We even beat shoes if you can believe that, along with clothing, beauty, and electronics. Now consider venerable retail names brought low by the internet. Sears, JC Penney, Bon Ton's and Toy's R Us. It's all about the consumer. They rule at our ignorance and expense.

And, the continuing online trend is supported by demographics. The size of the average new home is shrinking, and the Millennial generation is still by-and-large renting. Guess what folks? Apartment-dwelling Millennials don't buy as many multiple rooms of furniture and, what they do buy, tends to support online purchasing.

Retailer Buying Behaviors

What do the consumer buying trends discussed above have to

do with professional buyers who attend High Point? A lot. My point is that if consumers don't have to touch it, feel it, sit in it, to buy it, what makes you so certain that the same couldn't be true for professional buyers?

Ed says retailers like Amazon, Wayfair and Hayneedle send large buying groups to furniture shows. I believe this won't last. It makes sense going forward these online giants will not only sell online, but buy the majority of their products as well using new search and AI technologies. Why wouldn't they adapt the tools they've created for their customers use, to streamline their own buying process?

Technology

To Ed's point, technology could grow the furniture industry, and it does level the playing field by democratizing data, but only if our industry uses it.

I've lost faith that companies in our industry will do that any time soon. How many retailers

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still use fax machines? Too many! And just look at their websites, templated, loaded with "buy now on-sale" pitches, are hard to navigate and lack content.

The same is true for those technology-laggards, furniture manufacturers. It's my view for manufacturers that don't adapt, don't innovate, will simply not be able to justify the funds necessary to show at multiple furniture shows. This will start a feedback loop, fewer manufacturers and less retail traffic. In fact, it's happening already.

Alternatives

We already see buying groups siphoning off independent buyers with their own dedicated shows. What if the largest manufacturers left High Point and Vegas and built permanent showrooms in or alongside their distribution centers? That would not bode well for major shows. Most companies have DCs on the coasts and in middle America. These

showrooms could be open seven days a week. It would be easier for buyers and better for manufacturers. And, it could all cost less than their present showroom leases, the cost of moving products in and out, of taking reps off the road, entertaining and more.

Fun?

Ed thinks High Point is fun. I disagree. It's really hard to get to, there aren't many good places to eat or entertain, it's archaic to navigate, and did I mention it's expensive and stressful to attend? Before I conclude, let me rant a bit about the Las Vegas Market. I love going to the Vegas Market because it's so easy. Easy to get to, great hotels, shuttle service, and restaurants. There's only one thing not to love about Vegas. The summer market!

Bill's Conclusion

Just because you build it,

doesn't mean they'll come. Like I said at the start of this counterpoint, give it five to seven years.

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: *The Managing Partner of Napier Marketing Group, Bill has been chief marketing officer for small, medium and large companies, most notably Ashley Furniture Industries.*

He is a featured writer/speaker whose 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 strategies for retailers and brands. Contact: napier@napiermkt.com or 612-217-1297.

"If consumers don't have to touch it, feel it, sit in it, to buy it, what makes you so certain that the same couldn't be true for professional buyers?" - Bill Napier



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THE CURSE OF

FOUR PERCENT UNEMPLOYMENT

by Gordon Hecht

Here are five great ideas that will make it easier to hire better, more loyal employees in this very tight job market.

There is an ancient proverb that says "What we think is a curse is sometimes a blessing, and what we think is a blessing is sometimes a curse." You really don't have to look too far back to see that. Last decade's recession was a cursed period for retail and manufacturing business, but the blessing was that business managers and owners had to really pay attention to every dollar spent. Efforts to streamline and "go lean" were in high gear. Many of the practices adopted during that recession are still being used to help keep businesses efficient and profitable.

Another curse of 2009-2013 was harsh unemployment. You may remember that it topped 10 percent early on, then finally dropped below eight percent in 2014. If you were unlucky enough to live in Nevada or Michigan, the high number was close to 15 percent. It's hard to call it a blessing, but if you were a manager or business owner you could count on having a deep pool of potential employment

candidates. For the most part, these were good people who did great work, but were just unlucky. If you had good people on your team, the recession made them loyal. Most people knew outside prospects were dim, and they worked like their job depended on it!

For many different reasons, the economy has turned for the better. The current unemployment rate in the US is 3.8 percent. Back in the old days when I hitched my horse at school, college economics professors taught us that four

"If your net profit (EBITDA) is six percent, you are losing \$1,500 to \$2,700 in net profit dollars per month just from being understaffed."

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percent unemployment was considered "Full Employment" meaning that everyone who wanted a job, had one. Shave another 200 basis points off of that and you can see a recruiting crisis is looming.

Greatest Challenge For Retail

Whenever someone asks me what I think will be the greatest challenge for retail businesses over the next five years, my very fast response is "Recruiting Great People". There are four factors that lead me to this conclusion:

- **Not anyone's dream job:**

Retail is the dream job of no one! If you asked every high school senior about their

career choice following graduation, I believe less than one percent would say that they want to pursue a retail career. The pay may not be enough to cover their student loans.

- **Schedules are lousy:** Retail schedules are not family or work/life balance friendly. Stores are open nights and weekends because that's when people are off work. Your prospective recruits want that time off, too!

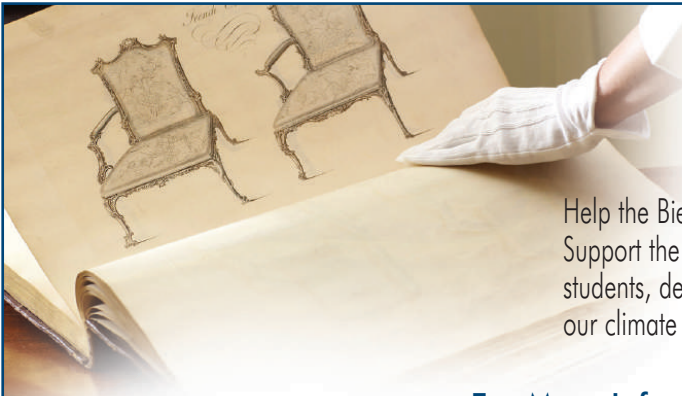
- **Benefits aren't always the best:** Sure, some of the Big Box retailers offer some good benefits, but things like healthcare and paid time off are darned expensive. However, next to national security,

healthcare ranks number two as an issue on people's minds.

- **Shoppers can be difficult:** Robert Moses is quoted as saying "I love the public; it's just the people I can't stand". Retail shoppers are ready to fight over the least little slip up. If your delivery truck is 15 minutes late, or there is a pin-hole tear in the product plastic wrap, many shoppers want to escalate the issue for extra discounts, new products, and sometimes your employees' necks! And their language ain't too pretty either.

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FOUR PERCENT UNEMPLOYMENT

have to do is convert your company culture from being just another retail job (aka-my career before my real career) to being THE PLACE TO WORK.

The only catch is, getting and keeping good people will cost you money.

Empty chairs and revolving employees, however, will cost you more! Assume your mattress store has a staff of three RSAs, full or part time. Or, if you have a furniture store, let's assume 10 people are on your sales team. If you lose one person, the rest of the team will pick up SOME of the slack, but they will never cover all the lost sales due to unattended or under-attended shoppers. Experience shows that monthly sales losses total about \$25,000 in sales in a mattress store, and

\$45,000 in a furniture store. Flooring and Appliance stores can suffer an even larger loss. If your net profit (EBITDA) is six percent, you are losing \$1,500 to \$2,700 in net profit dollars per month just from being understaffed.

Even just changing the way you view staffing and making some no-cost or low-cost changes will help reduce this loss. Here are five areas to consider.

1. Recruiting: Retail stores succeed when their sales teams look more like their customers. If you don't believe me, check out Victoria's Secret, The Apple Store, Jared Jewelers, and Pearle Vision. Jared's RSAs look like they are in competition with Mr. T for most bling, and everyone at Pearle wears glasses whether they need them or not. Many of

your shoppers have tattoos, piercings, and some wild haircuts and colors. When candidates come in for interviews, don't discount their abilities based on how they look. If you are looking to add on some bilingual candidates, then be sure to advertise in non-English newspapers, radio stations, and websites.

"A four day work-week gives employees the option to have one less day of childcare and commuting, or one more day to pursue experiences."

"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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"Never tolerate harassment

or bullying of employees. Either should be grounds for immediate termination."

2. Consider college loans:

It may not be number one on people's lists of concerns, but large college loans are a big burden many young people carry. It is probably the biggest reason that they are living with Mom and Pop longer, and not buying home furnishings. One of the greatest benefits you can offer is college loan assistance. Just offering to pay off \$1,000 in college loans after one year of employment and \$2,000 a year every year after that will gain and keep great loyal people. It boils down to \$80-\$160 a month cost per person.

3. Address scheduling.

Scheduling is where most retailers lose out. Here, flexibility is key. Consider options such as:

- Offering a four day work-week (full or part time) to give employees one less day of childcare and commuting, or one more day to pursue "experiences".
- Options to work alternate weekends or just one weekend day per week.
- Late shift bonus pay.

Sure these strategies will complicate staffing, but if you don't get on the work/life balance

bandwagon, you'll miss out on hiring the best people.

4. Healthcare.

It's hard for smaller retailers to keep competitive with retail giants when it comes to covering insurance costs. Your best bet is to look for program options, take advantage of employee funded HSA and FSA accounts, and consider cutting back on hourly or commission (taxable) income in favor of offering more generous healthcare coverage.

5. Personnel protection:

You should never tolerate the harassment or bullying of employees. Either should be grounds for immediate termination. Retail associates are bullied and harassed by shoppers and customers every day. I have seen this play out as a customer and stopped it as a manager. Every shopper is important, but there should come a point where you must draw the line and let unruly and out-of-line shoppers know they are not welcome to shop at your business. Protecting the dignity of your employees will earn you much more loyalty than pay raises and Christmas bonuses. Plus, it's absolutely the right thing to do.

Conclusion

Enjoy the blessings of a robust economy. People have money and the confidence to spend it now. These things are cyclical, and will change at some point. Building a strong, diversified, and loyal team in good times will pay off in lean times.

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 career in Home Furnishings as a delivery helper and driver, later moving to sales and management.

Gordon has been a store manager, multi-unit Manager and National Director of Sales and has been recognized for outstanding 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.



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