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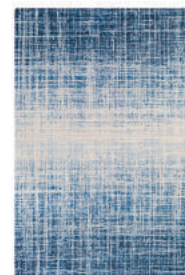
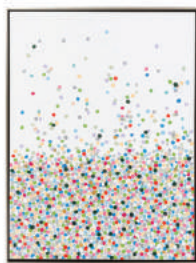
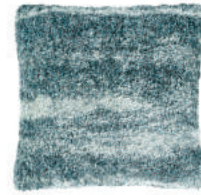
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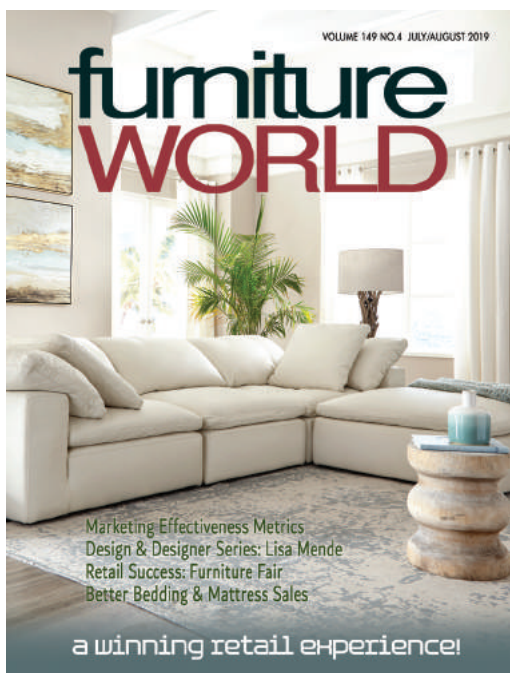
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Here Come the Lizards!

What do the following phrases often heard on retail sales floors have in common?

"Is there anything special I can show you?" "Do you have a favorite color?" "Can I point you in a particular direction?" "Did you see anything you can't live without?" "Will you be taking this with you?" "Has this been a fun experience?" "Are you browsing for anything special?" "Have you seen anything that you have to own?" "Are you shopping for ideas?" "Should we get your order started?" "Would you like me to write this up?"

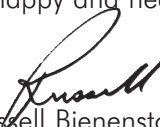
Those of you who recall the sales wit and wisdom of Furniture World's enthusiastic contributing editor Kathy Finney will know that these are "lizards", the closed probes likely to get a one-word response... the one you and your sales associates probably won't appreciate!

Kathy spent years working to eliminate these phrases from furniture sales associate lexicon, yet lizard phrases continue to slither off the tongues of new as well as experienced RSAs.

Kathy suggested that sales associates forgo lizards in favor of questions starting with the words who, why, when, what, where, how, tell me, describe, elaborate and explain. Also, that they ask questions shoppers already know the answers to, such as, "Where will you be using your new sofa?" and, "Who will be using your new room?" Sure, shoppers may still reply, "I'm just browsing", but it's a lot less likely.

Get customers talking about themselves, she advised. Let them know that you are there to listen, to have a conversation, to help, give them a great experience, and not waste their time or your own.

I hope you enjoy all the great information in this edition of Furniture World magazine. Best wishes for a happy and healthy summer retailing season!


 Russell Bienenstock
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MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS METRICS

by David McMahon

Retailer A has a bigger ad budget. Retailer B uses more digital media. Which one gets better returns?

I recently took the time to observe and evaluate the marketing efforts of two companies in different towns. Both sell to similar populations, have comparable occupancy rates and similar competitive environments.

Both Retailer A and Retailer B operate stores in decent retail locations. They are similar in many ways, however, their marketing approaches are very different.

Marketing Approaches

Retailer A is highly promotional, advertising heavily across many media channels including TV, radio, digital media, and direct mail. Salespeople do little prospecting on their own with past customers.

Retailer B purchases very little television, radio advertising, or direct mail. It invests a large proportion of its marketing budget in digital media. Retailer B's salespeople are required to perform extensive follow-up with custom-

ers.

I decided to look at these businesses side by side under several marketing related metrics to compare the effectiveness of their approaches.

Most retailers' marketing efforts are undertaken for the purpose of communicating to a large target audience to generate store traffic and sales leads. The purpose of sales is to communicate effectively with customers to generate revenue for the organization.

The more traffic and leads

"Since Retailer B spent much less, and sold a bit more, it produced a \$7.44 marketing ROI versus \$3.95 for Retailer A."

EXECUTIVE CONTACTS

Editorial Director, CEO

Russell Bienenstock (russ@furninfo.com)

Publisher

Barton Bienenstock (barton@furninfo.com)

Advertising Sales Director

Gary Siegel (sales@furninfo.com)

Advertising Sales Manager

Mark Testa (sales@furninfo.com)

Representative India

Amarjeet Singh Gianni (sales@furninfo.com)

Art/ Design Editor

Barbara Bienenstock (barbara@furninfo.com)

Retail Features Editor

Janet Holt-Johnstone (janet@furninfo.com)

Special Projects Editor

Melody Doering (melody@furninfo.com)

Digital Projects Editor

Nic Ledoux (nic@furninfo.com)

Comptroller

Connie Tejeda (fwcomptroller@furninfo.com)

IT Manager

Armanda Turney (armanda@furninfo.com)

Circulation Manager

Rich Jarrett (rich@furninfo.com)

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

David Benbow - Bedding & Mattress Sales

Dan Bolger - Warehousing/ Trucking

Joe Capillo - Sales Management

Jeff Giagnocavo - Retail Systems

Gordon Hecht - Retail Observer

Rene Johnston-Gingrich - Design Education

Amitesh Singha - Technology

David McMahon - Operations & Finance

Larry Mullins - Development/ Advertising

Peter Schlosser - Furniture Repair



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MARKETING METRICS

a furnishings store's marketing efforts can produce from a certain budget, the more revenue a company can generate, right? Maybe, maybe not. Ultimate results depend on how well they convert traffic to sales.

Through comparing Company A and B, I will suggest some marketing metrics to track, analyze results, and suggest some improvements.

For the purpose of this article, traffic is broken down into three customer segments: new customers, repeat customers, and be-back customers. A be-back customer is defined here as the personal trade customers of an individual salesperson who

returns after a first visit.

Store traffic was segmented in this way due to the difficulties of tracking traffic by a single media type. Real-world customers may engage with one or a variety of media, so any individual customer can decide to visit a store based on exposure to one or multiple ad types. Please note that online traffic is not being considered in this article, as that analysis requires a separate set of analytics.

Crunching The Numbers

Advertising media spend, customer traffic proportions, salesperson handling of that traffic, conversion rates, average sale,

revenue per guest, cost of the traffic and the return on the advertisement investment were considered in the following analysis.

"At 13 percent of sales, advertising expense is higher than most operations. In this case, Retailer A has a good location, so it may be unnecessarily overspending."

Chart #1: Monthly Data

MONTHLY DATA	Company A	Company B	MONTHLY DATA	Company A	Company B
TV \$ Spend	\$25,000	-	# of Sales - New Customers	170	130
Radio \$ Spend	\$10,000	-	# of Sales - Repeat Customers	150	200
Direct Mail \$ Spend	\$25,000	\$10,000	# of Sales - Bebacks (Personal Trade)	20	50
Digital \$ Spend	\$5,000	\$25,000	# of Sales - Total Retail	340	380
Website \$ Spend	\$5,000	\$5,000	# of Sales - Website	15	50
Agency \$ Spend	\$6,000	\$2,000	# of Sales	355	430
Total \$ Spend	\$76,000	\$42,000	\$ Sales - New Customers	\$250,000	\$125,000
Traffic - New Customers	750	420	\$ Sales - Repeat Customers	\$255,000	\$325,000
Traffic - Repeat Customers	495	530	\$ Sales - Bebacks (Personal Trade)	\$75,000	\$125,000
Traffic - Bebacks (Personal Trade)	50	120	\$ Sales - Retail Total	\$580,000	\$575,000
Total Retail Store Traffic	1295	1070	\$ Sales - Website	\$20,000	\$50,000
Traffic - Website	5,000	10,000	Total Sales \$	\$600,000	\$625,000
			# of Salespeople	10	10

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Chart #2: Monthly Data

SELECT METRICS	Company A	Company B
TV % of Spend	33%	0%
Radio % of Spend	13%	0%
Direct Mail % of Spend	33%	24%
Digital % of Spend	7%	60%
Website % of Spend	7%	12%
Agency % of Spend	8%	5%
Total Ad Spend % of Sales	13%	7%
New Customer Traffic % of Retail	58%	39%
Repeat Customer Traffic % of Retail	38%	50%
Beback Customer Traffic % of Retail	4%	11%
Traffic / Salesperson - Retail	130	107

Effectiveness can be evaluated by tracking metrics, analyzing results and making suggestions for improvement.

SELECT METRICS	Company A	Company B
Conversion Rate - New Customers	23%	31%
Conversion Rate - Repeat Customers	30%	38%
Conversion Rate - Bebacks (Personal Trade)	40%	42%
Conversion Rate - Total Retail	26%	36%
Average Sale - New Customers	\$1,471	\$962
Average Sale - Repeat Customers	\$1,700	\$1,625
Average Sale - Beback (Personal Trade)	\$3,750	\$2,500
Average Sale - Total Retail	\$1,706	\$1,513
Average Sale - Website	\$1,333	\$1,000
Average Sale - Total	\$1,690	\$1,453
\$ Sales/New Guests	\$333	\$298
\$ Sales/Repeat Guests	\$515	\$613
\$ Sales/Bebacks (Personal Trade)Guests	\$1,500	\$1,042
\$ Sales/Guest Retail Total	\$448	\$537
Cost/Customer Traffic - Retail	\$59	\$39
Ad Spend ROI - Retail (@ 50% GM)	\$3.95	\$7.44

After crunching the monthly data numbers presented in Chart #1, similarities and differences were identified in the marketing results produced by each retailer.

Similarities

Sales Volume:

For the month, the sales volume produced was very close at \$600,000 and \$625,000. Both companies produced this volume with the same number of salespeople, 10.

Conversion Rate by Customer Type:

Companies A and B both have the highest close rate in custom-

ers who have shopped with them before. New customers have a lower close rate.

Average Sale by Type of Customer:

Both have the highest average sale in repeat customers and be-backs.

Sales Per Guest by Customer Type:

The revenue produced for customers who are "asking for salespeople by name", due to personal trade, is the most profitable traffic. The next most profitable are repeat customers who have shopped there before at some point.

Differences

Percent of Media Spend:

As mentioned earlier, Retailer A advertises heavily with traditional media, while Retailer B spends

"Retailer B made more sales from less retail traffic and thus produced a much higher close rate at 36% versus 26% for Retailer A."

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"In the furniture industry,

traffic handled by each salesperson on average ranges from 80 to 200, with design oriented operations being on the lower side."

more of its budget on digital media. Retailer A spent a much larger amount on advertising at 13 percent of sales, while Retailer B spent 7 percent.

Total Traffic:

Retailer A produced more in-store visits than Retailer B, while Retailer B produced more website visits.

Traffic handled by each salesperson on average:

Retailer A handled 130 customers on average while Retailer B averaged 107 per person. It is important to staff to the level that your business model dictates. In the furniture industry, traffic handled by each salesperson on average ranges from 80 to 200, with design oriented operations being on the lower side.

Retail conversion rate:

Retailer B made more sales from less retail traffic and thus produced a much higher close rate at 36 percent versus 26 percent for Retailer A.

Retail average sale:

Retailer A produced a higher average sale than Retailer B pri-

marily because it was better at producing a higher sales volume from new customers. \$1,471 versus \$962.

Cost per total retail traffic:

Retailer A spends much more to bring customers into their operation at \$59 per customer, versus \$39 at Retailer B.

Return On Investment:

The return on investment of advertising is higher at Retailer B. The Advertising ROI formula is: Gross Margin Dollars Produced / Total Cost of Advertising. Both operations had a similar gross margin percent. Since Retailer B spent much less, and sold a bit more, it produced a \$7.44 marketing ROI versus \$3.95 for Retailer A.

improvement for each company were identified as outlined below.

Retailer A

1. Decrease Ad spend and change Ad mix: At 13 percent of sales, advertising expense is higher than most operations in our industry. In this case, Retailer A has a good location, so it may be unnecessarily overspending. They should look at tweaking their media spend and mix to see if a similar amount of traffic can be produced with a budget of under 10 percent of sales to start.

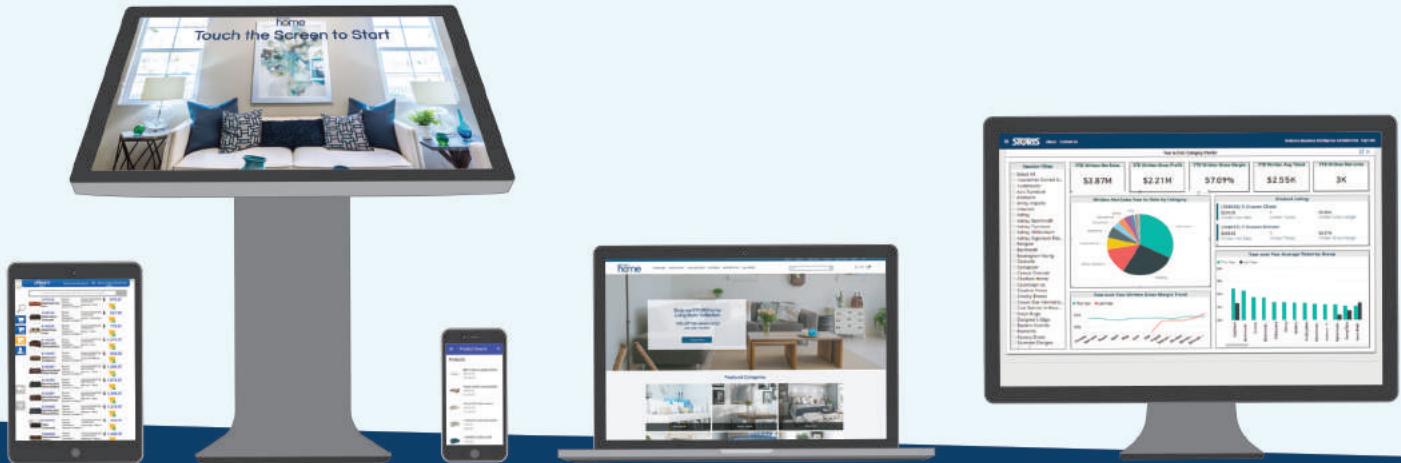
2. Improve close rate: Retailer A may be able to improve its close rate for new customers. It has proven that it can get a decent average sale from new customers and a higher close rate from repeat customers (see Charts). Even a couple of percentage points increase in close rate would have a significant impact on sales.

3. Focus on increasing repeat customers: In both companies, all metrics point

Recommendations

Every business situation is different. There is no perfect model. Everyone has areas of strength and areas of weakness. As a result, opportunity is always present if you can find it and know how to improve upon it. In this comparison, three top areas for

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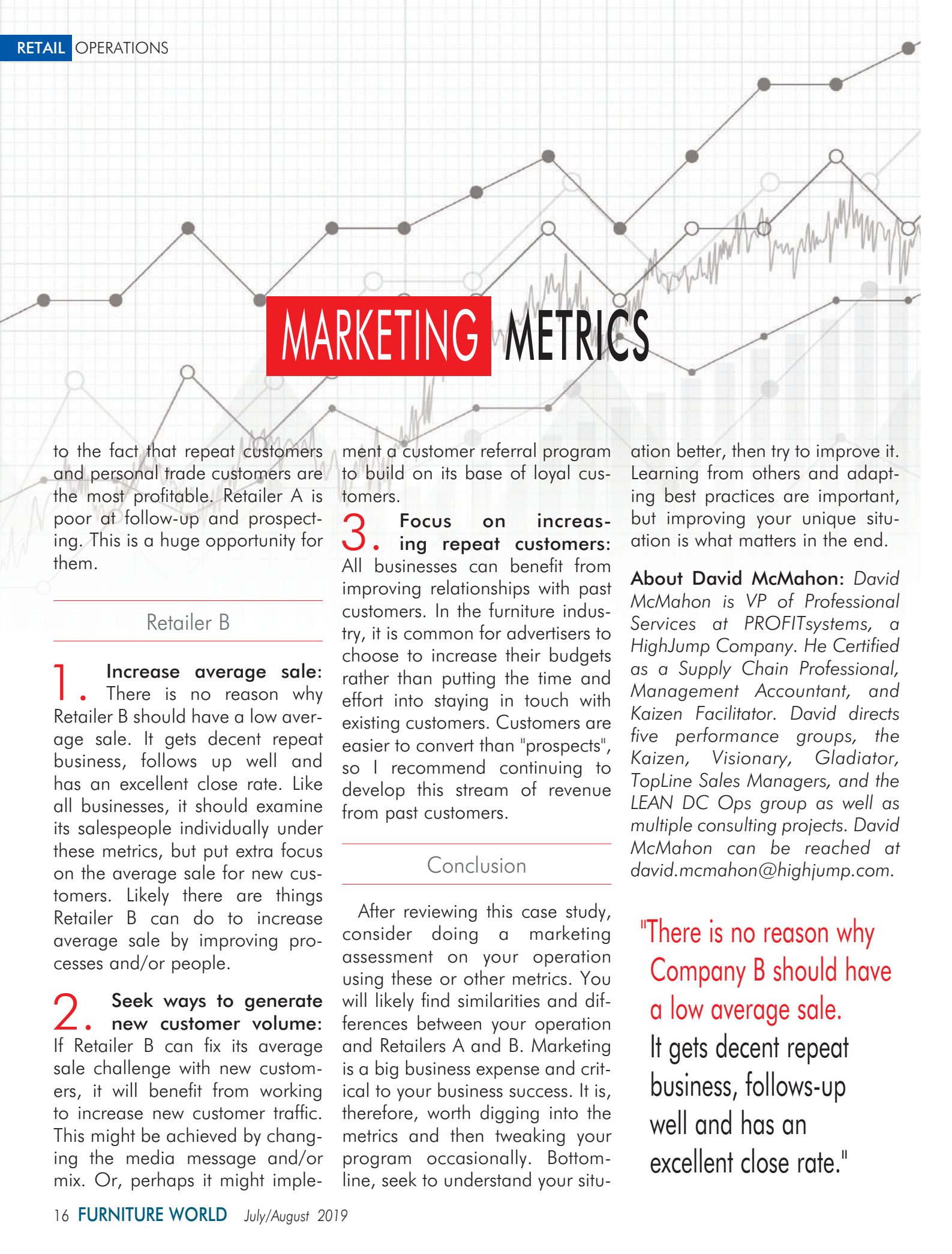


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MARKETING METRICS

to the fact that repeat customers and personal trade customers are the most profitable. Retailer A is poor at follow-up and prospecting. This is a huge opportunity for them.

Retailer B

1. Increase average sale: There is no reason why Retailer B should have a low average sale. It gets decent repeat business, follows up well and has an excellent close rate. Like all businesses, it should examine its salespeople individually under these metrics, but put extra focus on the average sale for new customers. Likely there are things Retailer B can do to increase average sale by improving processes and/or people.

2. Seek ways to generate new customer volume: If Retailer B can fix its average sale challenge with new customers, it will benefit from working to increase new customer traffic. This might be achieved by changing the media message and/or mix. Or, perhaps it might imple-

ment a customer referral program to build on its base of loyal customers.

3. Focus on increasing repeat customers: All businesses can benefit from improving relationships with past customers. In the furniture industry, it is common for advertisers to choose to increase their budgets rather than putting the time and effort into staying in touch with existing customers. Customers are easier to convert than "prospects", so I recommend continuing to develop this stream of revenue from past customers.

Conclusion

After reviewing this case study, consider doing a marketing assessment on your operation using these or other metrics. You will likely find similarities and differences between your operation and Retailers A and B. Marketing is a big business expense and critical to your business success. It is, therefore, worth digging into the metrics and then tweaking your program occasionally. Bottom-line, seek to understand your situ-

ation better, then try to improve it. Learning from others and adapting best practices are important, but improving your unique situation is what matters in the end.

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

"There is no reason why Company B should have a low average sale. It gets decent repeat business, follows-up well and has an excellent close rate."

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DESIGN & DESIGNER

LISA MENDE

by Melody Doering

Interior designer, blogger, style spotter and influencer, Lisa Mende shares her perspectives on uniquely southern design, new trends and collaboration between retailers and designers.

Featured this month in Furniture World's Design & Designer series, is Lisa Mende, the founder and principal of Lisa Mende Design. Lisa is acclaimed throughout the southeast for her interior designs that infuse traditional elements with a modern vibe. She maintains a lively social media presence through her blog, also named Lisa Mende Design. In addition to being an allied member of ASID, IDS, Design Trust of NYC and WithIt, she has been a High Point Market Style Spotter three times.

Starting out in Design

I grew up in Newton Grove in eastern North Carolina. My dream was to go to the big city to work in the fashion industry. Instead, I ended up living in a small town working for Roses Stores as a copywriter, because I couldn't find anything in my field, apparel design.

"After a few years, I found a job as a ladies' clothing buyer for a five-store regional chain and

managed two of the stores. When my first child was born, I no longer wanted the retail hours, so I got a job representing a clothing line in North and South Carolina. After that, I was a part-time marketing director for a nutritional company."

Politics to Interior Design

"I also worked for the Clinton campaign, and then for a period at the White House. I returned home to reevaluate how to balance work and raising my children. I thought, 'I should go back to school for interior design.' So, I went to the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, met my present husband, moved to Charlotte, and transferred to an interior architecture program.

"In my junior year, I took an internship with a local kitchen and bath firm here in Charlotte and fell in love with the whole idea of doing residential design. In 1998, I opened my own practice and had a third child."

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"I grew up in the South where tradition is very important – appreciating the value of family heirlooms and enjoying the stories that went along with those items."

Realignments

"In 2008, I was at a client's house with fabrics spread all over the kitchen island when the husband returned home and said, 'What are you doing here? Haven't you heard? The market crashed.' After that, luxury design was a hard business. Our business went from doing whatever we wanted without budget considerations, to minimal jobs to redesign houses without spending a fortune.

"A year later a client shared her story of losing a child to leukemia, and I told her there was no way I could survive that. Little did I know that the very next night I would be getting a call that my oldest child, Walker, a senior at Auburn, had been in a kayaking accident and was lost. I quit working cold turkey, stayed in my house, didn't talk to people, didn't do anything. My husband pretty much took over."

Sisters in Design

"About two years after that, a friend suggested that I start a blog. And I asked, 'What is a blog?' So, I started blogging, initially having no idea what I was doing, or what it meant. Soon I connected with other bloggers, including interior designer Tobi Fairley, joining her Mastermind Group which did business consulting with designers.

"Once I reconnected with supportive people, I became re-energized. They became my sisters in design.

"Soon business picked up. I did a showhouse with Traditional Home magazine, and then went on to do seven national showhouses with them. Through my blog, I've met so many people; gone on domestic and international blog tours, worked with retailers, like Ballard Design, and have been asked to design national campaigns with companies like

DXV by American Standard. I was a brand ambassador for ROHL Auth Lux Designer Guild, and am on Thermador's design council. I've also worked with Twin Star, Wesley Hall, Woodard Furniture, and Ballard Designs.

"Today, the majority of my blog's readership is in major design cities like, New York, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Dallas. I also have international readership. But it all started by connecting with Tobi, other designers, retailers, and manufacturers."

Southern Style

"I grew up in the South where tradition is very important, appreciating the value of family heirlooms and enjoying the stories that went along with those items. As a southerner who grew up with that appreciation, my design is rooted in tradition. I'm comfortable around traditional pieces,

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Sophistication in design can be seen in many forms. Sometimes it appears in intricate details and patterns. Sometimes it's sleek and shiny. It can also be expressed as strong, simple and understated. Arcadia is certainly the latter. Modern Rustic at its best, with a charismatic warm finish and dramatic rubbed hardware, Arcadia radiates comfortable, simple sophistication.



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DESIGN & DESIGNER

love antiques and the history that goes with them.

"As I've become more seasoned as a designer, I've traveled and learned to appreciate other cultures, abstract art, and the mixing together of everything to create multiple layers in a room. These layers, along with items old and new, speak to a client's personality. They tell a story and are the basis of creating interesting interiors.

"Although my interiors are rooted in tradition, I like to add new and fresh elements. I discover what's special in a client's life, give those pieces prominence and edit others out. On the other hand, I also appreciate maximal interiors. I'm known for creating livable luxury."

Pictured is a design for outdoor entertaining. Lisa's clients now think of their outdoor spaces as an extension of their homes. Photo credit Marco Rica



Function and Beauty

"Beauty always follows function in my world. If something is beautiful, but doesn't function for the families or businesses I'm designing for, then my work is not successful. Once I have the floorplan in place, the room comes to life with fabrics, wallpapers, furniture, rugs, accessories, and art."

Rethinking Wasted Space

"A lot of my clients aren't using their living rooms, which is a waste of space. Instead, they want big family rooms, designed for a more casual and comfortable

"Sometimes I am surprised by what stores offer and how they have it displayed; I feel they should have involved a designer for a more cohesive look."

lifestyle. That's been a trend for the last ten years or more. Or, they may re-imagine unused living rooms as offices at the front of their homes.

"However, some people still love their dining rooms. Overall, however, dining room style has changed along with the current style of entertaining. But in the South, we still love china, sterling and crystal. Of course, it depends on the client.

"For furniture retailers, addressing wasted space in their customers' homes, can result in re-purposing those spaces and selling more furniture."

Working With Retailers

"I sometimes meet with clients



Livable Luxury in a beach home located in Bridgehampton, NY. All furniture is Wesley Hall, covered in Crypton Fabrics. Photo credit Marco Rica.

who find out that they really do not have the budget to hire me. That's an opportunity to direct them to a retail store that has in-house design services. This helps those clients get what they need while cutting their cost for extra design hours.

"Jason Harris at Furnitureland South has done a beautiful job of working with outside designers even though they have a large in-house design staff. When I'm looking for product, I can contact them to help me. I take clients there to sit on furniture. What a great way to work together in the industry.

"Retailers who don't offer design services might reach out to independent designers, offer-

ing to help promote the designer's brand in return for creating in-store vignettes. When customers come in, they see vignettes and find out that they can have their entire room designed with accessories, rugs, and art. I think it helps to sell more than just a sofa. Retailers may also want to consider giving greater discounts to designers beyond the small reductions that many currently offer."

The Power of Story-telling

"There are so many furniture lines and so many ways that consumers can buy furnishings these days. That's why retailers and manufacturers must tell bet-

ter stories about the furniture and accessories they sell. How is the product made? What makes it stand out from all the others in terms of style and construction? What makes the sofa available down the street (or online) cost \$1,000, while the one in your store is \$6,000?

"One of the best ways to sell products is to emotionally connect the buyer to the product. When you learn about the people who have worked in a factory, such as Capel rugs, for their entire lives weaving braided rugs, it makes you appreciate buying that rug. The human connection

"Jason Harris at Furnitureland South has done a beautiful job of working with outside designers even though they have a large in-house design staff."



Another example of Livable luxury and maximalism designed by Lisa Mende. Furniture is covered in Crypton and Kravet contract fabrics in a room with layers of colors and patterns. Photo credit Dustin Peck.

Design Challenges

"As a designer, my biggest obstacle is making sure the products I specify are readily available. I cannot tell you how many times I specify something only to discover the item is on back order for six months which results in me going back to the drawing board for replacements.

"Another issue I deal with is damaged goods. The time spent dealing with returns reduces my bottom line. So, if I have a poor customer service experience with a company due to damage and returns, I tend to not buy from them again. On a positive note, I love to specify custom products and work with North Carolina companies to create something unique which provides custom interiors for my clients.

"Sometimes I am surprised by what stores offer and how they have it displayed; I feel they should have involved a designer

for a more cohesive look. Often retailers just group furniture by brands without an idea about the display. More thoughtfully curated merchandising would sell more furniture – as well as rugs, accessories, and art. Those who do it well, benefit.

"On the other hand, when retail-

"Every company should look for a way to share their story so that the products, and the people behind those products are appreciated and valued."

is important to so many people. Every company should look for a way to share their stories so that the products, and the people behind those products are appreciated and valued. "This can create an emotional hook, helping customers or clients to feel a sense of ownership. For example, I just ordered a Thayer Coggin piece for a client. Of course, I explained the story of how it was designed by Milo Baughman for Thayer Coggin in the 1950s. If consumers are told something interesting about an item they are thinking of buying, they are more likely to purchase it, and when they get it home, it will mean more to them."

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"The furniture industry

has been slow to incorporate technology. But furniture retailers can still address smart home technology to let their customers know that they are cutting-edge."

ers focus too much on the ROI of individual pieces at the expense of an artfully edited selection, it creates a disconnect between the customer's experience and outcome."

Retail Inspiration

"Lots of times people don't have the time or the means to travel to get the kind of perspective gained from visiting international markets and trade shows, such as Maison Objet in France, Heimtextil in Germany, Salone

de Mobile in Italy, and London Design. These shows give us a peek into where things are going, as well as what new brands might be worthy of introduction in the U.S. If travel is not possible, read magazines, blogs, follow people on Instagram and Pinterest – see what both designers and consumers are posting.

"Visitors to High Point Market can also easily visit the Bienenstock Furniture Library in the heart of High Point. It has a vast collection of all different types of books that range from architecture to furniture history, art history, fabric design; everything and anything that you could think about in the world of furnishings design. When I visit, I feel like I'm in a magical place. It's inspiring to be able to touch the books – books are tactile – and designers want to feel things, we want to touch them. It's so much

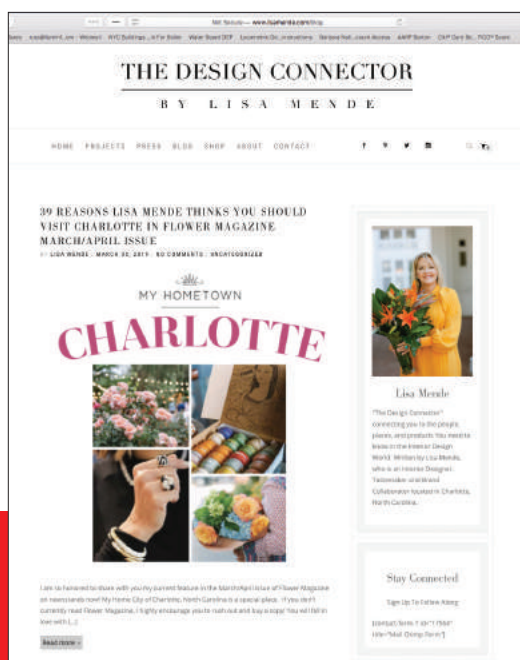
more inspiring than looking at them on a computer screen.

"Sister Parish said, 'Innovation is often the ability to reach into the past and bring back what is good, what is beautiful, what is useful, what is lasting.'"

Millennial Customers

"Some of my clients will say to me, 'My children don't want my antiques, they don't want to inherit anything.' This is a big trend right now. Younger consumers want to streamline their lives, live in smaller spaces with multi-purpose furniture, unencumbered.

"Higher-end furniture rental is on the rise in places like New York City. Millennials can get furniture, electronics, appliances, housewares, and decorative items delivered for a variable lease term. Then, if they move, get a job across country, or just want a change, the company picks it up and takes it back. There's no



Lisa's blog at www.lisamende.com/blog features stories on people, places and products in the interior design industry.



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— Steve Darvin, Co-owner

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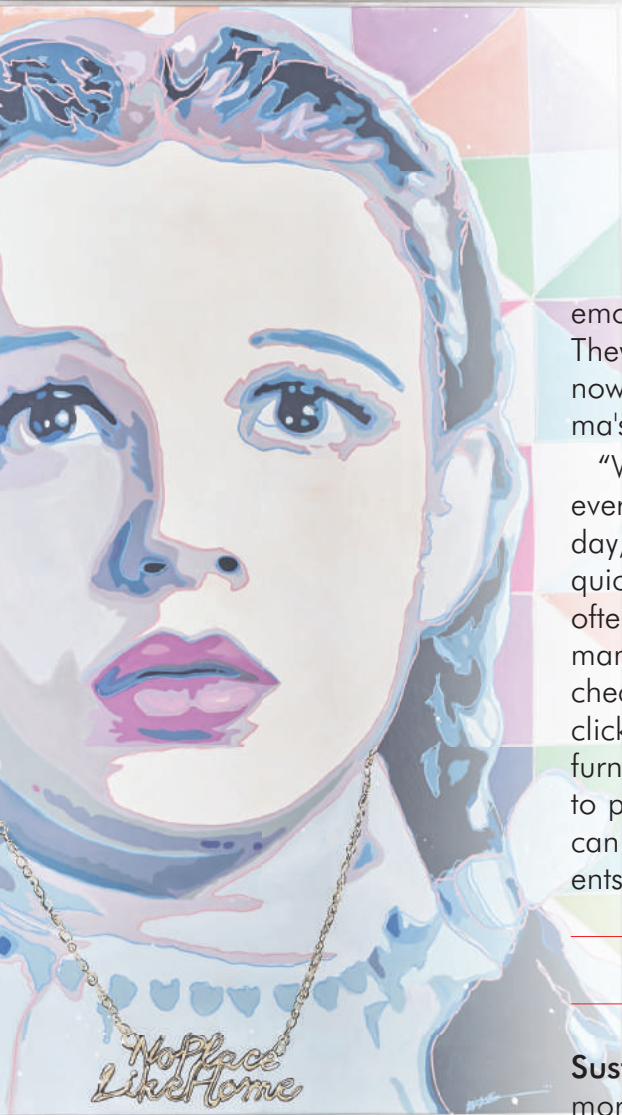
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Pictured is a collaboration between Lisa Mende and Artist Mark Boomershine who created this "Dorothy" painting for a mudroom in Tuxedo Park, Atlanta, GA.

emotional tie to that furniture. They want it fast and they want it now, but they don't want grandma's china cabinet!

"We have been spoiled, expect everything to be delivered next day, however, custom design isn't quick. Younger generations are often OK with sub-par quality in many respects if they can simply check something off their list by clicking 'buy now' online. The furniture industry has to move fast to provide in-stock options so we can all deliver quickly to our clients and compete."

Trending

Sustainable: "It's going to get more and more important as the population increases and resources become less available. In states like California, sustainable design is important now. The younger generation, especially, is very concerned about sustainability."

Outdoor vs. Indoor: "The distinction between indoor and outdoor has become a blur. We are using outdoor furnishings inside now, and the designs for outdoors look more like interior rooms."

Old and New: "Combining old and new makes a room what it needs to be for me. Every room should have something old and something new. It's the layers that create great design."

Bedroom Design: "Private spaces should be soft, soothing and inviting, with lots of beautiful textures that feel comfortable and relaxing."

Dining Rooms: "Dining rooms are still important in the South. I feel beautiful spaces that make you feel special – with hand-painted murals and luxurious fabrics – are highly on trend."

Smart Homes: "Smart homes are becoming mainstream. People have realized that they can use home technology to make their lives easier."

"The furniture industry has been slow to incorporate technology. But furniture retailers can still address smart home technology to let their customers know that they are cutting-edge. Retailers could have an event or seminar about smart home technology

"When you think of trends in this way, you realize that the things we do as designers or retailers are important to the health and welfare of our clients."

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and entice consumers to come into stores and think about creating beautiful and functional living areas."

Other Trend Perspectives: "In January I visited the Heimtextil show in Frankfurt, Germany, the largest textile show in the world. One of the most interesting areas at the show was the Trend Space.

"For furniture retailers, addressing wasted space in their customers' homes, can result in re-purposing those spaces and selling more furniture."

Instead of thinking in terms of color trends, for instance, the show presented a number of trends being driven by the way people live.

"Five trends they identified were: Go Off-Grid, Pursue Play, Seek Sanctuary, Escape Reality, and Embrace Indulgence. For example, Go Off-Grid featured designs that incorporated or were based on outdoor textiles, work clothing, and had the utilitarian aesthetics of functionality and durability. The idea was that people are tired of being connected all the time, so they're shutting down and they're going off the grid, camping, getting back to nature, or just disconnecting.

"The Pursue Play trend was identified as a reaction to the stress people are feeling from today's political situation and uncertainty, including environmental problems. Playful activities that help us escape and be optimistic are an antidote to being

inundated. The exhibit featured bold designs, humor, and interesting tactile materials.

"The trends addressed the way we live, using colors and patterns that support various lifestyles. Trendy colors and patterns don't pop up out of nowhere; they are actually connected to the way we live and breathe. When you think of trends in this way, you realize that the things we do as designers or retailers are important to the health and welfare of our clients."

Not Trending

"My blog has a 'never-in-style' section – here are a few exam-

Pictured left to right below: Showroom Lisa designed with Kenian Hom; Outdoor Friends Porch collaboration with Lloyd recent French Country Bookcase styled by Lisa Mende at Twin Star Home showroom, April 2019 High Point Market.



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ples. Nail heads are not in style. Nail heads are forever. They've been around since furniture was first designed, and will always be popular. But, in the last few years, people have overdone nail heads. I've seen rooms with nail heads on the table, nail heads on the chairs, and on the sofa.

"Another one is granite, which has been very popular over the past few years. People are always asking me if granite is in style anymore. It's a natural stone, timeless and will always be here. So, I don't think of it as trendy.

"Navy and grey have been popular over the last 10 years. They are now considered neutrals and will be a mainstay of our palette. They are not on trend anymore, but they're not out of style."

Partnering With Influencers

"The market considers me an influencer.

"When choosing who to work with influencers, retailers and manufacturers need to be careful, because there is a lot of fake social media out there. It's important to vet influencers before partnering with them. Just because somebody has a million followers it isn't a guarantee that reaching out to those followers will produce a desired outcome.

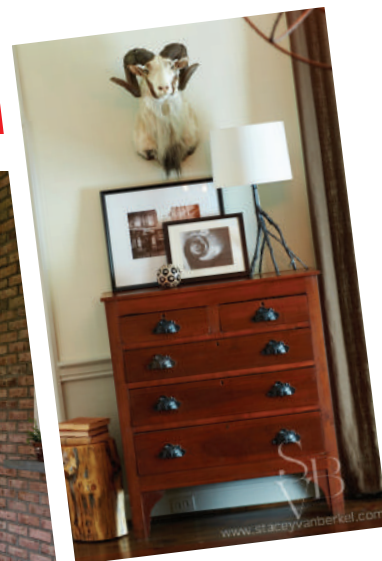
"Fortunately, it's not that hard to figure out if an influencer is reaching a brand's ideal customers. They can read followers' comments and see if they are representative of the type of market the brand is trying to reach.

"Here's the challenge for retailers, manufacturers and designers: if they want their brands to be considered authorities on design, they need to work harder at building a tribe of people who trust them. Market research shows that people buy from people they like and trust."

Retail Growth Opportunity

"When I worked in retail, I gained a respect for retailers, and the competitive aspects of buying and selling. There are a lot of ways designers and retailers can work together to support one another and solidify our connections to one another through collaboration."

LISA MENDE



Lisa designed this porch (left) sponsored by Woodard Furniture showing outdoor living at its best. Features lighting by Louise Gaskill, tableware by Replacements, Ltd., Plants by NDI, Fabrics by Schumacher, and Jill Seale, Perennials. Mixing Old and new are hallmarks of Lisa Mende's design aesthetic as shown above in the Hooper Kyser House, Chapel Hill, NC

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FINAL JEOPARDY!

I'LL TAKE MATTRESS SALES FOR \$800!

by Gordon Hecht

Take a few cues from Jeopardy's big winner James Holzhauer, and you just might WIN BIG at retail!

I've been a fan of the Game Show, "Jeopardy!" since the Art Fleming days. I love the trivia challenge, the pace, and the strategy. Even if you are not a fan, or have never watched it, you may have noticed that it's been in the news.

James Holzhauer recently finished his impressive "Jeopardy!" winning streak, earning \$2,464,216 over 32 games. He came very close to beating Ken Jennings' regular game total of \$2,520,700. While that IS impressive, what is more astounding is that he has reinvented the way the game is played, working the categories bottom to top, wagering all his banked winnings, and rarely giving a wrong response.

Similarly, our retail world has changed. It's not the same game as it was 24 months ago. Take a few cues from big winner James, and you can WIN BIG!

decades, and over this time period every player had the same strategy. Answer the easy questions first, the harder questions later. When they got a daily double, or on Final Jeopardy!, when the player controls the wager, just bet enough to win. JAMES DOES THE OPPOSITE. He goes BIG first, bets big and wins big.

It's about the same in our retail world, show the good stuff in the front, the cheap stuff in the back. Greet the shopper the same old way, ask the same old questions, and (maybe) ask them to buy.

"If you are tired of getting the same old results, maybe you should change the same old process."

Shake Things Up

I've watched "Jeopardy!" for



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"That may mean

investing in inventory, a new location, building refresh, advertising dollars, or a hot-shot manager."

Then show them a few "add-ons" and hope they do. If you are tired of getting the same old results, maybe you can change the same old process. Look for things you can update at the front door, move through your advertising, sales process, inventory, pricing, and delivery. I'll wager there is something that can improve.

Know the Other Players

Like champions in sports, James Holzhauer knows the other players better than they may know themselves. He knows what their money count is in the game, and how fast they can buzz in. In the last couple of games, his other two opponents checked out and stopped playing because he was so far ahead, he simply browbeat them.

You can see the same thing with RSAs and Store Owners. They get dazzled by the advertising claims made by the retailer down the

street. They ask me,

"How can they offer that?" But they ask me without doing their research. Know your competitors. Know their fine print, exceptions, extra charges, and deceptions. Visit them in the brick or on the click. In most cases their cost of doing business is not radically better than yours. They are just a little bolder.

Next month or next quarter you can become the store that dazzles. Take a risk on a super-hot untouchable promo. Be the store that competitors look at and cry "How can they do that?"

A Lot of Knowledge

When you see Mr. Holzhauer play, you will be amazed at his range and depth of knowledge. Although he is a college graduate, he admits that he missed as many classes as possible and majored in Poker! When interviewed he revealed that he gained most of his knowledge from reading children's books, many of which have accurate historical data in easy to digest formats.

street. They ask me, "How can they offer that?" But they ask me without doing

Your sales and operations team will never lose if they continue to learn. RSAs should be required to read our industry publications along with books about sleep, business trends, and marketing. Senior Managers need to read The Harvard Business Review and The Wall Street Journal. Operations leadership would gain a lot by reading The Toyota Way. Customer Service people need to read Dave Thomas' (CEO of Wendy's) biography Dave's Way.

And if all of that is too heavy for you, spend \$6.95 on a copy of "Green Eggs and Ham", by Dr. Seuss. It is the greatest book on closing the deal ever written!

Invest in Yourself

James is a resident of Las Vegas and he makes his living as a sports gambler. In Las Vegas we say, "GOT A HUNCH, BET A BUNCH". Like betting on sports or a Jeopardy! Daily Double, there is no sure thing. Professional gamblers take calculated risks. As a business owner or commissioned salesperson, you take a risk every morning when you turn the key in the door. But those who



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take the biggest risks are those who gain the biggest reward. If you own the business, that may mean investing in inventory, a new location, building refresh, advertising dollars, or a

"It may mean calling every customer that bought a flat bed and asking them to upgrade to adjustable comfort. Or, ask every shopper to buy and every buyer to purchase two beds."

hot-shot manager to move the needle. If you are a salesperson, it may mean calling every customer that bought a flat bed and asking them to upgrade to adjustable comfort. Or ask every shopper to buy and every buyer to purchase two beds. You won't WIN every time, but you will WIN BIG most of the time.

It will be interesting to see if future players follow his exciting strategy or go back to the old way making the game seem HO-HUM. Don't become another ho-hum shopping experience for your shoppers. Take risks, improve and measure for improvements and you'll be a champ in your market.

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 at www.furninfo.com/Authors/List. Questions and comments can be directed to Gordon Hecht at ghecht@serta.com.

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FURNITURE FAIR

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

Starting with a single 7,000 square foot store in 1963, Kentucky-based Furniture Fair has 11 locations, 300 plus employees, and growing!

Furniture Fair is, and always has been, a family affair. Fifty-six years ago, founder Robert “Bob” Daniels with his wife, Kate, followed their entrepreneurial dream and opened a 7,000 square foot store in home town Erlanger, Kentucky. They were also raising their children, Rick, Steve, Bill and Jenny (now Jenny Wynne), all of whom started working at the store in their teens. The four of them are members of Furniture Fair’s executive team, talented Jenny also guiding design. And following closely in this energetic family’s footsteps are Rick, Steve and Bill’s six sons, all endowed with the quintessential Daniels’ philosophy and drive.

All told there are more than 300 full-time members in Furniture Fair’s lively extended family. Many loyal staff members are long-time employees, part of the action for more than 25 years. Including Juda Yauger, the company’s first bookkeeper. Juda’s daughter and granddaughter have maintained her tradition, part of multiple generations working together in harmony.

Said Bill, “Juda has been with Furniture Fair since day one when

she helped my father open the first store in Erlanger. Juda and her family always give 100 percent effort to Furniture Fair and its employees. They truly are a wonderful part of our family.

“Jenny Wynne, our lead designer is one of the most experienced interior designers in the Tri-State area (OH, KY, IN). Jenny and her daughter Kelly are great at building relationships with Furniture Fair customers, producing lots of sales.

“We are proud of our long-time employees and feel fortunate to have a family-oriented culture instilled in all of our departments.”

The Daniels family lives by their HIP Rule which stands for “Honesty-Integrity-Professionalism”. And they encourage staff to follow their example. “That’s what our dad taught us and that’s how we guide our employees. If you live by the HIP Rule, you can work hard at the business AND sleep at night.”

But at the heart of every success story there’s that elusive hint of alchemy that helps shape inspiration into reality. In addition to an essential blend of hard work and dedication, the spark that made Furniture Fair a success was the gift

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of insight, the ability to make “the right move for the right reasons at the right time”. The very real challenge of working together necessitates taking extra steps to establish clearly defined roles and address individual concerns to create a positive atmosphere for everyone

"Furniture Fair's broad, comprehensive training programs cover all aspects of interacting with the public, from answering the telephone correctly to professional sales techniques."

within the Furniture Fair family.

Store Expansion

From Bob's single fledgling store in Erlanger, Kentucky, the family has expanded its vision over the years to their recently opened eleventh Furniture Fair in the Louisville area, and a location at the town of Beavercreek, near Dayton, Ohio. The showroom features a “state-of-the-art design center, and an exclusive bed diagnostic system to match customers to their ideal mattress”.

Bill told us, “Erlanger was (and is) a very nice community and Northern Kentucky was really growing in the early 1960s. It was (and still is) a family oriented town with high standards led by the local churches and schools. Our father looked at several stores throughout the Tri-State, but he

Interior lifestyle banners (above) remind shoppers that Furniture Fair offers fair pricing with a “lowest price or it's free guarantee”. Also, that the company is known for style, flair and custom designs.

felt that Erlanger had the best opportunity to grow. And we think he made the right choice.

“His vision of one day opening his own store started when he became a salesman for Leugers Furniture Company. After a few years he moved on to work for a man named Ben Strauss who owned Strauss Furniture in Hamilton, Ohio. He helped Ben open up several locations throughout southern Ohio. After about five or six years, in 1963 he decided to open up his own furniture store.

“His aim was to promote good furniture at fair prices, hence the name ‘Furniture Fair’!

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"Furniture Fair follows the housing market and tries to locate stores in prime areas to provide convenient locations to serve our customers."

"Back in 1963, at the original grand opening, we advertised \$1 lamps and quilted innerspring mattresses for \$19 to get traffic in the door, and it worked! We also offered items such as free vinyl throw rugs to the first 500 women who came through the door. And free handy yard sticks.

"Dad always insisted that we make sure we take care of the customer. His main core value was honesty, and he believed it was always the best approach. He

always said, 'Your word is your bond!' It is definitely something my brothers and I have lived by. We're a throwback to an old way of doing business."

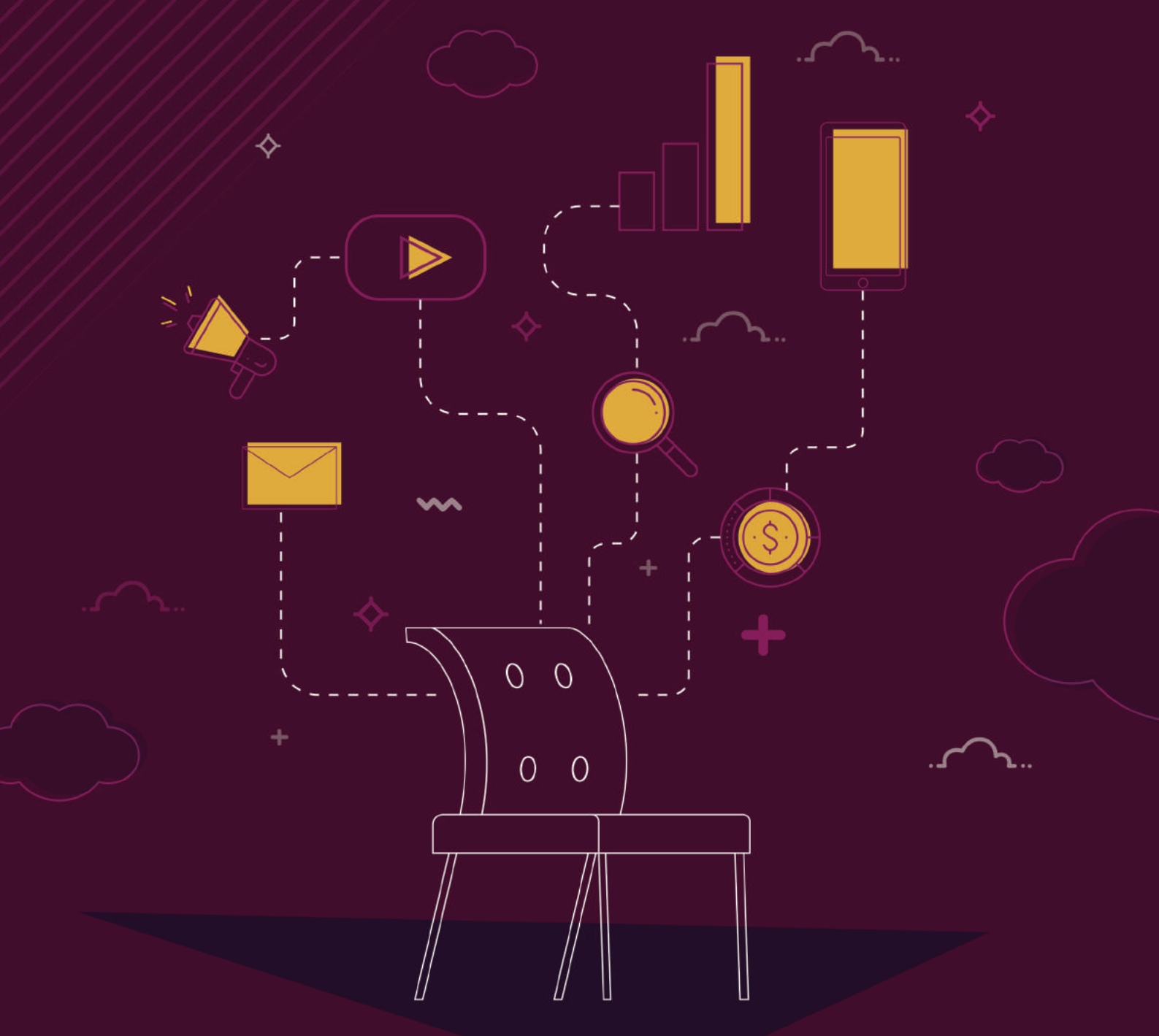
Furniture Fair's first expansion occurred in Fairfield in 1972. That store relocated in 1985. Today, the original home base is the site of its corporate headquarters, an expansive 200,000 square foot warehouse and central distribution facility. Other locations followed fast, the Northgate store

opening in 1976. Furniture Fair now has an important presence in Dayton, Dent, Beavercreek, Cold Spring, Eastgate, Loveland, Fairfield, Florence, Northgate and Oxford.

Said Bill, "Furniture Fair follows the housing market and tries to locate stores in prime areas to provide convenient locations to serve our customers. We will continue this strategy as we expand our footprint further into Kentucky and Ohio. New stores include



Photos of department areas in Furniture Fair. Suppliers include Daniels Amish, Winesburg, Smith Brothers, Flexsteel, England, Southern Motion, Serta, Tempur-Pedic, Beautyrest, Ashley and Best Home Furnishings.



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"We started selling online

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design center departments for customization and separate sleep center entrances."

First Generation Wisdom

Furniture Fair's president, Bill Daniels, worked at the store throughout his teen years. Then, following his father's retirement, and after attending Marietta College, Bill rejoined Furniture Fair. Bill recalls the "good news" he received from his father. "I've got good news for you, son," Bob told him. "You've only got to work half a day, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. That's called looking at your glass

as half full."

"So," recalled Bill, "we always felt that when we worked a 12 hour day we still had half a day left. Work is only work if you don't enjoy yourself."

Yet another Bob quote given to family members and employees was, "I have confidence in your ability."

Bill explained, "His mentality, was that if someone worked hard enough, they could always find a way to get something done."

A final quote from Bob came from his eldest son, Rick, who cited Bill's integrity. "Paying the bills comes first. And make sure

you set an example for other people and treat them with respect."

The Great Recession

Furniture Fair survived what everyone now calls the Great Recession, and "without much loss," said Bill. "Our goal was to keep as many people employed as possible. First we cut overtime hours. Two years later, as the Recession persisted, we made voluntary cuts. Steve met with everyone in the warehouse and asked if anyone could take a voluntary layoff. That's something family does for family."



Pictured is longtime Marketing Director and Furniture Fair spokesperson Ed Hartman (pictured with teddy bear). Also Ed with former NFL offensive tackle for the Cincinnati Bengals, Anthony Munoz in comical Furniture Fair TV spots.



Pictured at left are the three brothers, second generation family members Rick Daniels - CEO, Steve Daniels - VP, and Bill Daniels - President. Bob's daughter Jenny Wynne is lead designer who, along with her interior designer daughter Kelly, build great relationships with Furniture Fair customers. Founders Robert and Kate Daniels at lower left.

Furniture Fair focused on steady growth as the economy recovered. And, insightfully, they hired a software engineer to develop a proprietary iPad-based customer follow-up system. This prompts sales teams to record shoppers'

"Marketing Director Ed Hartman who stands 5'2" tall, and the former NFL offensive tackle for the Cincinnati Bengals, Hall of Famer Anthony Munoz at 6'8", have served as effective and popular community links."

interests, collect contact information and keep in touch throughout every stage of the buying process. Salespeople can alert new and prospective customers to private sales, keep current customers updated on their purchases, shipping status and build rapport. "Our customers' homes are never complete," said Bill. "There will always be something they need. When we are able to find common ground in the initial buying process, we build future sales."

Website & e-Commerce

Furniture Fair's website was created in partnership with Shopify, the number four e-commerce platform in the world. "Our Director of Internet Services manages the website and its content. Our Director of Software Engineering is responsible for the development of our omni-channel software systems.

"The advertising content, ad imagery and promotions for our

website are built by our marketing team. They are also responsible for digital marketing efforts that assist in driving traffic to Furniture Fair's website.

"We started selling online a couple of years ago, but we have seen significant increases within the past year with the rollout of a new e-commerce website that includes chat and seamless integration with our internal systems. We currently have an online sales associate who primarily answers chat questions and follows up on Perq leads.

"Chat offers our customers the chance to work with a seasoned sales professional online without needing to drive to a showroom. With more customers experiencing the convenience of shopping online, this department has already seen significant growth and will continue to do so."

Marketing

There's no doubt that smart

FURNITURE FAIR

marketing has been paramount in Furniture Fair's successful and visible integration into the communities it serves. "The media mix has been across the board starting with large newspapers like the Cincinnati Enquirer, local small papers, billboards, radio, TV, direct mail, store signage and now digital and social media. Our marketing department has done a good job of building relationships with our local media partners.

"And TV has always been a great way to advertise with our two great spokespeople." Since 1992, Marketing Director Ed

Hartman who stands 5'2" tall, and the former NFL offensive tackle for the Cincinnati Bengals, Hall of Famer Anthony Munoz at 6'8", have served as effective and popular community links. Ed and Anthony started out with comical TV spots featuring big selection and low prices. The theme played well off their height differences and, from the get go, the two of them had great chemistry.

"Our spots really stood out on TV and cut through all the clutter, now twenty-seven years and counting!

"Anthony visits Furniture Fair to sign autographs and help distrib-

"Our look and style are probably most popular with millennials, but our regular customer base really does run the gamut."

ute Community Price Watch badges and sunglasses. Ed Hartman has been described as the face of



The original Erlanger store (pictured below) opened in 1963. The newest store exterior features a separate sleep center entrance, lifestyle photos and a prominent Furniture Fair logo.





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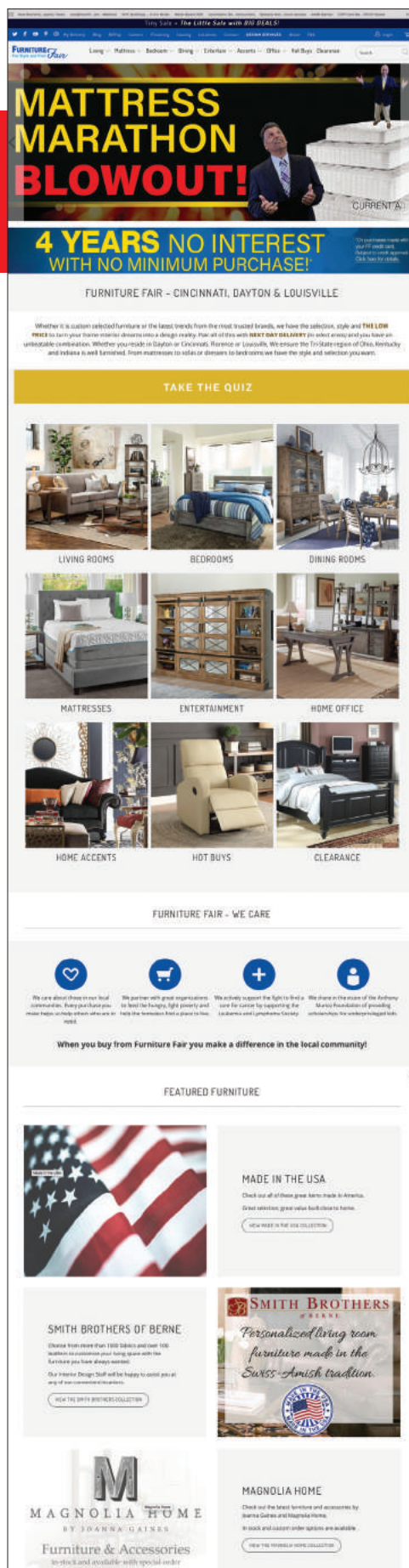


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Furniture Fair's home page (www.furniturefair.net) encourages visitors to take a design style quiz and lists product categories with underlying links to e-commerce options. Also touted are financing options, plus made in America from Smith Brothers.

Furniture Fair. The commercials are said to have made the two men the longest running commercial duo in the Tri-State area."

Munoz heads the Anthony Munoz Foundation. Formed in 2002, "It is a non-profit organization with a mission to engage the Tri-State region to impact its youth mentally, physically and spiritually. Anthony has helped thousands of high school seniors get scholarships to complete their dreams of attending college.

"Ed works with local and national charities as well, doing outreach with schools and churches. Furniture Fair also has a core values team that gathers information from our staff members to find causes they are passionate about supporting. For instance, one of our managers ran the Flying Pig Marathon which raises funds for charities. So, a group of us got together to go down to the race and support him."

"We always felt that when we worked a 12 hour day we still had half a day left. Work is only work if you don't enjoy yourself."

The programs last two and a half weeks. We don't do the hard sell. We give customers the opportunity to look.

"And we try to choose candidates who already have the friendly nature our customers expect. What we call 'The 10 Foot Rule'. When a customer or employee comes within 10 feet, you smile and say, 'Hello.'"

Delivery

The Ten Foot Rule

When hiring, "We look for personality and adaptability as well as a work ethic similar to our own. Our broad, comprehensive training programs cover all aspects of interacting with the public, from answering the telephone correctly to professional sales techniques.

Detailed tracking instructions on Furniture Fair's website describe a variety of convenient delivery times and methods. Within 24 hours of a delivery date, customers can access scheduled delivery times within a two-hour window. And, if they just happen to be late, customers are issued a gift

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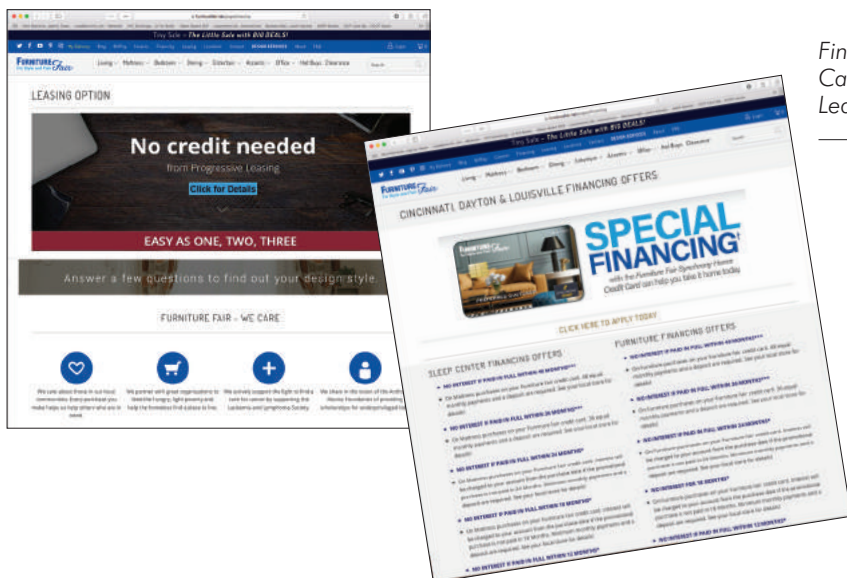
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Financing through the Synchrony Home Credit Card and leasing options from Progressive Leasing are detailed on Furniture Fair's website.

card to offset the amount of the delivery fee.

The website assures customers that before the purchase leaves the store's distribution center it will be "carefully inspected and prepared for delivery. All necessary parts for installation and configuration are carefully assembled." Customers are also sent a courtesy e-mail notification regarding the scheduled delivery time. Furniture Fair assures customers that delivery professionals will carefully place their merchandise into the desired location and that removal of all packing material will take place to ensure satisfaction.

Events

"We definitely think it's helpful to stage design workshops for our customers. In fact, we have one coming up this fall at our Louisville location. It will be paired with a wine tasting event.

"Other successful PR happenings, such as our Shred Event, are done twice a year, and both occurrences are big hits with the community.

We partner with Shred-It trucks to come to a few of our locations and invite the public to purge their old documents. Proceeds are donated to the Cincinnati Crime Stoppers."

An Interesting Project

Bob Daniels spent some time telling Furniture World about a grocery store Furniture Fair recently converted into a home furnishings showroom with the help of designer Martin Roberts. Bill said that he met Martin through FMG. "He had been a guest speaker at a few of our symposiums, as well as designing stores for some of the other members. We spoke to him several times and decided to sit down with him before we com-

mitted to property in the Louisville area.

"Martin looked at a couple of the locations we were considering and gave us input regarding how the space could flow and where we could make an impact. His 'magic wand' is his ability

"Furniture Fair has been using stacked rock and lifestyle images on our stores for several years.

Martin and his team embraced the ideas and helped us execute it on the Louisville store front."

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Pictured above is the new Furniture Fair store in Louisville, KY. The former HH Gregg grocery store (image at right) now has a separate bedding entrance and prominent branding and lifestyle images that reflect furnishings categories.

to create beautiful spaces that deliver excellent shopping experiences and ROI for his clients.

"Many fine furniture stores have come and gone since 1963, but we're still here because of our people and how they care for the customer."

Martin and his team provided the starting place for the store by bringing the initial ideas to the table on everything from space planning, lighting and exterior remodeling. At every step we met and discussed what worked, what didn't, and then debated any and all changes.

"For example, Furniture Fair has been using stacked rock and lifestyle images on our stores for several years. Martin and his team embraced the ideas and helped us execute it on the Louisville store front, adding metal awnings and planters to help frame the entrance."

The project involved the transformation of an HH Gregg grocery store. Three dated looking spaces of 15,000, 20,000 and 25,000 square feet were combined to make 60,000 square feet of retail area for Furniture Fair at a fraction of the cost of new construction. Furniture World

asked Martin to provide more details of the renovation.

"Since people in the area had been coming to this grocery store for many years, we didn't want them to walk in and ask where the 'dairy isle' went. The store was going to have a new use, and this had to be communicated to potential customers beginning at the traffic light where they would enter the parking lot.

"Looking at the before and after photos you can see that we covered spaces above the entrance with a stretched fabric graphic featuring happy smiling people using furniture. The idea is that from a great distance you can see the name Furniture Fair, as well as the graphics of people using furniture. Then, when people get closer to the store they see posters instead of windows. Most retailers dislike windows because sunlight fades furniture. Windows also take up valuable wall space

"The design center

was placed in the middle of the store, not at the back where everybody tends to forget it's there."

and create glare. The glass at the entrance was kept to keep costs down, but a little awning was added over the top of the entrance to help communicate that this is a retail store.

"We decided against changing the terra cotta tile on the original roof to a high ridge seamed metal roof, also to reduce costs, but frankly, most customers wouldn't notice this anyway, so, to be sure, we focused their attention downward with lighting underneath the walkway onto the posters and the graphics.

"The store has a butterfly shaped interior, with pathways customers can easily understand and follow. That necessitated a highly strategic master plan to invite customers into the store and painlessly direct them to the areas of their greatest interest. Roundabouts were used to create a slowing influence and continuity. The interior graphics reflect those seen from outside the space.

"Remember that this was a grocery store, a big open space with not a lot of partitions. All of the air conditioning and ducting was already there. The ceiling was

sprayed white to just freshen the whole space. The concrete floor, once the vinyl tile was lifted, was in good shape and was stained and improved. Then the furniture department areas were delineated with carpeting, luxury vinyl tile or imitation wood. And so it was a very inexpensive conversion.

"Our interviews show that shoppers think that they can buy a mattress in 20 minutes. People don't want to struggle all the way through a furniture store to find the mattress department, so this store has a separate mattress

store entrance. Mattresses in a store like this can represent 25 to 30 percent of sales. That's a huge percentage.

"Once the square footage has been allocated for upholstery including motion, and mattresses, that's about 75 percent of the total square footage.

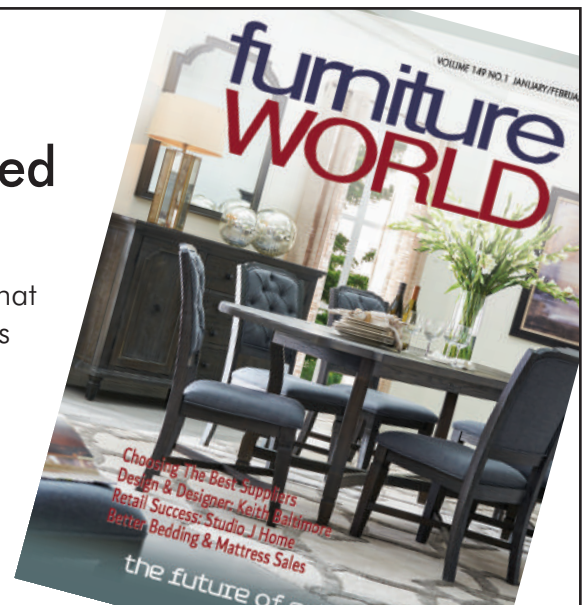
"The design center was placed in the middle of the store, not at the back where everybody tends to forget it's there. It's something that shoppers see all the time, and are conscious of.

"Throughout the store we tried

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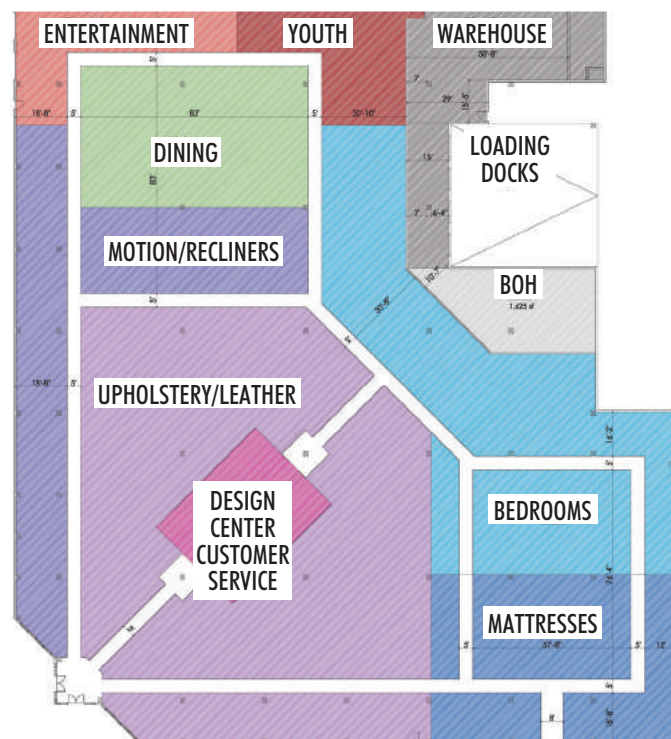
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FURNITURE FAIR



The Louisville Store has a butterfly floor plan. Most customers turn to the right when entering the front entrance, walking past the upholstery department and the centrally located design center area going toward the mattress section. Those using the mattress entrance can easily visit the adjacent bedroom furniture area.

"When hiring, we look for personality and adaptability as well as a work ethic similar to our own."

to create a selling machine, using the walls, lights, floors, the colors, the graphics... everything to communicate to potential customers some aspect of the product."

A Conservative Approach

Bill credits "keeping the bills paid and keeping them to a minimum" as a major factor in Furniture Fair's growth trajectory. "Our father was very conservative. Rick and Steve take the same approach. We have very

little debt. Major decisions have to be the right move for the right reasons at the right time."

The loyalty his father held with his first customers is still a guiding force today, Rick Daniels says. "Stability, consistency and knowledge are the keys to longevity. Many fine furniture stores have come and gone since 1963, but we're still here because of our people and how they care for the customer.

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Our Story Is Your Story, Too!

Sharron Bradley, CEO



Furniture World Magazine's Editorial director/CEO Russell Bienenstock and I have known each other for... gosh... at least 20 years now. So, when the opportunity to share with his readers arose, I was naturally eager for the collaboration.

The truth is, Furniture World and the Home Furnishings Association have a long history of collaboration and both are passionate about helping furniture retailers thrive.

We're both in the trenches, helping retailers in an ever-changing retail landscape, with ever-changing issues, ever-changing demographics; both investigating and putting forth the best solutions for businesses, in print and in action.

Merely scaling programs is not enough to address serious challenges such as ecommerce, health care, tariffs and the age of technology. To achieve impact, we need to align our many resources and work across our combined channels to bring positive impact to retailers.

Many readers of Furniture

World may know that the Home Furnishings Association is a non-profit association dedicated to supporting its members – about 1,300 furniture retailers. They come in all shapes and sizes – from Top 100 chains to mom-and-pop Main Street stores in the United States and Canada.

Over the Association's nearly 100-year history, one of its best initiatives on behalf of our industry is advocacy. HFA's Government Relations team works tirelessly for members and the industry, watching regulatory and legislative activity in Washington and state capitals on issues that impact their bottom line, ranging from furniture tip-over to online sales-tax collections and everything in between. We get involved because it's important—we stay involved because you're important.

But, I like to think the most important benefit of the association is access to some of the brightest minds in the retail furniture industry. Let's face it, we're all in this together, and HFA members are known for helping each other with anything from

a logistics problem to a sales question. If you get to know our retail members, you're getting to know us.

Pick a member – any member – and chances are they can tell you about a time they benefited from the networking opportunities, solutions partners and educational programs the Association is built around.

In the following HFA section, we are excited for you to read about retailers like you — our members — as well as activities and industry stories. We're looking forward to continued collaboration with Furniture World!

"Merely scaling programs is not enough to address serious challenges such as ecommerce, health care, tariffs and the age of technology."

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It's time to pop the question. Is a pop-up store right for your furniture store? Kim Pellett tells all.

Home Furnishings Association member Kim Pellett continues to burnish her City Home brand across Portland, OR – just not the way most furniture retailers do business. In addition to her two permanent stores, Pellett has a pop-up store that's been up and running for more than a year. A second pop-up is opening in August in Vancouver, WA, just across the Columbia River from Portland.

And while the pop-up stores are small – 1,000 square feet compared to Pellett's 10,000-square-foot permanent stores – they're doing a healthy amount of business. "I wouldn't be opening another one if the first one wasn't

profitable," Pellett says.

Pop-up stores are big with retailers who sell smaller items like clothing or jewelry, but where furniture is concerned, they are still something of a novelty. Fellow HFA members Colfax Furniture in Greensboro, NC, and Danto Furniture in Detroit have successfully run pop-up stores, too.

The key to running a successful pop-up store, says Pellett, is not trying to replicate your flagship store. "You want to offer a snapshot of your larger store," she says. "Give them a taste of what your bigger store has and drive them to your front door."

With more and more stores looking to cash in on this growing trend, here's how retailers can go about successfully setting up a furniture pop-up shop:

Think About Your Budget

Furniture retailers must think carefully about their budget, ensuring they have the means to make their vision a reality. Yes, pop-ups are normally a lower-cost, short-term option, but they still do not come cheap, particularly in major cities. Beyond the physical space, many businesses fail to consider all the additional overhead needed, like utilities, insurance, staff and marketing, when planning for their pop-up.

Marketing A Pop-Up

Marketing your pop-up is important, not just in the run-up to the event, but at every stage of the journey. To get the most out of the event, building exposure before, during and after is key, and your marketing efforts should be focused on providing the greatest impact in the limited amount of time that you have.

Read about HFA members on our Shop Talk blog: <https://myhfa.org/category/shop-talk/>

Location, Location

It helps to think outside the box when planning a pop-up store.

By limiting yourself only to traditional, empty brick-and-mortar buildings, you are missing out on a whole heap of potentially great spaces. Pellett says empty warehouses are great places to start. They're perfect for displaying furniture and may be even cheaper to rent.



They say everything is bigger in Texas, and Sam Zavary's rags-to-riches story is no exception. The oldest of four children whose family immigrated from Pakistan, Zavary opened his first Exclusive Furniture store in 1998. He was 21 and a part-time college student.

Today Zavary is 41, married with four children. Exclusive has grown up, too: Seven stores, a clearance center and gross sales of \$52 million anticipated this year.

Zavary's success, came along with a lot of hard work. That determination and work ethic was instilled in Zavary at a young age by his late father.

He says it's impossible to convey the impact Abdul Zavary had on his life. "How do you describe his impact on my family? How do you measure his support, his guidance?" Zavary asks.

Abdul Zavary worked as a grocery store clerk and later at a gas station. Sam Zavary's first jobs were working in a grocery store and later selling long-distance phone contracts while attending the University of Houston.

In 1998, Abdul Zavary told his son Sam, to do something over spring break. Hang out with friends, go to the beach – anything but work. Sam visited his uncle in California and hung out in his furniture store. He helped unpack furniture, sold a few sofas, delivered bedroom sets – a little bit of everything.

HFA member
Sam Zavary
got his work
ethic honestly –
from his father.

"When I got home," he says, "I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

He also drove around Houston dropping in on furniture stores and pretending to be a shopper. He wrote down what he learned in a notebook. "I had a 60-day crash course in how to run a furniture store," he said.

Exclusive's First Store

Sam's first store was in an aging shopping mall in a neglected Houston neighborhood. As Exclusive Furniture grew, so did his father's wisdom. There were times Sam got frustrated with the furniture business and talked of quitting. Abdul Zavary wouldn't let him.

"You can't do that," he said, Sam recalls. "Maybe a few years ago when it was just you and I, but now you've got employees and those employees have families. Whether you like it or not,

this business is bigger than you."

Sam Zavary wasn't entirely sure what his father meant. But with every new venture, he's finding a new meaning. Zavary helped distribute clothes and mattresses to Houston residents after Hurricane Harvey, and Exclusive annually hosts the 12 Days of Christmas Furniture, furnishing 12 disadvantaged families' homes every December.

"It took me a while to figure out what he meant by the business being bigger than I'll ever be," Sam Zavary says of his father's words. "But I see it now – and not in just one way. I'll be driving down the road and I'll hear what he meant in a completely different way. That's what keeps me going. I'm excited about what we're doing and how we're impacting our community."

Read HFA's Shop Talk blog:
<https://myhfa.org/category/shop-talk/>



G

overnment relations & regulations: Tip-over problem warrants "highest attention".

The problem of furniture tip-overs "is receiving the agency's highest attention at this time", Peter Feldman of the Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) told Home Furnishings Association members in Washington, DC.

Earlier this year, the CPSC issued a letter warning furniture retailers against selling clothing storage units that don't meet the voluntary safety standard published by ASTM. In June, the New York State Legislature passed a law requiring compliance with ASTM guidelines. Also, the U.S. House of Representatives is considering a bill that would set strict requirements. And the CPSC is moving toward the adoption of a mandatory standard.

This activity responds to a serious problem. Bedroom dressers, chests and similar pieces can fall over if children try to climb on them. These accidents have

caused devastating injuries and even deaths.

Retailers need to comply with safety standards and to equip purchasers with restraining devices to secure furniture to walls or floors. HFA meets with policymakers, sits on ASTM's Furniture Safety subcommittee and participates in deliberations about updating the stability standard.

Tip-overs warrant HFA members' highest attention, but there are many other concerns. There are a wide range of legislative and regulatory developments at state and national levels, from trade, to taxes, to data security and online privacy. HFA belongs to business and industry coalitions, combining its strength with other groups that have similar interests. HFA's Government Relations Action Team holds regular conference calls, and undertakes an annual trip to Washington, DC to meet with members of Congress and

regulatory agency leaders.

Retailers work hard to operate their businesses, provide employment, pay taxes and serve the needs of their customers. Not all of them have time to monitor government activity that can affect their bottom line. The Association tries to do that for HFA members and to use its influence on their behalf.

Sometimes that means reminding retailers of their responsibility to always make safety a top priority. The most effective way to prevent a child's dresser from tipping over is to anchor it to a solid surface. Every customer who purchases a clothing storage unit must leave with a sturdy product and the proper restraining devices, along with instructions for installation.

In upcoming issues of Furniture World, HFA will share more regulatory and legislative news. In the meantime, you can keep up with the latest on HFA's Policy Matters blog: <https://myhfa.org/category/gov-rel/>.



Photo shows HFA members meeting with U.S. Rep. Jackie Walorsky (R-Ind.) in Washington, D.C., in May 2019.

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Resilience keeps 114 year old Kurlancheek Home Furnishings in business.

How does a furniture store stay in business for nearly 114 years? Resilience.

Kurlancheek Home Furnishings in the Wilkes-Barre, PA, area met one challenge when a Raymour & Flanigan store arrived to offer the same promotional and lower-end furniture on a larger scale.



Quality Upgrade to Compete

Ronne Kurlancheek, owner of the Home Furnishings Association member business, decided she wouldn't compete against the Top 100 juggernaut. Instead, she upgraded the quality of furniture she sold so that shoppers could see a difference. Then she hired several designers and offered free house calls to plan and design customers' living spaces. She loaded the walls of her store with fabric swatches and crafted an identity as the area's go-to source for special orders.

The move was a gamble that Kurlancheek could only hope would succeed. It did, and business increased.

"I'm not afraid of trying anything anymore," she said. "If you're an independent furniture retailer these days, there's only one way to survive and grow, and that's to take risks. You can't decide to go into business for yourself, which is the biggest risk of all, and then decide you're not going to take any more risks. Well, maybe you can, but you won't last long."

Tornado Destruction

The next challenge was much more dramatic. On the night of June 13, 2018, a tornado ripped through portions of Wilkes-Barre Township, destroying her store.

"We were like ground zero," Kurlancheek recalled.

Losing her store and inventory was a tough blow, but within weeks, she moved operations into a vacant warehouse with a loading dock and began filling orders. She set up a small showroom, serving customers by appointment.

On June 13, the anniversary of the tornado, Kurlancheek held a reopening celebration in a repurposed automobile factory.

The old industrial building has been divided into small business spaces. It's occupied by a floral shop, delicatessen, hair stylist, fitness center and more. Her store has 6,000 square feet, plenty to display her special chandeliers, artwork, fabrics and home furnishings.

"The area has a funky atmosphere," she said. "The potential for foot traffic is good."

The Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon cutting for one of its oldest members.

"The Chamber really likes us," Kurlancheek said. "We're like the little engine that could."

That's resilience.

For more information on HFA and HFA members visit <https://myhfa.org/>.

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RSA MATTRESS EXAM

by David Benbow

What RSAs know, or may not know but should know, about the business of selling bedding. Take this quiz and find out!

In my 28 years in the bedding business, I have noticed, with some dismay, that some RSAs who sell bedding lack even the most basic skills and knowledge to perform their job with competence. This situation does not translate into success, either for the RSA, the store, the manufacturer, or especially, the unfortunate customer, who often counts on sales associates for detailed information to guide him/her to a wise buying decision.

On the other hand, many RSAs do have some knowledge and preparation for their job, but only rarely do I find one that truly stands out as a supremely competent professional.

Self-evaluation is the key to self improvement. We probably learn more from our failures and errors than from our successes and correct responses. With that in mind, this bedding test can be used by retail managers to evaluate how much RSAs know about selling bedding, and identify areas where improvement is needed. This is not a comprehensive test.

It will cover a lot of different subjects directly related to selling bedding and a few subjects that seem indirectly related. I welcome readers to respond with comments and additional questions. Taking this test will give Furniture World readers a decent review of what they know, and also may not know but should know, about the business of selling bedding.

An answer key for many of the questions asked in the following section can be found at the end of this article. For some questions, however, the answers will be unique depending on your store's operations and inventory.

Readers of this series of bedding articles may have noticed that I never mention bedding brand names. This time I made an exception because a big part of an RSA's essential knowledge is brand awareness. A professional RSA must thoroughly know the specs, lines and names of the brands and merchandise that her store, as well as competing stores, sell.

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Bedding Product Questions

1. List all the mattress SKUs on your showroom floor by the following criteria:

- *Brand name.*
- *Line name.*
- *Complete mattress name.*
- *Construction type – meaning coil/foam, etc. Include composition of various comfort layers.*
- *Feel – degree of hardness or softness.*
- *Color – include quilted panel type – if any.*
- *Foundation type.*
- *Warranty.*
- *Queen size price as tagged on the floor.*
- *Location on the floor.*
- *Inventory normally in stock.*
- *Approximate number of turns per month.*

Answers should be written down strictly from memory without consulting any specs, or looking at the models on the floor.

2. List all the pillows that your store carries, by:

- *Brand.*
- *Construction type.*
- *Feel.*
- *Shape.*
- *Sizes available.*
- *Price by size.*

- *Inventory normally in stock.*
- *How well does it sell?*

Again, list answers from your memory.

3. List all mattress protectors in your store by the same criteria as listed in question number two.

4. What is the difference between a bed frame and a “complete bed?” What is the difference between bed rails and a bed frame?

5. List all the bed frames/rails your store carries by the following criteria;

- *Brand/Manufacturer.*
- *SKU name.*
- *Sizes available.*
- *Primary function of the frame/rails.*
- *Is there an example of the frame on the showroom floor, either supporting a mattress set or in short rails?*
- *Price by each size.*
- *Warranty. List as many as you can from memory.*

6. Do you know how to assemble each and every frame/rails your store carries in stock? Which SKUs have you personally assembled and which ones have you not assembled? Do you ever lose a sale because of your lack of knowledge about

frames?

7. What are modi plates and what is their function?

8. List all the models of adjustable bases that your store carries. List by:

- *Brand name.*
- *Model name or SKU.*
- *Sizes available.*
- *Price by size.*
- *Configurations available, meaning splits, etc.*
- *Features and benefits.*
- *Location on the showroom floor and which mattress is featured with it.*
- *Warranty coverage.*
- *Queen and twin extra long prices.*
- *Also, answer if you have personally operated and tested the bases you listed above, and are you completely familiar and comfortable with demonstrating them using the control mechanism?*

9. List the six standard mattress sizes that virtually every manufacturer produces. List their dimensions. List the “mattress language name” that each goes by in RSA parlance. Hint: the “four-oh” was the name of a four foot wide mattress that once was produced on occasion for special beds.

MATTRESS EXAM

10. Does your store offer non-standard, special order size mattresses and, if so, who are the manufacturers and what restrictions, if any, do they place on the special order?
11. What is a hybrid mattress?
12. What do we mean by coil count? What do we mean by gauge of wire on a coil? What is the range of gauges usually found in coils, and which is the thickest and which the thinnest? What do we mean by coil turns? What is the significance of coil height, if any? What is the significance of coil profile or shape, when viewed from the side?
13. List at least four types of coils and their features. How many of these coils are found in mattress models on your showroom floor? How many of these coil examples have "cut-aways" on your floor?
14. What is a helical/helicon wire? What is its purpose? Do all mattresses have helical wires? What is a border wire? Do all mattresses have border wires?
15. What are the three basic types of foam products found in mattresses?
16. What are the different kinds of edge supports that can be found in mattresses?
17. What is the difference between foam density and foam firmness? Is there a way to measure the characteristics of each category?

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MATTRESS EXAM

18. List the different headboard/footboard sets on your showroom floor by the following criteria:

- Name or SKU.
- Manufacturer.
- Sizes available.
- Price by size.
- Warranty.
- Whether in stock or wait time for special order.

19. Do you think that the "Bed in a Box" phenomenon is affecting your sales?

20. Do any of your suppliers offer a competitive "Bed in a Box?" If so, do you know all of the specifications, prices, and availability of this product? How competitive is your

product with the merchandise that is widely advertised on TV?

21. What's the difference between a California king and a regular king?

Financing Questions

1. What percentage of your mattress "ups" ask for third party financing? How much of your sales volume is paid for by third party finance companies? How many applications (by percent) are turned down (TD)?

2. List all the finance companies your store uses. Do you know how to fill out all the forms that they require to approve financing? How long does it take to fill out or enter the data finance companies require? How do you communicate the information to the finance companies?

3. What exactly does the term "Same As Cash" mean? Do most of your customers know what it means? Do you explain the EXACT meaning of SAC to every customer so that they do not misunderstand it, whether they ask or not?

4. Do you know how to calculate monthly payments?

5. What if your customers tell you they are buying a new

home? They have been approved for the home mortgage, but the purchase has not closed yet; and they want to buy and finance an expensive new mattress set. What is a thoughtful way to handle this situation?

Advertising Questions

1. List every advertising medium in which your company advertises. How often do they advertise on each? Approximately how much of the advertising budget is devoted to each? How many ups do you get from each? Do you ask customers what brought them into the store?

2. Are you familiar with every advertisement your company runs; in each and every medium? Is it possible that there are some you are not aware of? If so, how can you fill in the missing knowledge gaps?

3. Are you prepared to explain any ad a customer might bring into your store; what it means, which products are mentioned, etc? Do customers ever catch you off-guard with an ad you didn't know about?

4. How does sales management keep all RSAs in your organization up to date on every advertised item?

"Do you explain the EXACT meaning of SAC to every customer so that they do not misunderstand it, whether they ask or not?"

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"List the ten most important qualifying questions RSAs should always ask."

Inventory Questions

- 1. Is in-stock, ready to deliver inventory important when selling bedding? (I thought I'd start with an easy one).
- 2. Do you know where to find exact, up-to-the-minute inventory counts on every SKU in every size your store offers? Does your store make this information available to every RSA? Why is this important?
- 3. Does your store back up every SKU on the showroom floor? If so, how deep is the backup and in what sizes?
- 4. When was the last time you visited the warehouse? Do you know the warehouse managers? Are you allowed to visit the warehouse? Why would you want to visit the warehouse?
- 5. Are you aware of "hidden" or discontinued merchandise in the warehouse that might help you to make a sale?
- 6. What is the normal scheduled delivery date of every

- manufacturer/supplier that sells to your store? How often does each deliver?
- 7. Is it better to stack mattresses in the warehouse or stand them on end in rows?

Policy Questions

- 1. Does your company/store have a published policy manual? If so, have you read it lately?
- 2. What does your company charge for delivery? How far will they deliver? How quickly will they deliver? Do they offer "white glove" service? Is out of town delivery available only on certain days? Does your store have its own delivery trucks and staff, or does it contract out some or all deliveries?
- 3. Will your company carry off and dispose of the customer's old set?
- 4. Does your company offer "comfort exchanges?" If so, list every requirement your

- company has specified in order to validate a comfort exchange. What does your company do with the products taken back in a comfort exchange?
- 5. Are customers allowed to pick up merchandise rather than have it delivered? Who is responsible for securing the merchandise to the vehicle, customer or store employees? What hours is the warehouse open for customer pickup?
 - 6. Does your store have a return policy? What conditions must be met by a customer before your store will accept a return? If your store accepts returns, does it offer cash refunds or in-store credit?

- 7. Does your store have a layaway plan? What are the parameters, conditions and terms of starting a layaway? Will your store refund a layaway deposit on demand?

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“Do any of your ups ever leave

your store without buying, only to go straight to your competitor to buy a similar product? How would you know if they did?”

8. Does your store offer special orders on merchandise not carried in stock? What are the terms and conditions of executing a special order? Are you familiar with ALL the different product categories that may be special ordered and how to show them to customers?

9. Are you familiar with your store’s customer security procedures, such as protecting against identity theft?

Competition Questions

1. List the five primary competitors in your trading area. How close are they to your store?

2. List all the mattress product lines your competition carries. List as many of the models (or SKUs) they carry including specs outlined in question number one in the Product Knowledge section. Of course, no one will know the full answer, but the more you know about your competition, the better served you will be to help customers on the showroom floor. Remember, customers shop and compare.

3. How does your store compare with the competition in the following categories:

- *Product selection*
- *Competitive pricing*
- *Advertising and financing*
- *Inventory in stock*
- *Ability to deliver.*

4. Do any of your “ups” ever leave your store without buying, only to go straight to your competitor to buy a similar product? How would you know if they did?

Industry Knowledge

1. List the four “major” mattress companies/brands. Which of these does your store carry? Which brands are carried by your five main competitors?

2. List at least 10 other mattress manufacturers, and which ones, if any, your store carries. Do the same for your competition.

3. Approximately what percentage of the entire American bedding market has been captured by the “Bed In A Box” imports?

4. What is ISPA? What is the HFA?

5. When was the last time you visited the websites of the top 15 mattress producers in the USA? When did you last visit the websites of the major “Bed in A Box” importers?

6. Which domestic mattress brands also produce a “Bed in A Box?”

7. Are you personally acquainted with every manufacturer’s representative of each mattress brand on your floor? How often do you see them, and how often do you ask them questions about their products?

Sales Techniques

1. List as many “Steps of the Sale” as you can think of, in the order in which they should be executed. Can some steps be repeated, and can they be repeated out of order from the usual sequence?

2. What is your usual greeting to a new up you have never met before? Why do you



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think it is an effective greeting? What does the RSA hope to accomplish with the "Meet and Greet" step?

3. What are the three biggest mistakes an RSA can make?

4. List the ten most important qualifying questions RSAs should always ask.

5. What is the single most important thing any RSA must do during any sales encounter?

6. Should an RSA use a memorized sales script or just go with the flow?

7. List at least six common customer objections and explain how an RSA might handle them.

8. What is the difference between a firm feel and a hard feel?

9. Should offering a comfort exchange be an important part of closing the sale? How about the warranty?

10. What is a prorated warranty?

11. What problems does a mattress warranty cover?

12. How should the RSA respond if the up complains that his old mattress is sagging in the middle. What does this usually mean?

13. How should the RSA respond to the customer who says, "I just want to look."

14. Does every mattress SKU on your floor have an adjustable base supporting it?

15. Should every customer, even if they are just looking for a twin mattress, be encouraged to try out an adjustable base?

16. Should RSAs ALWAYS take new ups to the most expensive bed in the store (start at the top?) Explain your reasoning for this answer.

17. What should RSAs do when customers ask,

"Can/may I have your card?"

18. Should the RSA ever recommend a certain mattress set?

19. Do you consider yourself a sleep consultant or a bedding consultant?

20. How often do you follow up with a customer who bought from you? How often do you follow up with a prospect who has not yet bought from you?

21. At what point in a sale, is it permissible for an RSA to utter uncomplimentary language about either a competitor or another product?

"If the RSA uses the comfort exchange as a close, he will probably get a comfort exchange."

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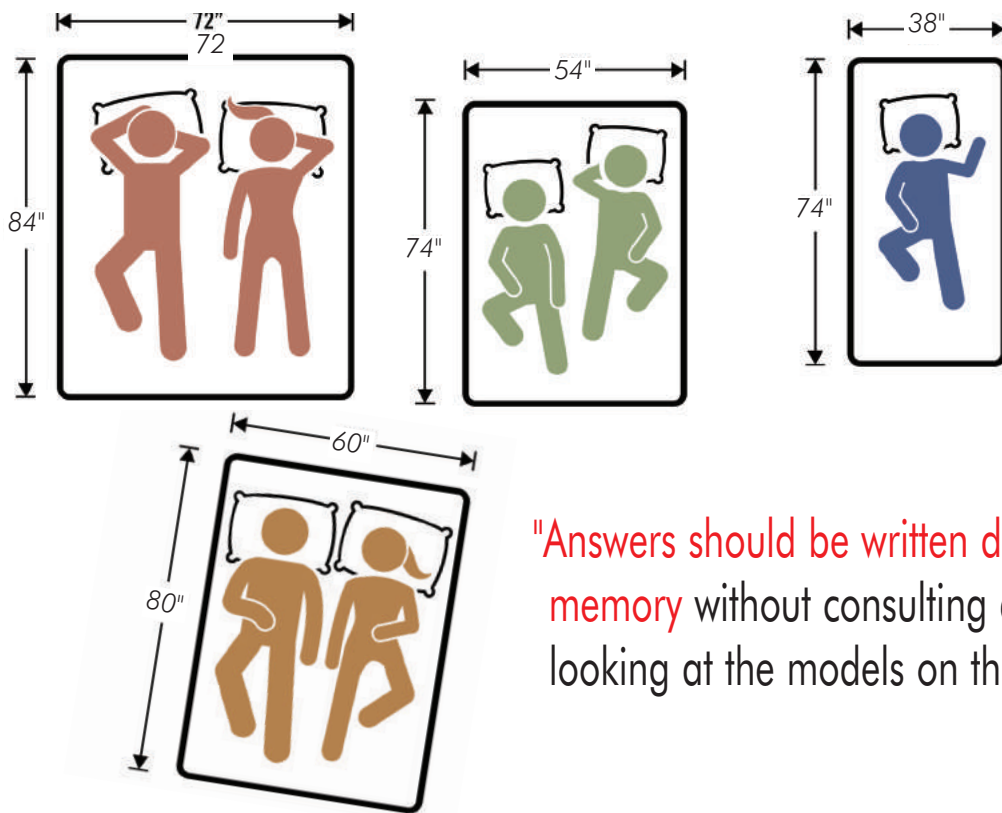


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"Answers should be written down strictly from memory without consulting any specs or looking at the models on the floor."

Final Thoughts

Allow me to repeat that this is not a comprehensive quiz. Hopefully these questions will get retail owners, managers and RSAs thinking about the level of mattress sales and sales management competence in your retail organization. In addition, maybe this quiz will encourage further research and investigation using some of the many resources available for training.

Bedding Product Answers

1. All answers to the mattress SKU questions are unique to your store.
2. All answers to the pillow SKUs questions are unique to your store.
3. All answers to the protector questions are unique to your store.
4. A "complete bed" is a headboard, footboard and rails. It does NOT include a mattress. Confusing, I know, but this is industry parlance as I learned it. Bed rails are the pieces, frequently angle iron, between a headboard and foot-

board, preferably never free standing by themselves. A bed frame (also called a Hollywood frame), is a free standing, mattress set supporting frame, usually angle iron, to which you can attach a headboard but not a footboard.

5. All answers to the bed frame questions are unique to your store.
6. Do you know how to assemble frames/rails, and have you?
7. Modi plates are flat, iron pieces (with holes) that can be used to attach a headboard to a frame when the holes on the frame and headboard do not match up.
8. All answers to the adjustable base questions are unique to your store.
9. Sizes in inches are Twin 38 X 74, Extra Long Twin 38 X 80, Full 54 X 74, Queen 60 X 80, King (standard) 76 X 80, and California King 72 X 84.

10. Answer to the special order question is unique to your store.
11. The general definition of a hybrid is a mattress with an innerspring (usually a wrapped coil unit) with layers of memory foam (visco) on top of the innerspring.

12. Coil count is the number of coils in a given size mattress. The measuring standard until about 12-15 years ago was number of coils in a full size mattress. Now most brands count the number of coils in a queen size mattress. The coil count, along with the innerspring type, is also used as an identifier for a given innerspring unit, for example a "312 Bonnell" has 312 coils in a full size Bonnell knotted coil unit. The gauge is the thickness of the wire. Gauges usually run between 12.5 and 15.5, with the lower number gauge being the thicker wire. "Turns" is the term used for how many spirals, from top to bottom, in the coil. Taller coils can make the mattress thicker, without using extra foam padding. Coil shape can be either barrel shaped or hourglass shaped. Barrel shaped, in the days before foam encasement, often meant better edge support.

13. Bonnell coil (knotted and tied by helicals) are mostly used in promotional sets.

In continuous coil units, a single wire stretches throughout the entire innerspring unit.

In a Marshall unit, wrapped coil/pocketed coil, each coil is individually wrapped with fabric and not

MATTRESS EXAM

tied together with helicals, so that less motion is evident when moving objects are placed on the mattress.

Offset – usually means that the top and bottom turns on the coils are squared off on two sides so that they perform a hinging action when compressed. The desired effect is to have less motion and better contouring to body shape.

14. A helical wire is the tight spiral wire that “sews” the innerspring unit together by lacing through each coil and attaching to the border wire, which is the heavier, usually six gauge wire that forms the outer perimeter of the mattress inner-spring. Many mattresses no longer have border wires, because they are not compatible with the necessary bending that a mattress must do with adjustable beds.

15. Basic foam types are: flexible polyurethane foam (FPF), the most common comfort layer found in mattresses, and least expensive; Memory foam, or visco (slow recovery foam); and Latex (rubber and more bouncy).

16. Various forms of hard foam are now most often used as edge support in “foam encased” mattresses. Older models, especially Bonnell units, sometimes had various kinds of metal clips between bottom and top border wires.

17. Foam density is the weight of the mattress. Foam firmness is a measurement of how much the mattress will compress under a given amount of weight. For a more complete discussion, consult my book, “How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales,

the Bed Seller’s Manual”.

18. Answer to the headboard question is unique to your store.

19. Ask your sales manager about your store's Bed in a Box sales.

20. Ask your reps about Bed in a Box options if you haven't already.

21. See question number nine's answer.

Financing Answers

1-4. Ask your sales or finance manager about financing if you have trouble answering these questions.

5. A new finance application for a mattress, or any other item, can spoil an approval on a mortgage application, especially if the mortgage was approved on tight criteria and is still waiting to close. Don't ruin a new home purchase by possibly voiding the mortgage.

Advertising Answers

1. Various media are TV, Cable TV, and all manner of social media,

newspaper, magazines, billboards, direct mail and many others. Check off yours. All answers in this section are unique to your store.

Inventory Answers

1. Yes, ready to deliver inventory is obviously hugely important.

2. Ask your sales manager and inventory manager. It is important because you do not want to promise same day delivery if another RSA just sold the last set in stock.

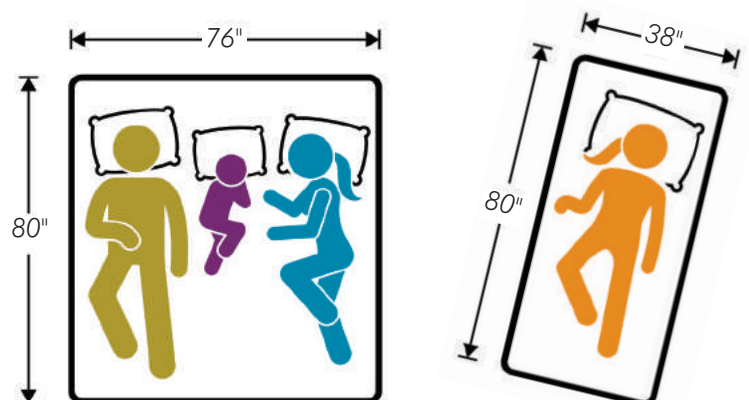
3. Ask the sales manager about back up depth for all SKUs.

4. It's important to visit the warehouse to get to know warehouse personnel, which might come in handy if you need a favor. It also helps to know the location and presence of non-stocked merchandise that might help make a sale.

5. See answer to question four above.

6. Ask your sales or warehouse manager for customer pick up information.

7. Mattresses should not be ware-



housed standing up, end to end. Gravity affects padding. Also, it encourages dragging and pushing mattresses on the floor, which is not a good thing.

Company Policies Answers

Check with your managers for answers to the ten store policy questions.

The Competition Answers

I suggest doing your own research. Much of this information can be found on competitor's websites, by checking their ad messages or visiting their stores.

Industry Knowledge Answers

1. The four "major" brands are Serta, Simmons, Sealy and Tempur-Pedic. Do your own research on the other questions. Visit their websites.
2. Do your own research online and in furniture/bedding publications.
3. It was recently reported that Bed in A Box imports have captured approximately 15 percent of the US bedding market.
4. The International Sleep Products Association and the Home Furnishings Association. Every bed-

ding RSA should at least be familiar with these organizations and what they do.

5. Ask yourself.
6. Look it up on their websites.
7. Are you?

Sales Techniques Answers

A brief disclaimer is in order here. Some sales trainers and RSAs may not necessarily agree with my answers, or even my questions, for that matter. I base my opinions on 23 years of service on the showroom floor and over 30,000 sales made personally by me; as well as multiple readings of every retail sales book I could find over the same period.

1. Steps of the sale, as published in my book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual", are:
 - Approach and Greet.
 - Qualify the buyer.
 - Product selection and discovery.
 - Presentation of features/benefits.
 - Closing of the sale.
 - Goodbye and the Finish. (There are many other sub-steps, I refer to as the "Elements of the Sale").
2. If you are still greeting with "May I Help You?" read my Meet and Greet article, which can be found in

the Furniture World online archives at <https://www.furninfo.com/Authors/David%20Benbow/37>.

3. Number one is wasting your valuable time, which could be spent becoming the professional you should be. Number two is failure to control the sale. Number three is failure to ask for the sale once you have earned the right to ask for it.
4. Refer to my article on qualifying, also found at <https://www.furninfo.com/Authors/David%20Benbow/37>.
5. Acquire and maintain control of the sale until the customer walks out the door.
6. Somewhere in between memorization and going with the flow. RSAs certainly need to follow a pattern.
7. Refer to my article "I Object" at <https://www.furninfo.com/Authors/David%20Benbow/37>.
8. In my opinion, "firm" refers to the interior, usually the innerspring and how flexible it is. "Hard" or "soft" is the surface feel (in infinite degrees, of course). For example, a mattress can be both firm and soft; meaning a firm innerspring or inner core, with soft, luxurious padding. I think of the word "firmness" as non-measurable description of potential back support.



"I am concerned about the trend in this business to encourage RSAs to promote themselves as sleep experts.

Even medical science is still a bit in the dark regarding its knowledge of the science of sleep."

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9. No and no. If the RSA uses the comfort exchange as a close, he will probably get a comfort exchange. The RSA shouldn't mention warranty at all unless he explains it only covers "manufacturer defects" and nothing else.
10. Usually found in less expensive, promotional products. Prorated means full value is only for the first year (usually) and loses value yearly thereafter.
11. Look at answer number nine above.
12. Sagging in the middle often means the mattress does not have proper center support from the bed frame. Manufacturers will not warranty a mattress that is not properly supported by the frame.
13. Refer to the "Aloof Customers" chapter in "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual". Remember, you must gain control of the sale, or there will be no sale.
14. Look and see. Having lots of adjustable bases on the floor increases sales.
15. YES. Every customer should be encouraged to demo an adjustable base.
16. It's not always best to start at the top in my opinion. Refer to the chapter in "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual", titled Stepping Up.
17. You must re-gain control of the sale, if possible. Otherwise, see my article in Furniture World archives on Be-Backs.

18. I recommend that the RSA NOT recommend a mattress.
19. RSAs are primarily bedding consultants. Certainly, they should discuss sleep with their customers, but I am concerned about the trend in this business to encourage RSAs to promote themselves as sleep experts. I sold beds for years and I am definitely not a sleep expert. Even medical science is still a bit in the dark regarding its knowledge of the science of sleep. This also jibes with my suggestion in answer 18 above. Any RSA who recommends a bed to a customer, I think, is greatly exaggerating his thin resume of expertise, and very possibly creating a disservice to his customer.
20. Follow up at least every six to 12 weeks for the rest of the customer's life.
21. It's probably never OK to bad-mouth the competition.

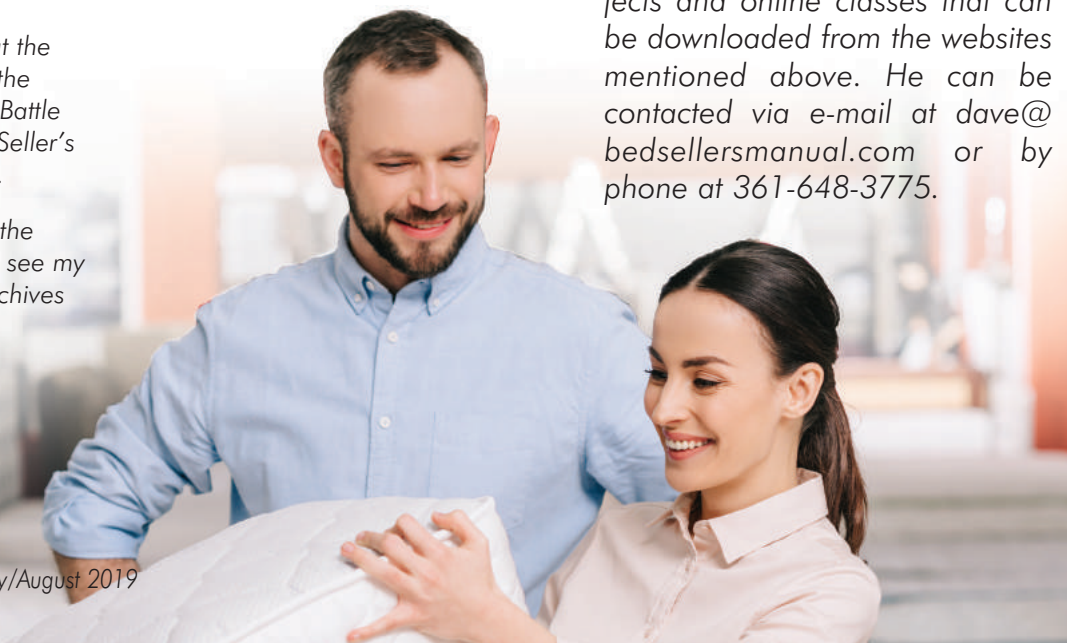
Final Note

This quiz may take days or even weeks to complete. I'd like to hear feed-back from anyone who

reads this. My contact numbers are in the following bio.

About David Benbow: A twenty-eight 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. He can be contacted via e-mail at dave@bedsellersmanual.com or by phone at 361-648-3775.



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POINT/ COUNTERPOINT

by Bill Napier & Ed Tashjian

When money is tight, you have to out-think and outsmart rather than outspend your competition. Bill and Ed debate, and rank by effectiveness, retail marketing tools.

Editor's Note: Here's more from Furniture World's point/counterpoint duo Bill Napier and Ed Tashjian, having previously debated topics including: celebrity licensing, digital advertising overload, the millennial myth, whether or not furniture brands matter, the future of furniture markets and the future of independent reps. See all of their commentary at <https://www.furninfo.com/Series/Debate/57>.

POINT: Ed Tashjian

One of the great marketing controversies today regards the use of digital media. Digital media is a broad term and includes much more than the ads you see on Facebook. It is a comprehensive marketing toolbox that includes SEO, SEM, Display, Retargeting, Affiliate, Video, Social, e-mail, and your website. To do it right, it requires a lot of skill and intense analytics. Very few people are doing it right. Long ago I learned

not to trust people who told me that I wasn't smart enough to understand, so give me your money and I will do the heavy lifting for you. There is an old marketing maxim about this, "When we started out, I had the money and they had the experience. Now they have my money and I have the experience."

But the goal of this Point-Counterpoint article is not to get into the weeds. Rather, Bill and I want to use our combined 80 years of marketing experience to articulate how we would allocate our marketing budget if we owned a retail store.

We have varied backgrounds, but each of us has spent a considerable amount of time in retail. And, both of us are data geeks. I was vice president of marketing for Krause's Sofa Factory and Expressions Custom Furniture: multi-store chains in 13 markets. As a consultant, I've had numerous retail clients, but most relevant for this article was a year-long stint at

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"A sign saying,

Circus Coming on Saturday, is advertising.
Put the sign on an elephant and walk
it into town, that's promotion.
If the elephant walks through the
mayor's flower bed and the local newspaper
writes a story, that's publicity!"

Calico Corners. What all of these retailers have in common is multiple stores across broad geographies. This allows one the ability to test different things in different areas and measure what moves the needle. The obvious advantage of retail is that you have the ultimate sale as the dependent variable. You know who bought when and what and how much they paid for it. You start with the purchase and you correlate that back to the antecedent that caused it. This is both a science and an art. If you have enough data, you can use a statistical tool called regression modeling. The art comes from guessing which hypotheses to test to measure statistically if there's a relationship.

I recently read an amusing but accurate definition of marketing by Allan Dib, in "The 1-Page Marketing Plan." Let's say, the Circus is coming to town. "If you paint a sign saying, 'Circus Coming to the Showground Saturday,' that's advertising. If you

put the sign on the back of an elephant and walk it into town, that's promotion. If the elephant walks through the mayor's flower bed and the local newspaper writes a story about it, that's publicity. And if you get the mayor to laugh about it, that's public relations. If the town's citizens go to the circus, you show them the booths, explain how much fun they'll have spending money there, answer their questions, and ultimately, they spend a lot at the circus, that's sales. And if you planned the whole thing, that's marketing."

Marketing is the whole shebang. And when money is tight, you have to out-think and out-smart rather than outspend your competition. Unlike the circus, you have a lot more to think about including signage, website, and floor salesperson training that comes out of the same budget. So, let's cut to the chase.

Here is how I would rank the top 15 marketing tools and why.

MARKETING TOOLBOX

#1: Training

Hands-down, this is the wisest place to spend your money. The greatest short-term path to profits is increasing the closing ratio, and the greatest long-term path is to increase the lifetime value of each customer. Training is not just for the floor salespeople. Invest in yourself. Managing people is hard. Leading people is even harder. Furniture is a people business. The people are every bit as important as the furniture on the floor. Customers don't buy just goods and services. They buy relations, stories and the promise of a beautiful home.

Your salespeople need to believe in you and your story.



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"Even online companies,

like Wayfair send me about three postcards per month. I have never seen a study where the ROI from digital was higher than with postcards." - Ed Tashjian

This should be so deeply inculcated that it is second nature. When they have confidence in themselves and what they're selling there's practically no limit to what can be achieved.

The store manager is the single most important variable. I have plenty of experience in moving a store manager from one location to another. A store can have bad signage, poor access, and no advertising... but somehow when you bring in a manager from a high-performing store, sales increase dramatically.

#2: Signage

Time and time again, statistics show that the stores with the best signage and access outperform other stores. Here is why. It is your most consistent messaging anchored to a geographic location. Unlike groceries, people don't shop for furniture every day. They shop when they have a need or a desire. Every time their car passes your store, they subconsciously associate it with a place to shop once they are ready. There are limitations to sig-

nage based on local ordinances. However, I would not lease a new store without the first consideration being signage and access. And, I would buy the biggest sign allowed. If you have a sign that is old and worn, and connotes a shabby rundown store, change it immediately!

#3: Public Relations

Bill Gates famously said, "If I was down to the last dollar of my marketing budget, I'd spend it on PR." If my point of view for this article wasn't that of a retailer, I would probably put public relations at the top of my list. Be careful not to confuse publicity with PR. Seth Godin says it best, "Publicity is the act of getting ink. Publicity is getting unpaid media to pay attention, write you up, point to you, run a picture, make a commotion. Sometimes publicity is helpful, and good publicity is always good for your ego. But it's not PR. PR is the strategic crafting of your story. It's the focused examination of your interactions and tactics and products and pricing that, when combined, determine what and how people



talk about you.”

Unless you have a compelling story about why you are different and better, any money spent on marketing is wasted. You must start with a strategy before you can even think about tactics. In the Art of War, Sun Tzu writes, “Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.”

#4: Website

Nearly all customers do research on a website before they come to shop. And here’s an important thing to remember. Unless you’re actually doing e-commerce on your site (and 98 percent of you are not) the sole goal of your website is to get the person into your store. I would always look at my website through that lens. The website can be an enormous time and cost sucker. Every dollar I put into my website would be prioritized with the question, will this motivate someone to get in the car and come see me?

#5: Consulting

This is going to sound self-serving and it is. They say a consultant is someone who borrows your watch to tell you what time it is. And that may be true. However, if

you have a watch and you don’t know how to tell time, it can be very useful to have someone who can teach you. It’s the same reason you hire a guide when you go fishing. The good ones know where the fish are. Once you learn, you don’t need them anymore. In the meantime, you don’t know what you don’t know. The amount of money they can save you can be staggering.

#6: e-Commerce

Experts predict that as much as 30 percent of all furniture purchases will be conducted online in the near future. You need to have a strategy for this. It could be as simple as adding a line of DTC furniture or even a few items to your website.

#7: Retargeting

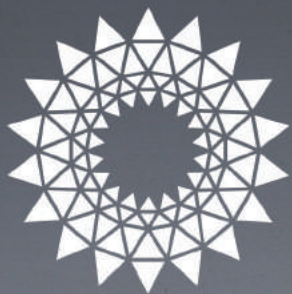
Retargeting, also known as remarketing, is a form of online advertising that can help you keep your brand in front of bounced traffic after they leave your website. For most websites, only two percent of web traffic converts on the first visit. If someone has taken the time and effort to find your website, and they have looked at a product up close, they are interested. In the old days, you would

pay attention and call the customer back. Today, you can send a targeted message that shows up in their Facebook feed or when they’re browsing the web.

#8: Direct Mail

This seems to work for almost everyone. Again, remember the goal is to get them in your store, not to make a sale. This does not have to be a complicated message. And the beauty of this is that it is the most measurable of any variable. You know who you sent the postcard to. You know who purchased. You know the cost of the mailing, and you

"A store can have bad signage, poor access, and no advertising... but somehow when you bring in a manager from a high-performing store, the sales increase dramatically." - Ed Tashjian



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"I know a lot of marketing people and none of them have been able to make this work. The digital agencies are excellent salespeople. But they're selling vapor or rather pixels." - Ed Tashjian

know the gross margin from the sale. I think that it's very interesting that even online companies like Wayfair send me about three postcards per month. I have never seen a study where the ROI from digital was higher than with postcards.

#9: Pop-Up Stores

America is overstored. But this can be good news for furniture stores who may be able to launch lifestyle-based pop-up stores on a temporary basis in high traffic places without a long term lease, and on-the-cheap.

#10: Social

Here, I am lumping together Facebook, Instagram, Houzz, Pinterest and the like. It works when it is genuine, the same way that old-fashioned Word of Mouth used to work. When somebody writes a positive review, especially about trust, reliability, above and beyond service, it can be valuable. When it's fake, you're just shouting in the wind. And since businesses and individuals get mixed together on these sites, there is a lot of clutter. Social should be viewed

through Seth Godin's definition of PR which bears repeating: "PR is the strategic crafting of your story. It's the focused examination of your interactions and tactics and products and pricing that, when combined, determine what and how people talk about you." What do you want people to think or do after they see your social media content? It better be "come to my store" because that's the only place where a transaction can take place.

#11: e-mail Marketing

I have mixed feelings about e-mail marketing. It is cheap and easy. But I get so much spam from so many people that I mostly just ignore it. This only works when it is personal, and you have permission. In other words, if it's personal, people are expecting it, and it is part of a dialog, it is great. If it's not, it's spam.

#12: Newspaper

This was once the mainstay of retail furniture marketing. And I have spent millions of dollars on newspaper advertising over the years. I now believe that the newspaper is almost dead. It is

OK for that boomer who has made a decision to go furniture shopping and is looking to see who has a sale. If they don't already have your store in their consideration set, you are in trouble. Few people under 60 read a newspaper.

#13: Display Digital

This seemed to have so much promise, but honestly, I have never been so disappointed in anything in my whole life. What makes display digital seem so compelling is that it is dirt cheap compared to conventional advertising. The argument is that you get millions of impressions. And, you can measure when someone clicks on it. And, if you're really scientific, you can tie that IP address to a street address and compare it to sales at the register. I personally have put thousands of hours into this and have never been able to make it work. This is especially true when you set up a control cell and subtract out the people who would have bought anyway. Full disclosure. I know a lot of marketing people and none of them have been able to make this work. The digital agencies are excellent salespeople. But they're selling vapor or rather

pixels. They can inundate you with data, but I've never seen it work in driving traffic, increasing sales, average transaction amounts or lifetime value.

#14: Television

If you're a store like Nebraska Furniture Mart or Mathis Brothers, and dominate your market, television can make sense. It's an expensive medium, but it reaches a lot of people. And if you're a massive store that sells everything for everyone, or you have multiple stores in the same trading area it should be part of your mix. If not, I recommend against it.

#15: SEO SEM

What a joke. You will never be able to afford the keywords of generic furniture. The keyword you want to own is your brand-name. And you want it to stand

for something distinctive. I have also seen people buy their competitors' brand-names so that their store shows up in the search. Personally, I think that's dishonest and immoral.

Nobody thinks it's easy to run a furniture retail store. Any kind of retail is hard, and furniture has its own special challenges with long hours, lots of staff and the logistics of deliveries to contend with. Furniture does not sell itself. It does not deliver itself and does not do its own customer service. Those of us who've been in this industry a long time appreciate what you do and how difficult it can be.

COUNTERPOINT: Bill Napier

Ed and I discussed this idea at great length because we believe that many in our category embrace the "noise" of going all digital with their marketing strat-

egies and tactics without doing their due diligence.

Ed did a great job defining the paradigms available to retailers and brands to present their brand platforms, so I'd like to chime in here with my thoughts, and, of course, the research I've done to further define what works and what probably doesn't work. Because of the space restraint, my comments will be short and cryptic where applicable.

#1: Signage

Ed is totally on target here. He wrote about the benefits of using outdoor signs, but here I'm going to touch on the benefits of the in-store signage.

"Most websites are templated, showing categories, usually populated with poor quality pictures taken in Asia along with unimaginative product specifications." - Bill Napier



MARKETING TOOLBOX

According to POPAI – (Point Of Purchase Advertising Institute):

- 82 percent of ALL purchase decisions are made “in-store”, and 68 percent of those purchases are unplanned.
- Total merchandise sales go up 15.7 percent in stores that utilized signs vs. a negative 4.7 percent in stores that do not.
- P.O.S. signage delivers a 2.6 percent to 45.5 percent sales lift.

In summation, studies have found that POP displays are effective at influencing the decision making of shoppers and increasing sales.

#2: Public Relations

Ed did a great job of explaining the difference between getting publicity and crafting a strategic PR message. But, here's the BIG problem. The most common message retailers communicate to potential customers is they are discounting 50 percent off everything! That's why I believe retailers have a ton of work to do regarding PR.

On the manufacturing side, furniture brands often use PR and other communications to

generate showroom traffic in Vegas and High Point. Then, their retailers reach out to consumers with a 50 percent off mantra. Why? Because brands don't help retailers craft a unique message with a compelling story about why they are different, and better.

The following two ideas are the most important for brands to consider when planning their PR strategy:

- *Instead of you making your brand about YOU, make it about ME/the consumer.*
- *Research and embrace how consumers interact with Search, with Social and with in-Store experiences. You'll quickly realize they are very visual first, content/conversation inspired second, idea-focused third, and functionality focused fourth. All these four focuses are wrapped up into a complete value equation.*

Right now the industry is all caught up with celebrity endorsements, trying to create brand identities and/or Unique Selling Propositions (USPs). It's my view, that with the exception of a handful, celebrity endorsements don't work. Nielsen and Statistica report that less than eight percent of consumers believe that celebrity endorse-

ments influence their purchase decisions. In actuality, Nielsen's study says “that celebrity and athlete endorsements are two of the three themes that resonate the least”. Save the fees and invest those licensing fees in your brand.

Consumers want to make a “statement” when furnishing their homes. That's why there are so many DIY home shows. They are immersed in “I want to know” and “I want to do” moments. Embrace that when formulating your brand's platform and your unique selling proposition.

#3: Websites

Okay, time to get really brutal! In my opinion, if the brand

“Social should be viewed through Seth Godin's definition of PR which bears repeating: **PR is the strategic crafting of your story.**” - Ed Tashjian

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"Content is KING.

Our industry is less than unimaginative in supplying meaningful and relevant content, but very good at taking shortcuts utilizing copy and paste." - Bill Napier

logos on most brand websites were interchanged, consumers would never know the difference.

Most websites are templated, showing categories, usually populated with poor quality pictures taken in Asia along with unimaginative product specifications and quickly composed design descriptions. Why are you wasting money on room shots when you can show consumers 3D renderings that can be color draped and easily inserted into photos of consumers' rooms? You'll probably save a ton of money. New technologies allow consumers to do what they

want with your products, vs. trying to show them pretty room scenes they may not even like.

Most furniture websites allow browsers to search by Style. I don't have a clue what Transitional is, do you? Why not let shoppers find furnishings their own way by launching product searches using images rather than arbitrary style categories or text entries. There are so many new technologies that can be integrated easily into web platforms to help consumers navigate and engage with your business and the sale.

The worst part for retailers is

that manufacturers do not standardize their products for website providers, and only a handful offer API feeds so retailers don't show discontinued products and inaccurate product data. For more information check out the Technology Point Counterpoint in Furniture World's July/August 2018 issue (<https://www.furninfo.com/Series/Debate/57>).

#4: Consulting

I would be all in on this one if it wouldn't come across as too self serving. Fortunately I already wrote a detailed analysis of the benefits (from a cost and results perspective) of hiring a marketing consultant like Ed or me in a previous issue of Furniture World magazine. See it in the November December 2016 issue of Furniture World. Find it at (<https://www.furninfo.com/Series/Debate/57>).

#5: Retargeting

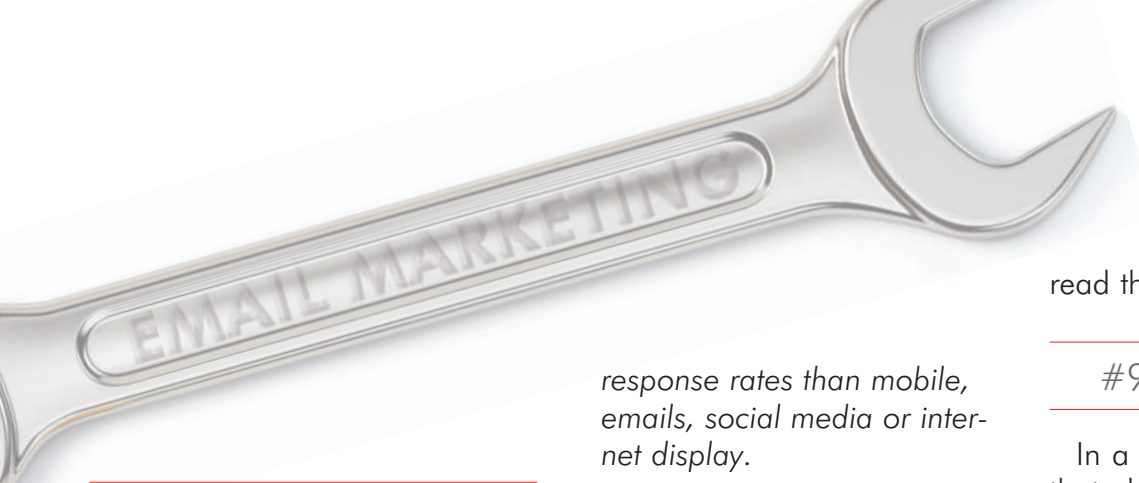
I'm skipping this one, Ed really nailed his section on the value of retargeting.

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#6: Direct Mail

Oh ya, the mail is dead. That's why Ed and I get postcards from Wayfair and every other company that does well in our space. Most retailers have embraced fad marketing. You know those digital marketing platforms that deliver "conversions". Every time I read some propaganda about how a marketing company "increased conversions" from some digital ad spend, I feel so very sorry for the company that actually bought into the conversions fad frenzy. Getting traffic to your website from a digital ad spend means nothing more than you got some traffic. Did they buy anything from that ad spend and can you track the spend back to the purchase? People, that is all that matters. We keep score with our checking accounts, not someone's eyeballs.

If you read the "Digital vs. Print Point/Counterpoint" segment in the July/August 2017 issue of Furniture World, you already know why I feel that furnishings retailers are putting more of their ad spend into digital advertising than they should (<https://www.furninfo.com/Series/Debate/57>). The evidence is there in black and white, so I won't repeat my heart-felt rant again here... but basically:

- *Direct mail has much better*

response rates than mobile, emails, social media or internet display.

- *People hate digital ads and use ad blockers.*
- *Research shows that a high percentage of shoppers say they prefer direct mail for making purchase decisions.*
- *Direct mail is great for reaching women.*

#7: Email marketing

Everyone swears on this, I agree with Ed. Unless I sign up for it, you're gone – bye-bye. I program my email to take your company's name and "TRASH IT". Additionally, the email content needs to be relevant, not just 50 percent off everything. Having a blog is the best way to communicate. Have your designers do a bi-weekly design tip. If you don't have designers, partner locally with some and have them write for you and give them a backlink to their business. CONTENT IS KING!

#8: Newspapers

Virtually all newspapers have outlived their original purpose and have become so polarized politically, that they will be extinct in the next few years. Think about suburban newspapers that highlight local events, businesses, school events, etc. Most parents

read those.

#9: Digital Display ads

In a recent study, Adobe found that about 28 percent of website traffic showed strong "non-human signals," leading the company to believe that the traffic came from bots or click farms. The company studied traffic across websites belonging to thousands of clients. When you do the math and subtract lost traffic due to AI BOTS, Click farms, Facebook "LIKE" Farms, and ad blockers, you'll realize that a substantial percentage of your ad dollars are wasted. For more on this check out the "Buyer Beware – Your Digital Marketing" from the July/August 2017 issue of Furniture World at (<https://www.furninfo.com/Series/Debate/57>).

#10: Television

I'm with Ed on this one!

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marketing toolbox

POINT-COUNTERPOINT

#11: SEO/SEM

I'm with Ed on this one as well. The fact is, content is KING and our industry is less than unimaginative in supplying meaningful and relevant content, but very good at taking shortcuts utilizing copy and paste. Just read some of the product descriptions manufacturers put out there, Case closed.

"Consumers are immersed in 'I want to know' and 'I want to do' moments. Embrace that when formulating your brand's platform and your unique selling proposition." - Bill Napier

Bill's Conclusion

Everyone tells you to market to millennials, the group that has no money, more than 30 percent live at home, have an average of over \$35K in student debt and can't afford a down payment on a home – THINK huge apartment complexes going up everywhere.

People over 50 purchase 50 percent+ of everything to the tune of \$3.2 trillion, yet get less than five percent of your ad dollars. I'll bet millennials are running your marketing and marketing to themselves at the expense of doing their due diligence.

The bottom line. Too much NOISE out there on digital. Buyer Beware. Do your due-diligence on everything or become irrelevant. If you want to have a conversation on these subjects, I'd enjoy that, as would Ed.

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 Ed at (828) 855-0100.

About Bill Napier: Bill is Managing Partner of Napier Marketing Group. He has been the chief marketing officer of several small, medium and large companies throughout his career, most notably Ashley Furniture Industries. Bill is also a featured writer and speaker in the retail industry. His passion is to help retail brands and brick and 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.social-4retail.com with hundreds of articles and "how-to" strategies for retailers and brands. Reach Bill at: billnapier@napiermkt.com or 612-217-1297.

See all of Bill and Ed's Point/Counterpoints at <https://www.furninfo.com/Series/Debate/57>.

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Best Selling DESIGN



Norwalk

The low slung Nash Chair with natural Walnut base has a Mid-Century, Scandinavian feel.

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Twin Star Home

From the French Country Collection, TV Stand with optional ClassicFlame® electric fireplace.

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Breuer Seating

A series chairs and stools offered in four finishes: Textured Bronze, Black Nickel, Stainless Steel and Sand. Shown with one of Breuer Seating's new Glass top tables and bases with matching finishes, available in a choice of over 100 fabrics.

Contact information on page 128.



Himolla

The new Siegfried chaise-end sofa with adjustable head and footrests has a choice of leg finishes.

Contact information on page 128.



Null

The small scale turned leg chairside end is part of a new accents program featuring painted finishes as well as two tone wood finishes in a number of shapes and sizes.

Contact information on page 128.



Country View Woodworking

The Windham Bedroom offers regular panel or scooped panel headboards and regular, tall or European footboards. Additional bed rail storage is also available. Collection features a selection of 15 storage options, 20 hardware choices, and four drawer styles. Offered in Cherry, Sap Cherry and Brown Maple.

Contact information on page 128

Best Selling DESIGN



TOV

The Lyrical Mirror is framed by handcrafted butterflies. Each butterfly is hand hammered and comes together to create a truly unique piece. Available in two sizes.

Contact information on page 128.



Surya

The Scabbos table lamp features a natural stone body and oil rubbed base. Topped with a rectangular matching tan linen shade.

Contact information on page 128.



Furniture of America

Louis features a whole new look with reversible back cushions and Mid-Century styling. The simple frame has a classic light Walnut finish and slat backs.

Contact information on page 128.



Craftmaster

Metal cocktail ottoman from the Modern collection is available in a Satin Brass or Soft Nickel finish.

Contact information on page 128.



évolur

The Maddox Modern Crib converts to a toddler bed and a day bed to accommodate a growing child. Coordinating case goods include a six-drawer dresser and a three-drawer chest.

Contact information on page 128



Sealy Sofa Convertibles

The Winston is a premium drop back sofa convertible for modern living spaces. This sofa convertible can transform into a full or queen size bed. It features a ventilated storage compartment under the seat deck. Contact information on page 128.



Nourison

Area rugs from Nourison's Celestial Collection possess a dramatic beauty, with rich, saturated colors that swirl together forming unique and vivid designs.

Contact information on page 128.

Best Selling DESIGN



Huntington House

This large scale chaise is the newest addition to the Plush collection. It comes standard with ultra down cushioning, is big enough for two and is available in fabric or leather. Huntington House pieces are crafted by hand in the foothills of North Carolina.

Contact information on page 128



Capel Rugs

The Charise is a traditional hand knotted collection from India made with 100 percent wool. Available in 3' x 5', 5' x 8', 8' x 10' and 9' x 12'. A 5' x 8' rug may retail for under \$1,149.

Contact information on page 128.



OW Lee

The Marin collection takes inspiration from the Northern California coastal community of Marin County, located just north of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. With a modern design, this collection takes cues from natural elements.

Contact information on page 128.



International Furniture Direct

This new serving cart designed for smaller scaled homes is part of the Urban Antique Collection. Features include functional cast-iron casters and wrought iron details. Sliding barn door with iron mesh panel adds authentic rustic styling.

Contact information on page 128



Kas Rugs

Ria, from the Vintage Traditionals collection is machine woven from wool in muted colors.

Contact information on page 128.



Jaipur Home

From the Dianda collection, this cabinet is constructed of mango wood in a water resistant lacquer sealed dark blended finish with stamped brass foil panels hand overlaid on the door and drawer fronts.

Contact information on page 128.

Omnia

The new Bergamo Collection includes six new Italian-inspired power, motion styles. Features include impeccable tailoring and stitching, a new power switch with a "home" button that closes the head and footrests to their original position, and a USB charge port. Made in America.

Contact information on page 128.

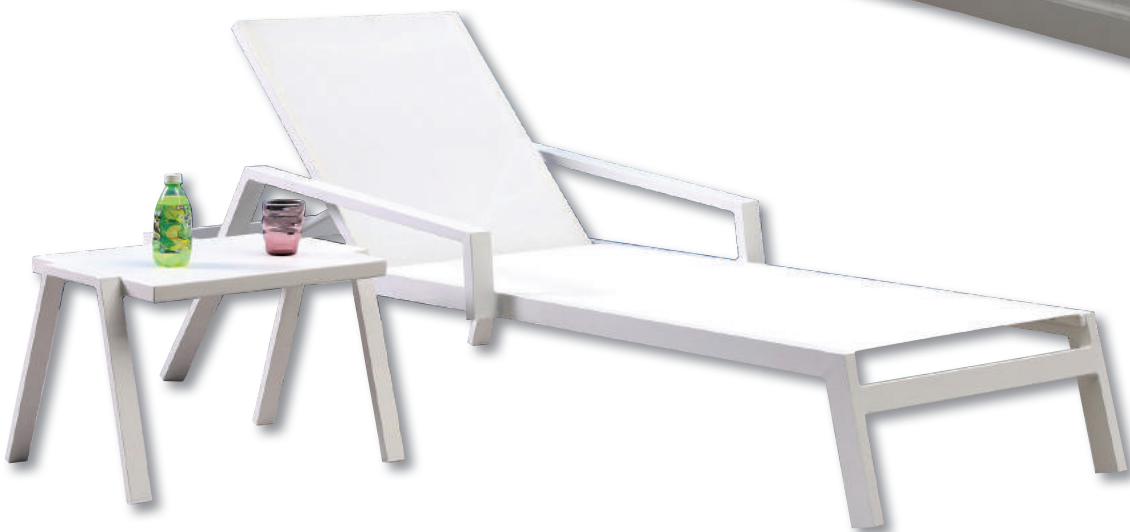


Best Selling DESIGN

Dimplex

The Madison Mantel Electric Fireplace features classic crown molding, and delicate belt line trim. The 28" firebox with a brick-look, enhances the traditional design of the mantel. Finished in a complementary Stone Grey finish.

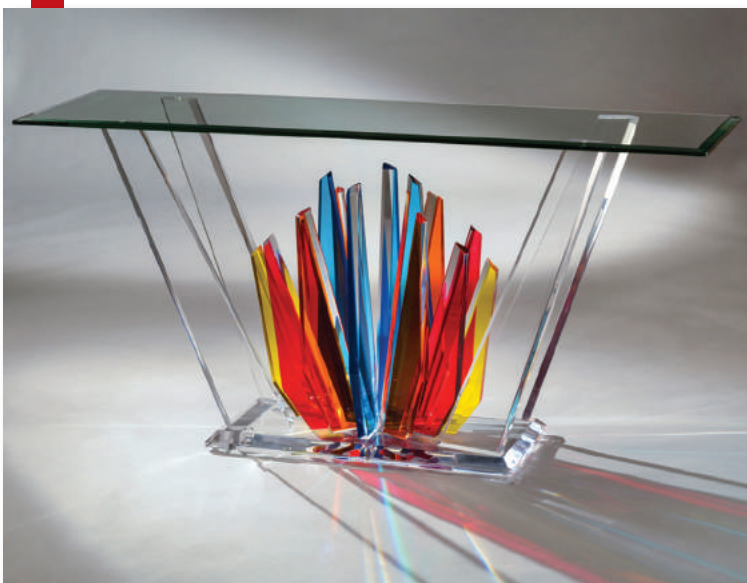
Contact information on page 128.



Pellican Reef

The Mykonos Sling Chaise Lounger, from their Panama Jack Outdoor & Sunroom Collection is made from extruded aluminum, powder coated in a matte white finish.

Contact information on page 128.



Muniz

The Starburst Console is made in America by this leader in acrylic furniture and accessories.

Contact information on page 128.



Nouveau Concept

This 76" TV base features drawers, bookcases, spaces for electronic components and sound bar.

Contact information on page 128.



Feizy

Knotted by hand in India, Piraj has traditional patterns, some in distressed vintage and others in deeply saturated hues. Sizes Available are 2'6" x 8' 2" x 3' 4" x 6', 5'6" x 8'6", 7'9" x 9'9", 8'6" x 11'6", 9'6" x 13'6".

Contact information on page 128.



Klaussner

New From the Trisha Yearwood Home collection the "Nashville" dining group features three custom finishes, along with custom hardware that provides a warm, familiar, and inviting feel much like the city itself.

Contact information on page 128.

Legends

The Sandpoint bedroom features drawers with extension ball bearing glides and highlighted English dovetail joints. The top drawers are felt lined and there are USB ports on both sides of the headboard.

Contact information on page 128.



A WINNING RETAIL EXPERIENCE

By Dean Horowitz

How your store can create a winning retail experience that turns your customers into promoters.

Today, more than ever before, customer experiences will make or break your retail future. Online reviews, omnichannel shopping options, employee turnover, and competition small and large are all threats to your business.

While the burgeoning trend for online retailers to launch brick and mortar stores in selected areas may feel like a win for those of us who appreciate traditional retailing, the data sets online retailers have already collected about retail customers represents a new type of threat. Aside from any economies of scale online giants may possess, they may already know more about your customers and your trading area than you do.

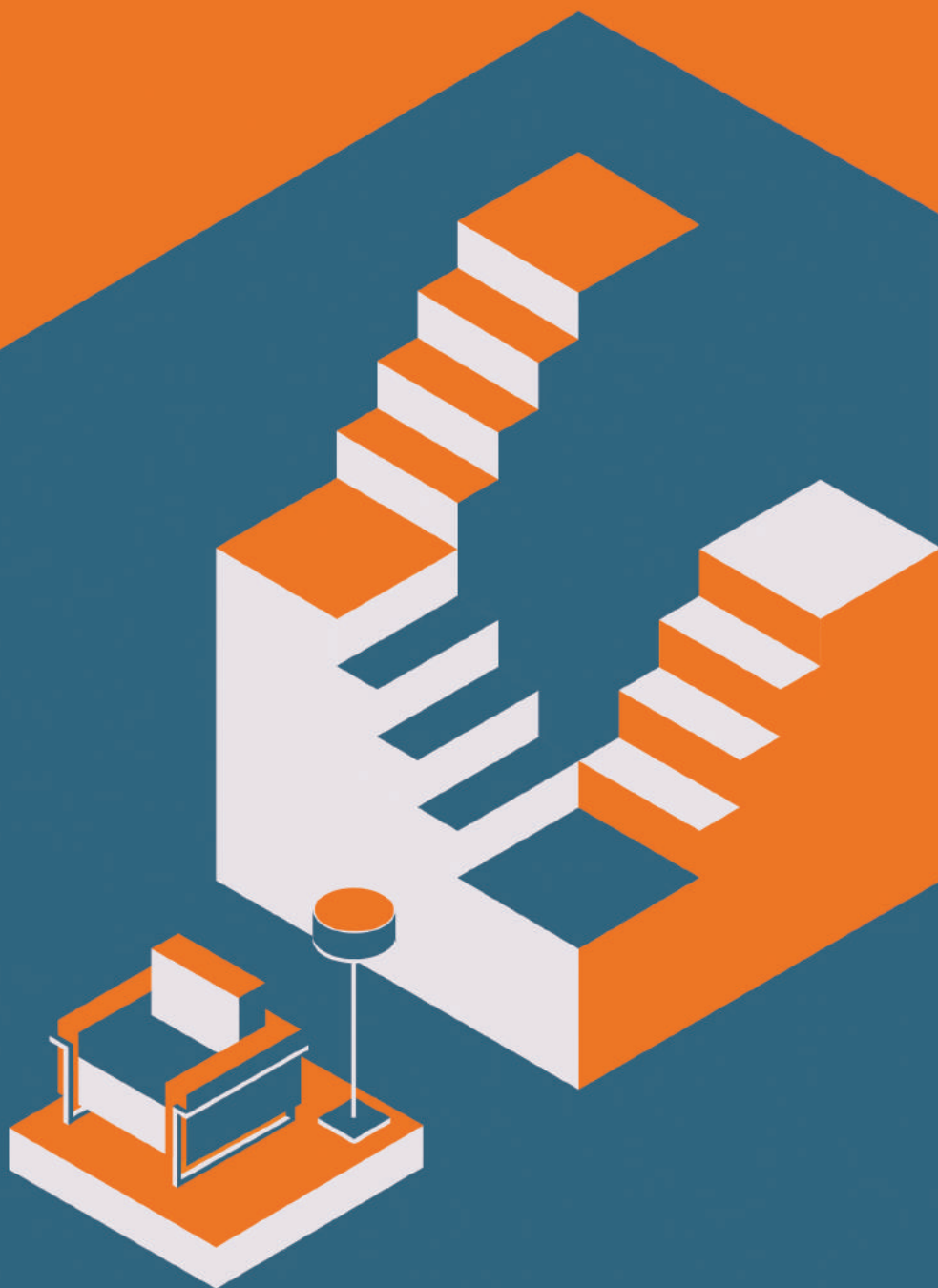
What They Already Know

They possess detailed demographic profiles of your customers and know what your customers' neighbors have purchased or are viewing online. Plus, they have data on credit ratings and behaviors. They may also have

identified their inner circles of friends, approaching life events, and some even know when they are 'expecting' before a partner or spouse. And here is one other important piece of information. As a requirement for their online business, these retailers have been obsessed with providing great online service. They employ services to identify "negative reviews" and quickly turn them into endorsements. Access to all this information means they will market to consumers who have the highest propensity to buy from them. They will tailor product selections shown to each prospective customer to match other home furnishings already in their homes, at a price – or other trigger point – that delivers a buying decision.

Survey Results

An April 2019 study, conducted by Sibyl Surveys by Signet Research, asked Furniture World Magazine subscribers to name the "The various ways you/your



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"The theory is

that one simple 0-10 rating question can determine if a customer will be a promoter (9, 10) or a detractor (0-6)."

company currently interacts with your customers." The most common reported interaction at 93.2 percent was in the retail location, followed by 78.4 percent on the phone, 55.4 percent via an e-commerce transaction, 43.2 percent at an event, and 33.8 percent through an interior designer.

Trust & Revenue

- 92 percent of consumers believe suggestions from friends and family more than advertising (Source: Nielsen Report, 2019).
- 88 percent of consumers trust online reviews written by other consumers as much as they

trust recommendations from personal contacts (Source: Nielsen Report, 2019).

- Leaders in customer experience deliver, on average, 6x the revenue growth of companies with poorer customer experience (Source, Forrester, 2018)
- A totally satisfied customer contributes six times as much revenue as a somewhat satisfied customer – and 14 times as much revenue as a somewhat dissatisfied customer. (Source: Infoquest, 2019)
- 50 percent of current customers are more likely to try new products and spend 31 percent more on average when compared to a new customer.

(Harvard Business Review)

Every Single Touch-point

This means every single touch-point will define your potential for ongoing success.

According to Bain & Company, it costs seven times more to gain a new customer through advertising, outreach, etc., than it does to maintain an existing one. Think about the amount you are currently spending on gaining customer traffic. According to your furniture retailing peers in the survey:

- 79 percent of them are currently investing in their websites.
- 68 percent on print advertising.

What are the various ways you/your company currently interacts with your customers?

In store	93.2%
Phone	78.4%
eCommerce	55.4%
Through an interior designer	33.8%
At local events	43.2%
Other	12%

When comparing 2019 to 2018, are you expecting more, less, or the same number of in-store customers?

Significantly More	2.7%
More	32.0%
Same	40.0%
Less	17.3%
Significantly Less	1.3%
Other	6.7%

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- 56 percent on emails.
- 51 percent on digital advertising.
- 48 percent on Local Sponsorships.
- 47 percent on holiday sales.
- 41 percent on local television.

When we consider the actual costs involved with new customer acquisition, these marketing and sales areas are only one factor. Others are, additional costs for personnel, services, office, and technology. It is expensive to gain a new customer.

"People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel", is an applicable quote from Maya Angelou. Making them feel great is your edge against all threats to

your business. It will ensure that your customer base and revenue continues to grow.

Likewise, the possibility for anyone to have a negative experience with your brand and then effortlessly broadcast it to friends, family, and other potential customers while they are in your store is high. One YouTube video headlined "Don't buy there!" has more than 33,500 views with comments such as "Thanks for sharing. Saved me a headache. I was about to purchase from....," and "Same problems I had with this company... BAD FURNITURE." Yelp, Google Reviews, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others provide an immediate bullhorn to your marketplace.

While Jordan's Furniture may be known for over-the-top experiences, the mission of Jordan's is not limited to in store experiences. Their mission encompasses every

customer interaction. You do not have to have a ripline or omni-max movie theater to learn from them.

Identifying Problem Areas

Okay, so how do you know if a shopper is having a great brand experience? You can welcome them into your store, treat them kindly, answer the phone with a smile, add a café and fun kids area, but you will still not know. Have you ever been served a terrible meal at a restaurant, only to tell the manager who checked on you that everything was fine? Your customers are most likely answering in the same manner.

Using Net Promoter Scores

About 15 years ago, Fred Reichheld of Bain & Company wrote an excellent article in the Harvard Business Review, "The One Number You Need To Grow". This one number has



"56 percent of surveyed retailers are either not familiar with NPS or aren't sure they know what it is."

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"If someone is a 'promoter'

then here is your opportunity to leverage them to build your customer base."

transformed businesses since. It is called a Net Promoter Score." The theory is that one simple 0-10 rating question can determine if a customer will be a promoter (9, 10) or a detractor (0-6). The NPS is determined by subtracting the percentage of promoters from the percentage of detractors. The one simple question is, "Would you recommend Byron's Furniture to a friend or family member?" can determine immediate actions.

Detractors: If someone is a "detractor" then an email should immediately go out reinforcing their value to your business and desire to correct any issues. A call from a key member of the team should follow.

Promoters: If someone is a "pro-

moter" then here is your opportunity to leverage them to build your customer base. Send them to a public review site. Offer a loyalty program. But, most importantly, identify what made them a promoter and do more of it.

Passives: What if a customer chose a seven or eight? They are called "passives." These customers are probably going to shop on price or speed of delivery and have no emotional connection to your enterprise. That said, they were satisfied with the experience and are worth nurturing.

The Net Promoter Score is a simple, inexpensive survey tool, yet, according to the recent survey of Furniture World Magazine's furniture retail subscribers, 56 percent of surveyed retailers are

either not familiar with NPS or aren't sure they know what it is. Yet, 41 percent believe that using a Customer Satisfaction surveying tool after a milestone event with a customer will positively impact sales. Sixty-one percent of the retailers surveyed don't know how to monitor customer satisfaction. Yet, those who do, get satisfaction insights in the following ways:

- 39 percent upon furniture delivery.
- 32 percent at the point of transaction.
- 24 percent via a survey of some kind.
- 17 percent are not conducting any form of customer satisfaction monitoring. Again, the online retailers are doing this 100 percent of the time.

Forty-one percent of retailers stated they believe using a Customer Satisfaction surveying tool after a milestone event with a customer could positively impact sales.

Implementing NPS

How do you institute a cus-

Do you/your company currently have a customer satisfaction/experience monitoring system in place?

Yes	37.4%
No	46.7%
Not Sure	5.3%
No Response	13.3%

The study asked Furniture World Magazine subscribers to name "The various ways you/your company currently interact with your customers"

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WINNING RETAIL EXPERIENCE

How do you/your company usually go about monitoring your customers' satisfaction?	
Ask at Check-out	32.0%
Call Customer After Order	16.0%
Call Customer After Delivery	38.7%
Send Customer Satisfaction Survey	24.0%
Other	4.0%
None of the Above	17.3%
No Response	17.3%

What is your retail sales volume?	
Up to 999,000	13.3%
1,000,000 – 4,999,999	29.3%
5,000,000 – 9,999,000	6.7%
10,000,000 – 49,999,999	9.3%
Over 50,000,000	8.0%
Not sure	10.7%
No Response	22.7%

tomer satisfaction program into your business? According to Byron Zanopoulos, Managing Director of Sibyl Surveys by Signet Research, establishing a customer satisfaction program is a matter of choosing the right platform, about an hour's worth of training, and then establishing it as a key part of your culture.

"Try to avoid those free, Survey Monkey/Survey Gizmo type platforms. These tools can get you an NPS score, but don't give you means to segment and analyze those responses efficiently. The dashboard functionality of a well designed CX platform gives you that ability to drill down, and inbox features allow you to respond to each customer's feedback in a meaningful way. These are key distinguishing characteristics of a valuable CX survey platform."

Key Takeaways

What are the key takeaways?

- *It is more profitable to engage a current customer than gain a new one.*
- *So much focus is on new customers, while instituting a Customer Experience program will be the most effective means to grow your business.*
- *Anyone who has an interaction with your brand, now has the platform to define who you are and influence others to do business with you.*
- *Only an on-going "Customer Experience" Feedback Platform will provide you actionable means to turn detractors into promoters.*
- *Promoters will grow your business and advocate for your growth despite the many*

threats this world brings.

As ecommerce companies continue to expand, conventional furnishings retailers need to find ways to compete on an even playing

"Have you ever been served a terrible meal at a restaurant, only to tell the manager who checked on you that everything was fine?"

Your customers are most likely answering in the same manner."

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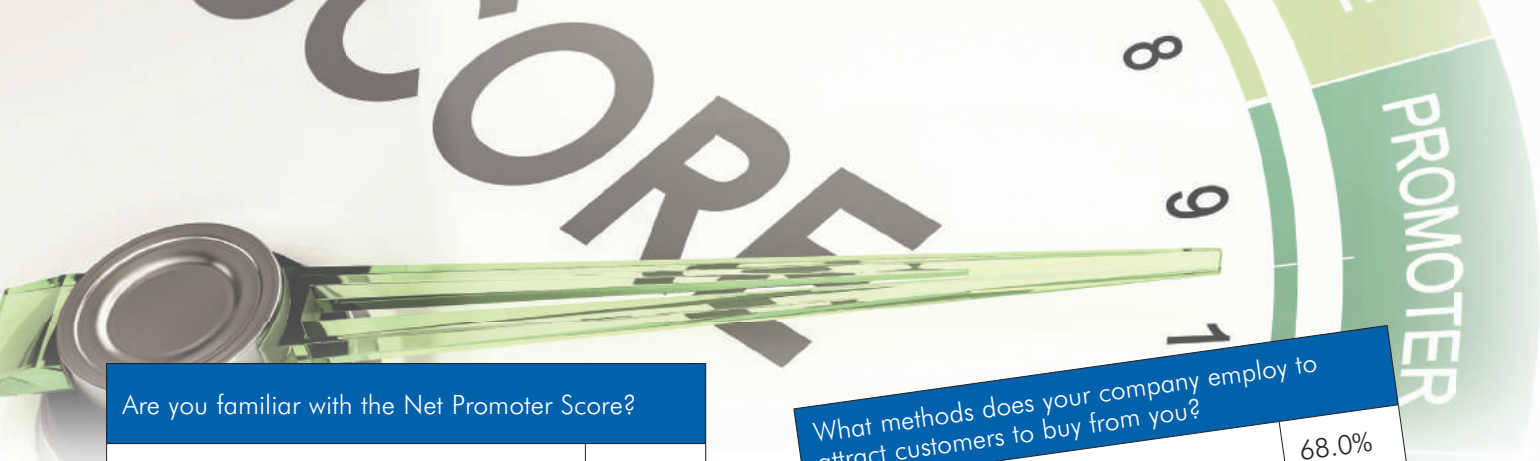
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Are you familiar with the Net Promoter Score?	
Yes	28%
No	45.3%
Not Sure	10.7%
No Response	16%

When comparing 2019 to 2018, would you say you are expecting more, less, or the same number of eCommerce customers?	
Significantly More	8%
More	41.3%
Same	30.7%
Less	2.7%
Significantly Less	2.7%
No Response	14.7%

What methods does your company employ to attract customers to buy from you?	
Print Advertising	68.0%
Your Website	78.7%
Emails Sent by Our Company	56.0%
Local Television Ads	41.3%
Local Sponsorships	48.0%
Digital Advertising	50.7%
Sales People	76.0%
Interior Designers	41.3%
Holiday Sales	46.7%
Other	10.7%
No Response	8.0%

field. Identifying your Promoter, Passive and Detractor customers, then taking appropriate action, will help your furniture business to thrive.

About Dean Horowitz: Dean Horowitz is the co-founder of IdeaSoil and has held leadership roles at b2b and b2c media organizations for more than two decades. His recent focuses have included the home furnishings industry as well as customer experience monitoring tools. He is a

Rutgers University graduate who is recognized as a thought leader in the media and marketing space. Questions can be directed to Dean Horowitz at Dean@IdeaSoil.com or 847-922-5102.

About Sibyl Surveys: Sibyl Surveys by Signet Research was developed by a 50+ year old, highly regarded research company as a means for associations to keep and grow membership. The platform expanded its client -base more recently to include furni-

ture retailers seeking to enhance long-term relationship with their customers.

Sibyl offers a Quadrant Report that graphically presents the areas of retail businesses that customers find most satisfying and important. Other useful management reports are available from Sibyl Surveys that provide detailed customer insight. For more information on Sibyl Surveys by Signet Research, contact Byron Zanolopoulo at Byron@SignetResearch.com or 201-945-6903.

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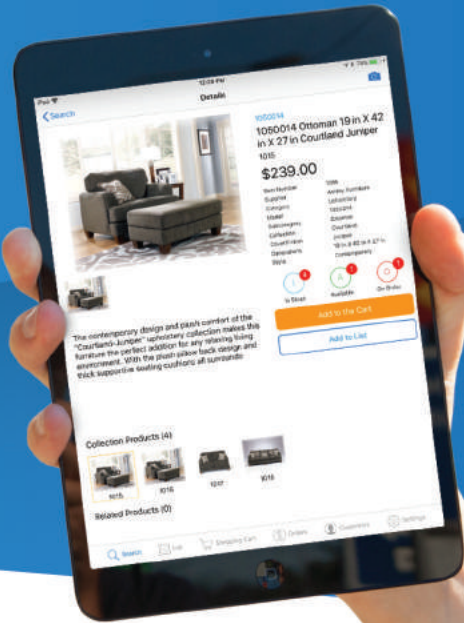


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