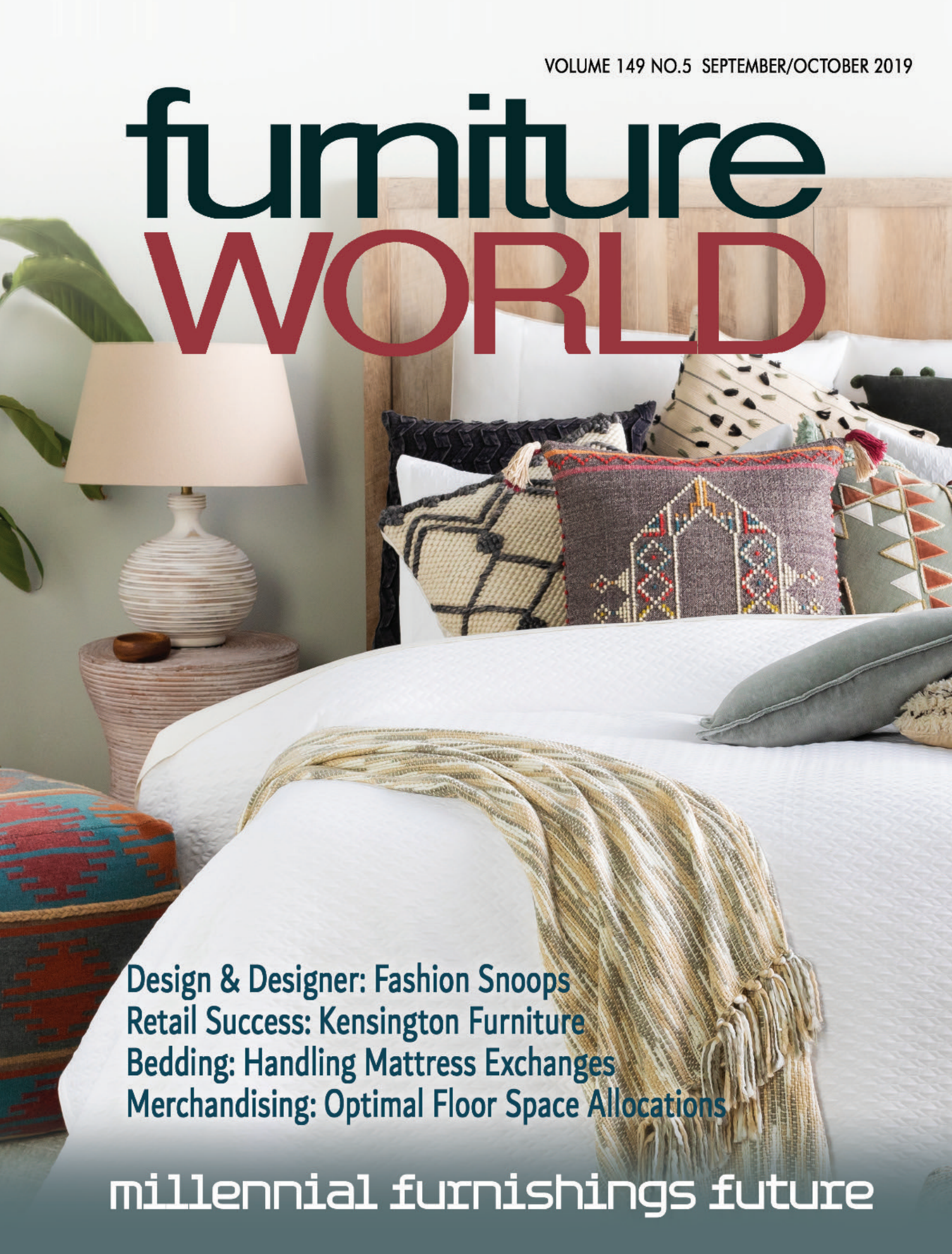


VOLUME 149 NO.5 SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2019

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Retail Success: Kensington Furniture
Bedding: Handling Mattress Exchanges
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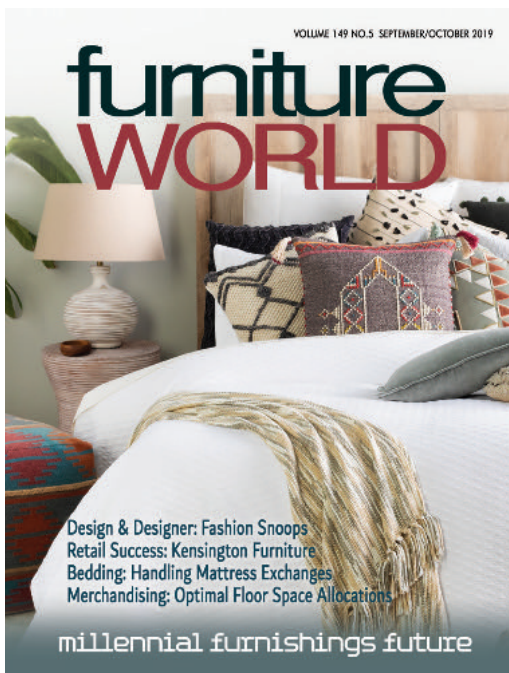
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Don't Fall Off The Roof!

It used to be, if I did something stupid like fall off of a roof, I would head over to the hospital emergency room. It was never a satisfying experience. After going through reception, filling out an intake form with pen and paper (ugh), presenting insurance information, and getting ignored for an hour or more, I was generally attended to by an overworked or inexperienced physician.

Lately, I frequent an urgent care store-front where appointments can be made on short notice. Intake forms filled out, insurance card scanned in — all online, in no time at all. It's only a few minutes wait upon arrival to see a well rested physician who seems to like their job, and care about my health.

My point in mentioning this is that the in-store furniture shopping experience can be more like going to the emergency room than urgent care. Neither are how most people would choose to spend their Saturday afternoon, but one is a much better experience.

Unlike going for medical treatment, furnishings shoppers can comfortably browse the websites of online-only retailers without leaving home. They can view curated selections while sipping chardonnay and watching the latest season of the *Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* on Prime. No travel, no pressure, no waiting. Still, after hours of looking, the large majority feel they need more help.

So, they visit a store to get the help they can't get online, all the while half dreading an in-store "emergency room" experience. I believe that is a major reason why people say, "I'm just looking". What they are really looking for is a reason to leave before they waste too much of their Saturday afternoons. They want to buy, but expect to be sold. They yearn for a seamless and satisfying experience, but don't expect to get one.

What can be done? For starters, check out what Jaye Anna Mize of Fashion Snoops has to say in this Furniture World edition about connecting the dots between culture and consumer buying behavior. Then, read what Michael Grossman is doing to give his growing independent store a competitive edge. Review Gordon Hecht's latest retailing revelations, and peruse Bill and Ed's ideas on the likely future buying behaviors of millennial shoppers and what that may mean for our industry. And, if you are going to High Point Market, have a great one!

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HOW TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS

by David McMahon

This sales formula for growth will help you take actions that will directly impact the strength of your retail business.

One of the most common questions I get from my retailer clients is, "How are businesses doing out there?" They often add, "I've heard that it is tough for many retailers, business is flat, and few are growing."

My response has remained pretty much the same over the past many years. Aside from during the great recession, many businesses in retail have been flat. However, there are some that have managed to grow significantly.

Why do some retailers grow, while others plateau or decline? This article will answer that question and hopefully help some of you get out of a rut and start to grow again.

The purpose of marketing is to increase customer engagement to then grow sales. Keeping that in mind, the most recent article in this series (July/August 2019 issue, "Marketing Effectiveness Metrics Marketing"), www.furninfo.com/Authors/DavidMcMahon/6, looked at tracking

customer traffic in three ways:

- By new customers
- By repeat customers
- By personal trade repeat customers

Soon after the article was published, I heard a podcast interview with Kevin Systrom, the founder of Instagram. You can find it at You can find it at (<https://master-sofscale.com>). Strom presented his formula for growth. "It's how many new people came in the door, how many people decided to stop using you, and then how many people who used to use you decided to use you again. Plain and simple, those three terms equal net growth," he said.

Given that it is difficult to track which customers "have left you and then decided to come back to you", the idea presented in the previously mentioned July/August article of counting traffic as a driver of growth seems worthy. And, to make this traffic counting meaningful, retailers should track average sale and close

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SALES FORMULA FOR GROWTH

rates by the three categories of traffic that are New Customers, Repeat Customers and Personal Trade Customers. The reasoning for this is that there are different strategies and likely different ROI's depending on each customer relationship.

The Formula

With all this in mind, my sales formula for growth is expressed in Figure #1 below.

This is in contrast to how many retailers in our industry measure growth. They use the simple formula for change: (Sales Now – Sales Before) / Sales Before. This

is OK, however, by just using this change formula, the underlying reasons for growth remain mostly guess work.

Salespeople & Capacity

Most furniture retailers' business models rely exclusively on salespeople serving customers. Experience has shown that individual salespeople can improve but, as a whole, a sales force can do so only marginally. This has to do with capacity. The capacity per salesperson is the average sales per salesperson dictated by your business model. Sure you may have a person who writes

\$1.5 million per year. But, you likely cannot find a way to bring everyone on your sales team up to that level. It's just not the way averages work. With this in mind,

"If you prefer to track sales per guest (SPG), you can substitute SPG for AS x CR (average sale x close rate in Figure #2."

Figure#1:

Sales Formula For Growth = (Number of New Customers x Close Rate x Average Sale) + (# of Repeat Customers x Close Rate x Average Sale) + (# of Personal Trade Customers x Close Rate x Average Sale)

Algebraically expressed: $SFG = (\#NC \times CR \times AS) + (\#RC \times CR \times AS) + (\#PT \times CR \times AS)$

Algebraically expressed (for companies that don't have personal trade customers:

$SFG = (\#NC \times CR \times AS) + (\#RC \times CR \times AS)$ or $SFG = (\#NC \times SPG) + (\#RC \times SPG)$

- #NC = Number of New Customers
- #RC = Number of Repeat Customers
- #PT = Number of Personal Trade Customers
- CR = Close Rate = (# of sales / # of customers)
- AS = Average Sale
- SPG = Average Sale X Close Rate

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Figure #2:

Sales Formula For Growth with Salespeople = # of Salespeople x [(# of New Customers / # of Salespeople x Close Rate x Average Sale) + (# of Repeat Customers / # of Salespeople x Close Rate x Average Sale) + (# of Personal Trade Customers / # of Salespeople x Close Rate x Average Sale)]

Algebraically expressed: $SFGS = \#SP \times [(\#NC/SP \times SPG) + (\#RC/SP \times SPG) + (\#PT/SP \times SPG)]$

- SFGS = Sales Formula for Growth with Salespeople
- #SP = # of Salespeople
- #NC = Number of New Customers
- #RC = Number of Repeat Customers
- #PT = Number of Personal Trade Customers
- CR = Close Rate = (# of sales / # of customers)
- AS = Average Sale
- SPG = Average Sale X Close Rate

Sales Formula (without personal trade customers) For Growth with Salespeople:

$$SFGS = \#SP \times [(\#NC/SP \times CR \times AS) + (\#RC/SP \times CR \times AS)]$$

$$SFGS = \#SP \times [(\#NC/SP \times SPG) + (\#RC/SP \times SPG)]$$

if you have five salespeople and your average is \$650,400 per salesperson, your sales are \$3.25 million per year.

Yes, you can improve. However, those retailers that really grow their furniture businesses, add additional salespeople, find ways to get them customers, and achieve the same or better sales / salesperson averages.

Expanded Formula

Since sales force growth is integral to company growth, the "sales formula for growth" is amended in Figure #2 above to include the number of salespeople. Also, if you prefer to track sales per guest (SPG), you can substitute SPG for

AS x CR (average sale x close rate in Figure #2).

Ways Businesses Grow

Before you start making predictions on the economy, or the internet and the way people shop (which do play a part, but in which you have little control), consider these 5 questions:

1. Has the number of salespeople you employ grown?
2. Has the number of stores you operate or categories you offer expanded?
3. Has your business model been improved?

4. Has the mix of your team been improved?

"Those retailers that really grow their furniture retail businesses, add more salespeople to their companies, find ways to get them customers, and achieve the same or better sales/salesperson averages."



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"Adding one salesperson,

and taking steps to increase the average monthly sales per salesperson helped this business go from habitually flat to growing."

5. Have your management team and systems improved?

When "no" is the answer to many of these questions, you are unlikely to have experienced substantial growth.

Another factor that affects business growth is when other businesses decide to grow in your market area before you. When competitors for your customers' share-of-spend are answering "yes" to the above five questions, they will hurt your growth potential.

Below is a list of some actions that commonly result in growing volume:

- Adding salespeople and staffing properly to existing traffic
- Adding salespeople and staffing properly to desired sales goals
- Decreasing employee turnover
- Adding retail locations
- Adding categories

- Adding new marketing programs
- Increasing customer follow-up
- Changing the business model
- Changing employees
- Changing managers
- Changing locations
- Changing the marketing mix
- Changing merchandising and/or display presentations
- Changing and improving on systems and procedures to make selling easier.

Aside from decreasing employee turnover, all the growth actions start with add, change, increase, or improve. There are few actions that would result in sales growth that start with cut, reduce, do less, or do the same thing.

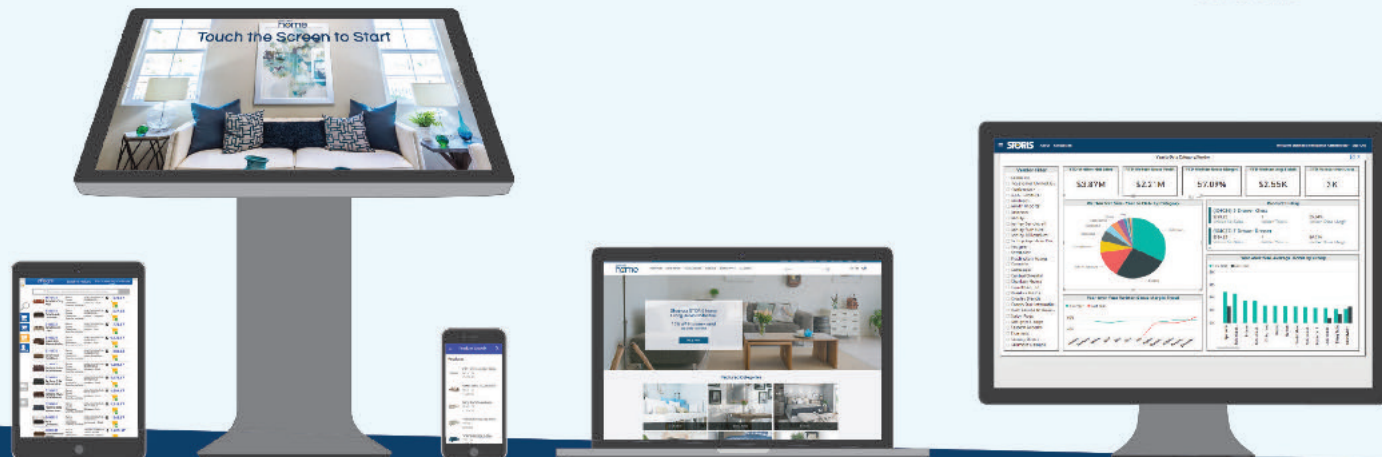
Case Example

Let's look at a quick case example and apply my sales formula

for growth with salespeople (SFGS). Let's take the case of a business we will call XYZ, stuck at \$3.25 million dollars in annual sales volume. This furniture retailer employed five salespeople on average, was good at counting traffic and had a functioning opportunity counting system that tracked close rates, average sales, and SPG by customer type. The company had tried sales training, changing managers, tweaking their selling system and changing up the marketing mix. These actions moved the needle initially. But eventually, they ended up right back where they started. The sales training seemed to have little effect on results in the long run because salesperson turnover was too high. Year after year they could not beat an average sales number of \$650,000 per year, \$54,000 per month per salesperson. Finally, XYZ's owner decided enough was enough and did three things:

1. Mandated and managed the use of a selling system that was part of the sales training they invested in.

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SALES FORMULA FOR GROWTH

2. Increased and systematized their customer follow-up.

3. Added 1 salesperson (averaged 6 at all times).

After one full year of operating this way, this is what happened:

Customer traffic increased by 50 people per month and salesperson turnover dropped. The store's average salesperson per guest metric improved. The average monthly sales per salesperson increased marginally from \$54,000 per month per salesperson to \$56,000. Annual sales

per salesperson increased from \$650,000 to \$672,000 per year. These steps helped this business grow from \$3,252,500 million in sales to \$4,032,000. That's a 24 percent increase in sales volume (See Chart #1 below).

For retailer XYZ, adding one additional salesperson and taking steps to increase the average monthly sales per salesperson helped this business go from habitually flat to growing.

Improvement starts with understanding your situation better, making decisions to improve that situation, and then executing

those improvement actions.

About David McMahon: A retail financial and operational professional, David directs multiple consulting projects, including six business mastermind groups: Ashley Gladiators, Kaizen, Visionaries, TopLine Sales Managers, Lean and Sigma DC Operations. He is also a Certified Management Accountant, a Certified Supply Chain Professional and Licensed by the US Department of Revenue. Reach David McMahon at: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/davidwmcMahon/> or email David at mcmahonlive@gmail.com.

CHART #1: Sales Formula for Growth with Salespeople

SP = Salesperson, NC= New Customers, RC=Repeat Customers, PT=Personal Trade Customers

ANNUAL BEFORE		MONTHLY AVERAGES BEFORE									
Total Annual Sales	Annual Sales per SP	Total Monthly Sales	Monthly Sales per SP	# of SP	Total traffic	# of NC	Sales per NC	# RC	Sales per RC	# PT	Sales per PT
\$3,252,500	\$650,400	\$271,041	\$54,208	5	800	400	\$295.00	300	\$340.00	100	\$510.00
ANNUAL AFTER		MONTHLY AVERAGES AFTER									
Total Annual Sales	Annual Sales per SP	Total Monthly Sales	Monthly Sales per SP	# of SP	Total traffic	# of NC	Sales per NC	# RC	Sales per RC	# PT	Sales per PT
\$4,032,000	\$672,000	\$336,000	\$56,000	6	850	400	\$330.00	330	\$400.00	120	\$600.00

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DESIGN & DESIGNER

JAYE ANNA MIZE

by Melody Doering

Fashion Snoops' Jaye Anna Mize shares what brands and retailers can do to connect the dots between culture, consumer behavior and new product development.

This month, Furniture World's Design and Designer series presents an idea-filled interview with Jaye Anna Mize, VP of Creative | Home Interiors and Design, at the trend-forecaster Fashion Snoops. As Jaye describes it, "Fashion Snoops is an online trend agency and consumer behavior platform."

Music & Trend Forecasting

"Born and raised in Eden, North Carolina, I was a notorious risk taker. After flunking out of a private all-girls school I decided to move to New York on short notice. A week later I landed a job at Fashion Snoops. At that time the company was developing a line of Kenny Chesney Hawaiian shirts for JCPenney. My bosses didn't know much about country music stars, so they were very happy to have a 19-year-old southern girl on their team to tell them anything and everything about country music. I soon became the assistant to Lilly Berelovich,

Co-founder, President and CCO, while going to school at night.

"A year later I transferred to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to get a fashion design degree while working remotely doing runway analysis. When I returned to New York I opened the home division at Fashion Snoops."

Fashion Snoops

"At Fashion Snoops we study consumer behavior, culture and lifestyles, similar to a financial trend forecaster, but on a product development level to help companies create smarter solutions for their product development needs. We work in fashion, beauty, home furnishings, and other industries, with a range of clients that extends from luxury all the way to mass market.

"Our core focus is on studying culture to get a deep understanding about what's happening – full spectrum – then diving down into product development.

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"My bosses didn't know much about country music stars, so they were very happy to have a 19-year-old southern girl on their team."

From there, we break it down for clients depending on their needs for serving the luxury, mid-market, mass market, boutique-shop market, etc."

Forecasting Process

"We discuss everything from economics to politics to cultural shifts, cool things in art, color and pattern direction, for example. We look at all this data-mined information objectively to forecast trends.

"Furnishings designers are working anywhere from one to two years out, so we have to have our heads even further out in the game.

"Practically speaking, following news of a recession, or political uncertainty, consumer attitudes and buying behaviors are affected. Designers, furnishings brands, and retailers should factor this into their product development

and buying plans. As sad as I am to predict this, due to this kind of uncertainty, Fashion Snoops thinks that in the furniture industry we will start seeing a grey-color shift returning to the forefront, but with tints of blue, green and purple undertones for a softer feel. Design will become minimalist, as patterns become less dominant and practical instead of wild and fun for core items."

Trend: A Five-Letter Word

"I am not particularly fond of the word 'trend.' Designers often say that they don't follow the latest trends in their creative process. My feeling, however, is that they actually do follow trends, without realizing it. Market-goers can become trend-oversaturated.

"Is it pink or purple or orange or grey or blue? Bohemian or shabby chic or what not. Everybody has an opinion on what the trend

is. The word 'trend' has become a marketing term. What designers really need to understand is consumer behavior. By the time a designer or product developer sees the Pantone color of the year at Market, it's too late.

"Designers want to be individualistic; that's the reason they shy away from the idea of trends. But how can they stand out, and remain authentic when everything's so over-saturated thanks

"We will start seeing a grey-color shift returning to the forefront, but with tints of blue, green and purple undertones for a softer feel."



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DESIGN & DESIGNER

"Right now, Fashion Snoops sees a huge shift in consumer behavior and preferences with regard to the home."

to Instagram? We're at a very interesting moment."

Social Media Influencers

"Instagram is having a big influencer moment, trying to remain authentic. Justina Blakeney, for

example, (www.justinablakeney.com) is probably the most authentic person on Instagram. She has really carved out that niche of bohemia better than anyone. Justina has a million Instagram followers, and she will not lose them, because she is so authentically herself, inventive with her color schemes and patterns, and always one step ahead. I think that's what people really want from designers and influencers, authenticity! It's the new trend!"

Shifts in Consumer Behavior

"Right now, Fashion Snoops sees a huge shift in consumer behavior and preferences with regard to

the home. It used to be that shoppers would buy, for example, blankets and sheets, then keep these soft goods for as long as they owned their bedroom set, or until they wore out. That's less true today. Consumers are changing them as frequently as they change their other fashion items. However, that's not true for furniture.

"Younger consumers are replacing those items a lot faster."

Pictured below is Lilly Berelovich, Co-founder, President and CCO, Fashion Snoops.





Photos from a recent Fashion Snoops Trend Immersion full-day event where attendees learned about cultural, consumer, product and color shifts that will impact their businesses over the next two years.

"Some stores think their job is to buy and sell product, but it's really customer service. In today's market, retailers must help shoppers to aspire to elevate their lives."

And since this demographic is more likely to work from home and move more frequently, they are looking for more fluid/flexible pieces of furniture that are also a lot less heavy.

"Many furniture manufacturers and retailers still try to have their product lines encompass every single trend, and every single scale. What they're going to have to consider is to find a style niche for themselves. It might be shabby chic, bohemian, or modern. Then from there, expand that

selection to include smaller and larger pieces, and more flexible furniture items. That way manufacturers and retailers can find a unique voice that will appeal to the needs of specific consumer demographics."

Affordable & Flexible

"For example, some beautiful higher-end, established furniture brands are not at all affordable on many platforms for younger demographics. They lack flexibility and they don't travel well. If this trend holds, these manufacturers and their retailers are going to have to reconsider the price, flexibility and scale of their offerings to make them more convenience-driven and seamless.

"It's interesting that we are seeing millennials influence the buying strategies of baby boomers. They are quick to buy products they see on Instagram. Tired of this bed? No problem! If you are part of a younger or older group, it's much more convenient to buy from Wayfair, get it quickly, have it delivered, and have it set up. The millennial generation is

teaching their parents.

"Fashion Snoops calls the generation above the baby boomers the 'Third Act' generation. They saved heirlooms for their children and grandkids, and now they're stuck with all this furniture. Younger generations don't want anything their parents have, because they are constantly on the move. It's nuts. They are freelancing all over the world. The result is that this large group isn't considering buying what many retailers are selling. And for those who do, right now, they want it to be relatively cheap. If they are willing to buy a more expensive home furnishings piece, they may feel more comfortable buying from the direct to consumer movement, a company like Joybird (www.joybird.com). Casper is another great example of DTC."

Learning About Customers

"Retailers need to take a closer look at their present customers, average spending, demographics, and incomes. Then they should compare this data to the

"Retailers should be

on the lookout for more artistic chairs, eclectic side tables and shelving as well as statement pieces, primary shapes and colors."

same metrics for all consumers in their trading areas. Finally, breaking out sales metrics by category will determine if a store, its price levels, marketing, visual merchandising and product selection are aligned and appropriate.

"There's a lot of room for furniture retailers to adapt their brick and mortar experience to compete with online retailers by creating an enjoyable in-store experience. When consumers shop for furniture online, they are probably drinking wine in the comfort of their own homes. People want to experience this same kind of comfort and hospitality when they visit brick and mortar stores.

"They gravitate towards specific genres of trends, for example, bohemian, shabby chic or modern. And, are looking at mass market or boutique retailers that don't necessarily show the same exact things, with items differentiated depending on quality and price point.

"It's really about educating your consumer; this is the price point for this reason. You're not going to be able to sell a \$50 poof that does not look like real leather. Shoppers are going to be able to buy it at IKEA for 17 bucks. Retailers have to be smart about what their markups are going to be because consumers know

where they can buy at a cheaper price point."

Selling a Lifestyle

"Retailers in today's market can also benefit from selling a full lifestyle, not just a piece of furniture. That means going even further than selling a bed with bed sheets, throws, pillows, and a chair. Retailers must make their shoppers feel amazing. Furnishings shoppers go to stores because they can't figure out what to buy on their own, at home behind a computer. If they could, they would buy online or choose their

PRIMARY TREND



"People are using shapes, layered in new artsy ways, that still have a minimalist touch. At a time when consumers are constantly moving around, and looking for flexible-furnishings, they are more willing to invest in furniture as art. This trend is called 'Primary'", says Mize. Pictured is counter balance shelving, candy colored ottomans, puzzle piece inspired seating and streamlined negative space seating."





MIDDLETON TRENDING TRADITIONAL

Statements about current fashion trends rarely contain the word "traditional." Middleton makes that statement without words. It's casual nod to the styles of yesteryear reflect the relaxed lifestyle it emulates. Go ahead ...put your feet up ...you're home.

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VISTA TREND



Mize explains, "Vista is more about cane than rattan. By practicing a slow living lifestyle, consumers nurture their surroundings with calmed elements of transparent colored glass, soft linens and native cane. Homes become places to display collections of calming aesthetics that emulate wellness and craft a sense of serenity."



furnishings using Pinterest. Some stores think their job is to buy and sell product, but it's really customer service. In today's market, retailers must help shoppers to aspire to elevate their lives.

"The biggest opportunity we see at Fashion Snoops across all markets is retailers who create an overall lifestyle look and feel. The best retail stores are bringing in many more product opportunities. They used to be comfortable just carrying a few, closely related

product categories. That doesn't really grab the attention of consumers anymore because they want an overall lifestyle look.

"Lots of stores, even fashion stores and hairdressers have incorporated a wine experience, coffee bars and food. This has become important to customers who are spending time and potentially spending a lot of money on furniture. It may sound crazy to the average furniture store owner, but it's true."

Showing That Lifestyle

"Retailers need to create great visual merchandising. If they sell beds, for instance, they should also have sheets; then why not sell picture frames for their customers' side tables? Filter everything around a color scheme, add

in a couple of patterns, and go from there. Sometimes, however, furniture store environments here can be too vignettied, clunky, a step back in time when compared to furniture stores in Europe.

"Lots of stores, even fashion stores and hairdressers have incorporated a wine experience... It may sound crazy to the average furniture store owner, but it's true."

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"Experiential marketing

is important. That includes creating and posting more events, plus information that's fun and quirky to bring out their corporate personality."

"Some retail brands have websites that feel like they are trying to catch up. It's hard or impossible for consumers to easily find where to buy their products. The same goes for furniture stores. They feel dated and it's not a seamless buying experience.

"ABC Carpet & Home (abchome.com), for example, provides an aspirational dream experience.

Leon & Lulu (leonandlulu.com), based in Michigan, presents a super cute experience.

Owner Mary Liz travels and buys from unexpected vendors. She develops great relationships with them and creates interesting stories that may not be related to the utility of those products. The store doesn't have an overwhelming presence, like some big furniture stores, which is really nice."



Experiential Marketing

"Beyond visual merchandising, which is an obvious challenge for many furniture retailers, a focus on experiential marketing is important. That includes creating and posting more events, plus information that's fun and quirky to bring out their corporate personality. The value of a corporate story cannot be over-estimated. In addition, we are seeing more collaborations and cross marketing among stores, especially with other fashion brands. Collaborations create cross promotion and excitement. Your collaborator doesn't need to even be similar to you to create synergy and be kind of fun.

"Outside of the furniture

CLASSICON TREND

A minimalist classic trend story identified by Fashion Snoops is Classicon. It updates classic pieces with new polishes and forms. Chic marble designs are back, but hollow on the inside to make them lighter.

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industry, brands like Rihanna (rihannanow.com), Virgil Abloh (canary---yellow.com) are leading the way. They understand what it means to tap into both mass and also luxury markets. Rihanna has been doing this with, Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (fentybeauty.com) and her clothing line where shoppers can buy straight from the runway. They don't have to buy from an actual store, or wait six months. Virgil Abloh has partnered with IKEA and Rimowa, the luggage brand owned by LVMH, building lifestyle looks."

"Gradient coloring and color waves are coming to the home, especially in furniture," says Mize. "There are iridescent sheens, lots of transparency within surfaces and translucent resins in colors like lavender and peach." Images below include translucent resin tables, amorphously shaped shelves, a color changing wardrobe and a highly textural chair."

The Art World

"Perhaps the biggest thing that the furniture industry is missing out on is what's happening in the art world. We're starting to see more people from the art world create smaller concept home brands, which is quite interesting. They're trying to tell us that our customers are searching for what home is from a cultural angle.

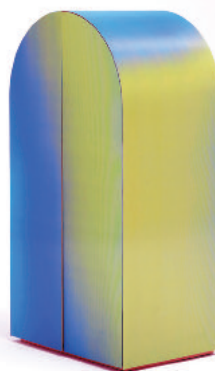
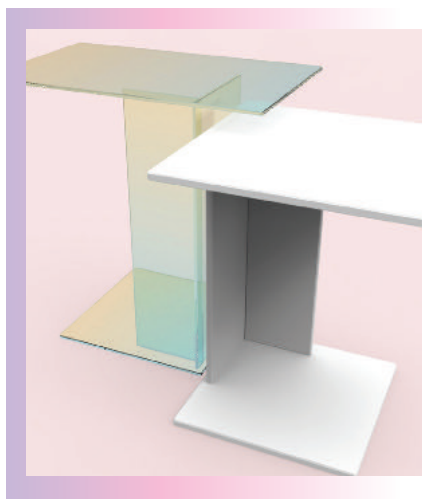
"If retailers and brands visit shows like Art Basel (artbasel.com) and Design Miami (design-miami.com), they will see a ton of home, furniture, and textile design. It's an opportunity to tap into their creativity through collaboration with some cool young talent."

An Instagram Moment

"Retailers should encourage their suppliers to develop more

"The number one topic on Instagram is people's homes. Was it made in an ethical way, a sustainable way, a cool way?"

useful marketing materials so they can do a better job of telling stories about where the furniture they sell is coming from, create transparency, and give customers information they can share with friends and shout out on Instagram. The number one topic on Instagram is people's homes. People are creating Instagrammable moments in their homes. It doesn't matter if



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VIVA TREND

Rattan is coming back in a trend Fashion Snoops calls Viva with more curves in seating, along with grounded seating, and footless seating. There's a lot of slatted wood coming into the market, updating mid-century and more minimalist looks. Viva incorporates travels and a sense of the nomadic into homes along with a bohemian aesthetic.

the topic is a furnishing purchase or their dog, they'll Instagram it left, right, and center.

"Consumers want to be able to tell the stories of how the products they purchase are made, so retailers and manufacturers need to coordinate on a cultural and technological level to develop that information faster and increase transparency.

"They want to know who made the products they buy, where they came from, how they were made and why. The more money they spend, the more they want to know. Was it made in an ethical way, a sustainable way, a cool way? These are facts that will find their way onto Instagram.

"Some manufacturers are starting to catch on and are posting more of this information. This makes it easier for retailers to repost.

"The home is an extension of social media. When consumers see a piece of furniture in a retail store or on Instagram, it reminds

them of where they were or how they see themselves. It's a story they can tell, maybe in a subtle, less ornate way. Furniture becomes a backdrop, a canvas for all the accessories that they buy and change with greater velocity today."

Trends to Watch

Rattan: "We're seeing rattan coming back, with more curves in seating along with grounded seating, and footless seating. Flexible seating is huge. There's a lot of slatted wood coming into the market, which is updating the Mid-century and more minimalist looks.

Accessories: "Consumers are changing out their accessories and soft goods a lot more frequently. Home accessories and soft goods have become, in a sense, 'fast fashion items'. They can easily be changed and updat-

ed without any emotional connection. Therefore, consumers want cleaner, more minimalist spaces and furniture to act as sort of a neutral base.

Minimalism: "That's why we see a trend towards minimalism in furniture with softer wood finishes, and the use of limestone, a nice neutral stone. Also, lots of mixed media including wood, and woven leather for dining chairs. That's an important trend. We're seeing this in sling chairs for the living room, plus rattan and cane weaving.

Gradient coloring: "In the European market there is a surrealist trend in upholstery that feels overly cozy and sensory but with a fantasy look and a youthful feel. Lots of gradient coloring and color waves are coming to the home, especially in furniture. It's really pretty. There are iridescent sheens, lots of transparency within surfaces and translucent resins in colors like lavender and peach.

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Primary shapes: "Be on the lookout for primary-shape play in everything from occasional and dining tables to seating. People are using shapes, layered in new artsy ways, that still have a minimalist touch. At a time when people are moving around, and looking for flexible-furnishings, they are more willing to invest in furniture as art. Retailers should be on the lookout for more artistic chairs, eclectic side tables and shelving as well as statement pieces, primary shapes and colors, lots of storage solutions, and convenience options.

Bohemia: "There's a resurgence of a bohemian feel with more specificity than previously seen. It's less maximalist and more refined, without a ton of pattern. This include vibrantly painted wooden pieces, jewel tones, rattan, wooden legs, and small

detailed accents -- items that look like they could have been collected while traveling, bringing a storytelling aspect to homes.

Classicon: "Another trend story Fashion Snoops calls Classicon is one of our favorites. Classicon is minimalist classic, an update of classic pieces with new polishes and forms. Chic marble designs are back, but hollow on the inside to make them lighter.

Natural materials: "Look for carved wood in really intricate forms. Wood grains stained in dark indigos, greens and blacks have become a strong artistic furniture design statement. We see lots of plays off natural materials like alabaster or raw rocks. It's a clean minimalist way to bring nature indoors, a great look for creating calming spaces, wellness, a feeling of ease with a chic,

modern, artistic edge.

Mixing it up: "There's not as much mixing old and new; instead, contemporary pieces are being mixed with items that tell a story. It's as if a lamp or accent piece was found while traveling to Thailand, India or Spain. These items say, 'This is who I am. The items in my home tell about the experiences I've had. This is my story.'

"In short, what we see coming to the forefront is texture, a juxtaposition of shape and detail; minimalist design with furniture becoming the backbone of the design, clean and simple. It feels sleek while making a beautiful statement, we go back and forth about minimalism and statement pieces so not to contradict ourselves."

"These manufacturers and their retailers are going to have to reconsider the price, flexibility and scale of their offerings to make them more convenience-driven and seamless."

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KENSINGTON FURNITURE

by Janet Holt-Johnstone

We are Fenway Park versus Jerry's World. An awesome Brooklyn pizzeria versus a Domino's chain. We are people helping people making their moments at home better."

There are no real secrets to success. Or if there are, we're already aware of most of them, theoretically at least. Vision, opportunity, sweat, persistence, sometimes downright stubbornness. And humor, perhaps the greatest of these. But each story along the scary and hazard-strewn road is undeniably unique, and reflective of individual inspiration and passion.

It was more than an action-packed century ago that Meyer Max launched his family's venture into home furnishings retailing in the lively, highly populated section of Philadelphia called Kensington. He'd chosen this district in suburban Atlantic City because he was convinced it was the ideal location to build his dream. In the early twentieth century, Atlantic City was the American holiday magnet, the busiest, most irresistible vacation spot in the country. "It was a town bustling with opportunity, a dream seaside destination for families, and Meyer Max knew he could do business there," said Michael Grossman, fourth generation, and today's owner of Kensington Furniture.

Kensington is located in the

region's only Home Marketplace, now in Northfield. "Since our beginnings we've been 'Local for Less', providing quality product and service to generations of families throughout Atlantic County, Ocean City, Egg Harbor Township, Galloway, Hamilton, Vineland, Stafford and Middle and Lower Township areas, Cape May County, Ocean County and beyond.

First Generation

"Meyer Max was from Hungary, a first generation American. He was one of six children working in their family furniture business," Michael told us. "An ambitious young man,

"Independent retailers have so many distinct advantages that can be leveraged to remain relevant."

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Meyer wanted to strike out on his own, he was passionate, convinced that he could do it better.

"In March, 1909, his family filled a push cart with furniture and step by step Meyer Max made that day-long trip from Philadelphia to Atlantic City. His first year, Meyer was a furniture peddler on the busy streets of Atlantic City, back then popularly known as America's Playground. Eventually, he was able to take space in another furniture store until September 1912 when he opened his own store, Kensington Furniture."

Said to be an outspoken and confident man, Meyer would stand

at the front of his store at the busy corner of Kentucky and Atlantic Avenues. He'd welcome all his friends and neighbors in the community, and he vowed, promised, to "WOW" his customers through his exemplary service.

Fourth Generation

Michael Grossman has inherited Meyer's confidence. Over the years he has somehow managed to actively attend more than 82 High Point Markets, purchased over 4000 living rooms, 1500 bedrooms, 1200 dining rooms and thousands of other furniture and mattress products!

In 1968, Kensington made the important move to its current location on Tilton Road in Northfield, New Jersey, the Marketplace at Kensington Square. As a result of the Grossman's "unbeatable

hometown service" and capacity to provide better values, local families really began to depend on Kensington as the only place to go to furnish their homes. At Kensington they bought their first bedroom set, their dining rooms for family gatherings. Those memory-making decisions. "And the sofas where they sat together to watch favorite television programs," said Michael. "Kensington grew because of our commitment to our community, our customers, our unique shopping experience and lower prices."

In the glowing introduction to a Renegade Furniture Group* event, where Michael appeared as a featured speaker, he was described as, "A born and bred furniture expert, navigating the greatest consumer habit changes in Kensington Furniture's 106-year history. In addition to being a retailer, Michael consults with manufacturers and the top-100 retailers".

"Each member of Michael's sales team is 'required to generate a minimum of 10 leads per week from our customers we've yet to close.'"





Pictured are founder Meyer Max, the exterior of his first store in Atlantic City circa 1912 and the exterior of Kensington Furniture's Northfield location. Opposite page is Michael Grossman, fourth generation.

How Kensington Competes

We asked Michael what he believes independents and smaller retailers need to do to stand out, compete and thrive. Said Michael, "First we MUST not feel overwhelmed or deterred by the rapid pace of all the changes in the marketplace. And the chang-

"Our plans for the future are to be 'selfie worthy', and engaged with a 'raving fan' customer base."

es within our industry, changes to the way a customer shops, changes as to how to market to our customers.

"Plus, changes to the ways to generate store traffic. We must be better than ever, double down, increase 10 times all the things that have made us successful generational family businesses.

"We will not be able to compete as an e-commerce player versus the likes of Wayfair or Amazon. We don't want to waste our time or money fighting that battle. We must simply be a more awesome version of ourselves. Who has more product knowledge than we do? Who can better help a local customer ensure that she makes the right furniture decision for her room? Who has seen more of the good, the bad and the ugly and

can, in turn, use that experience to benefit our customer? Who has more experience handling furniture and delivering it right the first time? Who knows and understands better that 30-mile radius around our stores, and how to best speak to these current and potential customers? Independent retailers have so many distinct advantages that can be leveraged to remain relevant.

"What we have done at Kensington is to build a 'ninja' marketing team, able to deploy all types of content to multiple customer segments on multiple digital platforms. We take a hyper-local approach to social media. We focus on being a dominant voice within that vital 30-mile radius of our enterprise. We leverage our multi-generational story. We

"Think about

your different types of customers, segment them,
buy audiences targeted directly to the various segments."

rely on a customer relationship management provider to help us to stay connected to our customer base.

"There is no longer one simple solution or promotion that can deliver sustained increases in store traffic and increased revenue. Rather, marketing today requires a series of small acts geared to multi-faceted customer segments."

There is the need to boost traffic and sales in general. Michael is convinced that, "Independent

retailers must think differently about marketing and how to allocate budget. What we cannot be is nostalgic about the ways we market, or advertising vehicles we've used previously to drive traffic and grow our businesses. It's not an understatement that the changes in how customers consume media, and how to get her attention, has seen the greatest revolution since the printing press!

Advertising That Works Today

"If we think that what worked two years ago, five years ago or whenever, will work now, we are vulnerable. Just as we know merchandise, we must also understand how to use social media.

Be aware of those out there who will take advantage of your fear plus lack of knowledge to overcharge and under deliver on social media. Use Google and YouTube to educate yourself so you have a general understanding of the concepts. Shift your dollars from mass traditional media and invest in people you employ and have them create content for your store. Content is a modern way to story tell. Keep these people in house!

"You should use Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest-post multiple times a day on these platforms. Tell why your store, why your brand! Use story telling/content to deepen the trust engendered as a local family business.

"Do not sell, rather inform. Help

Third generation owner Stanley Grossman with Mark Grossman, plus Michael Grossman with his sons Max and Jack at a game. The Grossman family, says Michael, are obsessed with the Philadelphia Eagles. "In stressful moments, we always rely on talking about the Eagles as a means to keep talking and to bring us back to our core belief that businesses can come and go, yet family must be forever!"



A man with glasses and a checkered shirt is standing in a warehouse, pointing with a pen at a tablet he is holding. The background shows high industrial shelving filled with boxes.

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kensingtonfurniture.com's home page features design services, major sales, special deals, the Kensington Furniture Outlet, a style blog and more. Kensington offers free house calls and custom furniture options.



customers make their very best furniture decisions. Think about your different types of customers, segment them, buy audiences targeted directly to the various segments. Spend dollars against these audiences, measure results,



and use that data to achieve continuously better results. If independent retailers work to understand and leverage social media coupled with our other significant advantages, we are in-the-game-to-win business!

"Our plans for the future are to be 'selfie worthy', and engaged with a 'raving fan' customer base. We must stay focused on being hyper-local and still remain open to continuously reinventing ourselves as the customer changes."

Probably more rapidly than ever before, demographics are shifting. An area to watch closely, define and act upon. Michael's comment, "We must use data to inform us how to observe and respond to changing customer demographics. We can hardly be as sophisticated as digitally progressive and well staffed companies, yet, in our small corner, with our small team, we deploy

Google and Facebook analytics to understand and respond to what converts a customer to buy. We spend quality time on our sales floor observing store traffic, talking to shoppers and correlating that to current marketing efforts and platforms to understand what works.

"We use advertising and promotions to add value and create urgency. Our content across

"We deploy Google and Facebook analytics to understand and respond to what converts a customer to buy."

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"We have three separate Facebook pages. One for our outlet customer, or promotional customer. One that is general Kensington. And one that shows Kensington design services for our high-end customer."

multiple social media platforms tells our brand story. We support local causes to demonstrate our commitment to our community. And we consider these efforts to be our public relations program.

"As the likes of Amazon and Wayfair make buying products much easier and more of a commodity, we MUST continue to tell our brand story and work to over deliver on our brand promise throughout our customer's entire Kensington experience. Our brand is our 'moat' against really smart competitors."

Kensington's staff roster. "We are blessed to have a number of people who have been with us for more than 20 years. In particular, we have both Carmella and Michele. Carmella manages all our special orders. Her experience and iron clad integrity is unmatched.

"Michele helps me run the company, and her talent and dedication make working with her a true privilege and the joy of my career.

There are always special challenges for family businesses, the second, third and fourth generations. Michael said, "Family business dynamics are extremely complicated. In our family, we all love, are even a bit obsessed with the Philadelphia Eagles! If we are engaged in a stressful, emotional family business moment, we always rely on talking about the Eagles as a means to keep talking and to bring us back to our core belief that businesses can come and go, yet family must be forever!"

Family Business Dynamics

Michael grew up with the right instincts to create an ambiance of confidence and trust within

Adding Value

"Kensington is a big store in a medium to smaller size market,



One of Kensington's Facebook pages (for Kensington Outlet) is designed to engage customers. Included are links to reviews, photos, videos and more.

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and we cover a wide spectrum of price points. We embrace custom orders. Our talented and experienced team of design consultants think long term, and they look to help a customer solve her furniture 'puzzle'. As a small business, we do not have formal training. We do have sales meetings every

"We have a full-time stylist whose aim is to spark a customer's emotions as she enters the store. And, we offer fresh baked chocolate chip cookies!"

Saturday and non-stop communication to help everyone better serve customers and have a firm command of the responsibilities.

"We have a full-time stylist whose aim is to spark a customer's emotions as she enters the store. And, we offer fresh baked chocolate chip cookies! We have an 18,000 square foot Outlet where we sell 'the good stuff cheap'. Ashley is a key vendor who counters our custom business with high velocity slots."

There is always that shopper who is convinced she has to "go home to think about it". Each member of Michael's sales team is required "to generate a minimum of 10 leads per week from our customers we've yet to close. These leads are instantly entered into our customer relationship management database, and then we employ a variety of methods



to turn these leads into customers. Design Consultants are measured on their leads to customers' dollars weekly, monthly, yearly. We use this data to generate repeat business as well.

"And we do offer free house calls. Our store is eight miles west of some of the best beaches on the Jersey shore. Second home design work is an important and interesting component of our business.

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"Why did Bonnie and Clyde

rob banks? Because that's where the money was. Why am I on social media? Because that's where my customers are!"

player, we know our region, we possess unmatched knowledge of how to prep, handle and then deliver furniture right the first time. Our seasoned techs promptly respond to the typical issues that are a part of delivering furniture. Any independent family furniture company in the United States offers special delivery.

Reaching Out

Michael reaches out to the industry through his consulting practice and at industry events. A speaker at a Renegade event this year, Michael declared himself to be "a furniture man". He described himself as "a fourth-generation, brick and mortar, single store, legacy retailer located in suburban Atlantic City, a region recent-

ly recognized by the United States Chamber of Commerce as one of the most challenged economic areas for business in the country." He added, "Every day I am inflicted with different responsibilities. I am an owner, I am a Customer Experience manager. I am CMO, CFO, sales leader, Chief Operation Officer and instantly involved in the operation of my business."

Some excerpts from Michael's remarks: "Our brand equals trust. Are we living up to the expectations we've promised to our customers? We have to think about how we can do it better. I have to think small and grow big.

"We have to surprise and delight through energetic communication with our people, making sure they talk about the touch-points with each customer, that they do one

extra, one better."

He asked, "Why did Bonnie and Clyde rob banks? Because that's where the money was. Why am I on social media? Because that's where my customers are!"

"We have to go deep and narrow in how we speak to the customer, stay hyper-close. Answer the phone, stay on the sales floor, listen to the customer. Talk to the delivery drivers, understand what the voice of your customer is.

"I'm gonna be hyper-local, human touch. Legacy. To make sure, we have three separate Facebook pages. One for our outlet customer, or promotional customer. One that is general Kensington. And one that shows Kensington design services for our high-end customer. That way, our outlet customer isn't turned off by our design services, or vice



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versa."

Michael reflected, "You can no longer work at the pace you're used to. You have to ramp it up.

"Sure this is a difficult time, but I'm not going to be passive, I'm gonna punch back. That's all in the day of a furniture man."

He quotes Hillel, "If I'm not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for others, what am I? If not now, when?"

"We are a fourth-generation local family business, the oldest retail business in our section of southeastern New Jersey. We are Fenway Park versus Jerry's World or Cowboys' Stadium. We are an awesome Brooklyn pizzeria with

the owner there tossing pizzas versus a Domino's chain pizza option. We customize, not simply just sell cookie cutter looks. We are people helping people make their moments at home better. With the pace of everything getting faster, super intense and our country becoming more polarized, Kensington offers as Bob Dylan sang, 'Shelter from the storm'."

About Michael Grossman:

Michael Grossman will be happy to field questions about how independent furnishings retailers can thrive in today's evolving retail environment by emailing him at editor@furninfo.com.

He recently spoke at the fifth annual Renegade Group furniture conference held annually in Melville, NY, attended by over 400 industry leaders. Michael

Grossman's remarks are reprinted in this article with permission of Renegade Furniture and TOV Furniture. The Renegade Furniture Group is a leader in Internet retail in the home furnishings market. With a wide selection of products, they are committed to offering customers true convenience along with the best value for their money. For more information about Renegade and TOV, visit www.renegadefurniture.com or www.tovfurniture.com.



Michael Grossman at the Renegade Group conference: Photo credit Renegade Group/ TOV Furniture

"Sure this is a difficult time, but I'm not going to be passive, I'm gonna punch back. That's all in the day of a furniture man."



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Fall Means HFA's Retail Resource Center at High Point Market

Sharon Bradley, CEO



During High Point Market HFA will present over two dozen educational seminars, including Jerry Epperson's State of the Industry report.

I love fall, the gathering of apples and squash, the weekend festivals and the chill in the air. Leaves are splashing mountainsides with reds, oranges and butterscotches. And, of course, pumpkin-spiced this and pumpkin-spiced that.

Oh, and High Point Market, of course. It's hard for me to separate fall from High Point. After all these years, the two go together like college football and Saturdays. There's nothing better than a crisp morning walk from showroom to showroom with all the new furniture and accessories

waiting to be discovered.

I like to think the Home Furnishings Association's Resource Center is as much a part of your discovery process as finding that best seller for your store. I love when retailers visit us on the first floor of Plaza Suites and discover everything our association has to offer.

That includes exclusive financing rates from HFA's Buying Source, our free buying program with more than 40 manufacturers; exclusive insurance plans designed especially for furniture retailers, and so much more.

While you are there, meet our concierge, who will help guide you in accessing all your industry association offers. Talk to our solution partners to learn about the many resources they provide to support you as you grow your business.

During Market, we present nearly two dozen educational seminars for you to discover new ideas and best practices – including our always-popular State of the Industry report by industry guru Jerry Epperson.

So, if you're coming to High Point Market, please drop by and see us. Meet with some of our vendors, sit in on a seminar or connect with other retailers in the Resource Center's café, which is open all day. We'd love to show you how your membership can easily pay for itself in ways you never dreamed. And if you see me at the Resource Center, introduce yourself. I'd love to tell you our story – over hot chocolate and marshmallows, of course.

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Garden City Furniture keeps its store image fresh. When is the last time your store received a makeover?

It took buying a new delivery truck for Home Furnishings Association member Joey Ray to pause and do the math on that question. The answer – 16 years – was enough to convince Ray that Garden City Furniture in Murrells Inlet, S.C., needed more than just a new truck. It needed an updated logo. And that updated logo will lead to a refreshed showroom and exterior in the coming year.

“That’s turning out to be an expensive truck,” says Ray, only half-joking. Still, he hopes other HFA members follow his lead.

“When you’re in a fashion-oriented business, it’s important you keep your image fresh,” says Ray. “It’s vital to make sure our brand remains current, relevant and poised for the future.”

This was not an epiphany for Ray, of course. He already knew this. But he wasn’t reminded of it until his new truck pulled into the company’s parking lot next to his old ones. “It just showed how old and tired we’d become.”

It had been 16 years since Garden City refurbished its showroom. “That’s a long time in a fashion business like furniture,” says Ray. “We needed to look good when these trucks were

going out into neighborhoods and pulling into people’s driveways.”

Today all the trucks have been wrapped with the new logo, an updated look to the store’s well-known palm tree. “I think it’s cool,” says Ray. “It’s clean and modern, which is what we want our customers to think we are.”

Ray extended the look throughout the store with new name badges for his sales staff and redesigned price tags. He added the new logo to the Garden City’s website.

There’s more to come: Ray wants to renovate the showroom

“Consumers want to spend their money with merchants they feel are fashionable and on trend,” says Connie Post.”

Tips for creating a new store logo

from store designer Connie Post

1. Drive one mile in each direction of your store and look at every business. (Not just competitors’ businesses, every business.) Does the new restaurant or gas station look more up to date than your store?
2. Think modern, clean and easy to read when rethinking your logo. Script fonts may be pretty, but they’re hard to read from a moving car.
3. Don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater. Post designed Garden City’s logo in 2005. It made more sense to update with a modern new vibe than to start over.

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Pictured are Joey Ray and a Garden City Furniture Truck. The purchase of two new trucks led the HFA member to freshen up the company logo – not just for his trucks but throughout the store.

both inside and out within the next year. That includes the exterior's pylon signage. "We're going to hold off on that until maybe the first quarter of next year, but we definitely want to carry the new look throughout the store," he says.

Connie Post of Affordable Design Solutions created the new logo and will help refresh the physical building. She says retailers need to realize their communities change and that they must change with them.

That's certainly the case for Garden City, which covers a large swath of coastal South Carolina. Long known as a purveyor of coastal home furnishings catering to second-home owners, Garden City has increased its offerings to reflect the area's growth and influx of year-round residents. "This area is very much a destination for retirees now, and the number of primary residences is increasing. We want to be able to furnish those homes as well," Ray says.

To do that, says Post, Garden City and many other furniture retailers need to take a second look at their stores. "Appearing modern and up-to-date is essential in the very competitive retail environment in which we are all operating today," says Post. "People simply don't want to shop in old stores, no matter the category or their demographic. Consumers want to spend their money with merchants they feel are fashionable and on trend.

"That's turning out to be an expensive truck, says Ray, only half-joking. Still, he hopes other HFA members follow his lead."

This means it's critical for retailers to review the exterior of their stores every five to seven years and update as necessary."

Ray says the new logo has been embraced by shoppers. "They're coming in and checking us out to see what's new and different about us," he says. "People have definitely noticed."

For information about the Home Furnishings Association, call HFA at 916-757-1164.

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



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New owners at Sheely's Furniture keep the retailer's 150 employees in the loop and fully invested.

Home Furnishings Association member Jeff Curry knows a thing or three about change. It's been 14 months since Curry, Jessica Smith and Lance Romeo purchased longtime HFA member Sheely's Furniture in North Lima, Ohio. Curry says the past year has been a learning curve for the new owners, but one they think has made the company even stronger and positioned for success in the coming years.

The No. 1 rule Curry offers the next generation of leaders taking over a furniture store? "Communicate as much as possible with your employees," he says. "They want to know what changes might be in store for

the business and themselves. You need to be open and honest with them."

When Dale Sheely Jr. and his wife Sherry announced they were retiring from the business last year, the company was already undergoing several changes.

In June 2018, Sheely's opened a scratch-and-dent outlet center that was wildly successful from the start. Hoping to build on that momentum, the new owners in February remodeled the store's bedding department.

They were only getting started. Ohio is to Amish furniture as Florida is to contemporary. Consumers can't get enough of it. A month after remodeling the bedding department, Sheely's dedicated 10,000 square feet of showroom to about \$300,000 in Amish inventory.

Both have been a hit with consumers, says Curry. Neither would have been possible without Sheely's new owners keeping their 150 employees not only in the loop but fully invested. "That's the key," says Curry. "Making sure

everyone was onboard from the start. Look, everyone is a little nervous about change. That's just who we are and the way we're wired, I suppose. But having all the employees in from the start made them feel like they were part of the change – and they were part of the change."

Sheely's new owners all bring a unique perspective to the store. Curry came to Sheely's in 2012 as the company's general manager after working for years at Sears. Romeo, who's been working at Sheely's the past 29 years, is one of the industry's most respected casegoods buyers. Smith is the granddaughter of Dale Sheely Sr., who founded the store in 1952. With a background in banking, Smith brings fresh ideas from a unique perspective.

"We get along great with one another, but more importantly, I think we get along with all the employees because we're always talking with them, learning from them," Curry says. "They're the front line to the store. They're the ones who know what works and what doesn't. Why wouldn't we listen to what they have to say?"

A year after new leadership at HFA member Sheely's Furniture, co-owner Jeff Curry says communicating with store employees played a big role in a smooth transition.

For information about the Home Furnishings Association, call 916-757-1164.



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Tepperman's newest store in Ancaster, Ontario goes by the "book".

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

When it came time for Home Furnishings Association member Tepperman's Furniture to open its sixth and latest store in August – this one in Ancaster, Ontario, just outside Hamilton – there was no debating the color of the walls, what carpet to install or where the lighting fixtures would go.

Andrew Tepperman and his staff just went with the same design used to open previous new stores and the remodeling of the flag-

ship Windsor store.

Home furnishings is all about finding the unique style that speaks to the consumer, but housing and merchandising that furniture is something else entirely, says Tepperman, the president of Tepperman's Furniture.

"There are two trains of thought to a new store," says Tepperman. "Some businesses want to personalize the store to their community. We want consistency like McDonald's."

Three years ago, Tepperman turned to Martin Roberts Design,

which offers consulting, store design and graphic services to

"There are two trains of thought to a new store," says Tepperman.

"Some businesses want to personalize the store to their community. We want consistency like McDonald's."

Tips for shaking things up in-store

from store designer Martin Roberts

1. Put your best apples at the front of the store. Why wouldn't you want to show off what's selling?
2. Move mattresses out of the back. Thirty percent of business from most furniture stores is done in mattresses. It's time to give them the focus they deserve.
3. Make your outlet store in the back a destination, rather than an afterthought. Just remember to make the path to the back go through your new merchandise. Many consumers who shop a retailer's outlet end up buying from the front of the store.





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Opening of the sixth Tepperman's Furniture store in August 2019. Andrew Tepperman provides a design manual that is a one-stop shop for building its new stores from the ground up.



retailers, to bring a consistent design to future Tepperman's stores. "We wanted shoppers to focus on the brand, and keeping that brand consistent all the way through from store to store was key to that," says Tepperman.

Many of the six Tepperman's stores in Ontario are within an hour's drive of each other. That means shoppers might easily find themselves at more than one store during their shopping journey. "We keep hearing online shopping is where the industry is heading, but we're still seeing good traffic in our stores, so we want to keep our best foot forward no matter where our customers are shopping."

Much as when Walmart and Target build new stores,

Tepperman's has everything having to do with new-store construction presented in a design manual that provides engineers, construction companies and designers a one-stop shop for building a store from the ground up.

How consistent is the Tepperman's brand from store to store? The book on Tepperman's includes where to buy a future store's office desks and chairs, water fountains – even the type and color of paint.

That consistency isn't just for shoppers, says Roberts. "From a retailer's point of view, if you keep the departments the same, you can expect to get the same results," he says. "So, if you're doing 30 percent (of your business) in stationary upholstery

because it's closer to the front of the store, you can expect that in every store, if you're consistent with your design and layout."

For information about the Home Furnishings Association, call 916-757-1164.

"Home furnishings is all about finding the unique style that speaks to the consumer, but housing and merchandising that furniture is something else entirely."

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fter the Supreme Court decision in South Dakota v. Wayfair, many furnishings retailers still don't see a level playing field.

Dozens of states have run with last year's South Dakota v. Wayfair decision – in all different directions.

The U.S. Supreme Court's 5-4 ruling in June 2018 opened the door for states to require that remote online vendors collect sales tax on purchases made by residents. That outcome was cheered by the Home Furnishings Association and many of its members because it helped level the playing field for brick-and-mortar retailers.

Some States are More Level Than Others

Texas began enforcing its online sales-tax collection requirement on October 1, but only for out-of-state retailers that exceed \$500,000 in sales to Texas residents in a calendar year. That is equal to the highest threshold in the country, along with California, New York and Tennessee. It infu-

riates Chris Pfeifer, owner of HFA member Homestead House in Conroe, Texas.

"I don't get a threshold," he says. "I've got to collect tax on every sale."

The sales-tax rate in Conroe is 8.25 percent. That's a price break that online competitors can give purchasers if no sales tax is collected. Pfeifer also noted that Conroe's City Council in August was set to raise the local property tax, which online competitors don't pay, either. He feels the disadvantage every time a customer comes into his store to select furniture, only to order it online from someone else.

Pfeifer, a member of HFA's Government Relations Action Team, has lobbied Texas legislators to knock down the \$500,000 threshold – to no avail, so far. But he won't give up.

In other states, leaders have responded positively to similar complaints. Ohio and

Massachusetts recently reduced the threshold from \$500,000 to \$100,000. Connecticut's dropped from \$250,000 to \$100,000, and a similar change will take effect on January 1st in Georgia. Arizona's \$200,000 threshold will slide to \$150,000 in 2020 and to \$100,000 in 2021.

Phil Vinson, store manager for HFA member Kitchen Tables and More in Columbus, Ohio, welcomed the lower threshold in his state.

"It evens the playing field when we're competing with online retailers who are selling into our state," said Vinson, who works closely with his father, Gary, in the family-owned business. The difference comes to hundreds of dollars on a large order. If more online sellers charge the same tax, "That gives us the chance to negotiate, it puts the ball back in our court a little bit."

His business sells to customers in other states, too, but doesn't

approach any thresholds, Vinson said.

Then there's Kansas, which has made the boldest move so far. Although Gov. Laura Kelly vetoed a tax bill that included a remote, online seller sales-tax requirement, and the legislature adjourned for the year without an override vote, Treasurer Mark Burghart acted. Citing authority granted by the South Dakota v. Wayfair ruling, he implemented a sales-tax collection mandate with no threshold.

The move was controversial and perhaps legally perilous. In writing for the court last year, then-Justice Anthony Kennedy noted that South Dakota's tax requirement would not place an undue burden on small merchants because the state's \$100,000 exemption provided "a reasonable degree of protection." Critics of the Kansas requirement think that, without "a reasonable degree of protection," online vendors with modest sales might be able to mount a successful legal challenge.

But Pfeifer and other furniture retailers who collect

"Critics of the Kansas requirement think that, without a reasonable degree of protection, **online vendors with modest sales might be able to mount a successful legal challenge.**"

sales tax on every purchase would ask where is their reasonable protection? There is no clear or consistent answer more than a year after South Dakota v. Wayfair.

For information about HFA's government relations work, contact Doug Clark at dclark@myhfa.org or 916-757-1167.

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KIDS SAY

THE DARNDDEST THINGS!

by Gordon Hecht

A advice from a half-dozen half pints that may just help you grow your retail furniture business.

There was a time in this country when daytime TV programming consisted of game shows, local movie hosts, and gentle men and women hosting family-oriented talk shows, unlike the scream-fests, divorce shows, and fake courtrooms you see today. One long running national talk show was Art Linkletter's House Party. Each show's final segment was called "Kids say the darnedest things". He would pose a problem or scenario to a half-dozen children and hand them the microphone. No script, no censor-just unfiltered pure simple advice.

Because of the travel I do for work I am a big Facebook guy. Recently one of my everlovin' bride's friends posted similar advice from a bunch of half pints. I hand-picked a few examples and added my own notes about how the generation behind the millennials can help us grow our business.

Never trust a dog to watch your food. - Patrick, age 10

All dog owners know that their friendly hound will do anything to get human food, and then look innocent after taking some. It's the same with your competitors! If part of your in-store sales presentation includes inviting shoppers to go out and check the competition before buying, you are trusting a dog to watch your food. And your profit/commission, just like a tasty T-bone or veggie burger, will soon be gone.

"If part of your in-store sales presentation includes inviting your shoppers to go out and check the competition before buying, you are trusting a dog to watch your food."

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KIDS SAY THE DARNDDEST THINGS!

BTW- not asking every shopper to buy TODAY is the same thing as inviting them to shop the competition.

When your dad is mad and asks you, "Do I look stupid?" don't answer. - Hannah, age 9

The thing called a "rhetorical question" exists, and the best way to respond is to say NOTHING. In the business world, we plan to avoid conflict and errors, but STUFF HAPPENS! Chances are

good that in the next week or so you will have an irate customer. (You may even be an irate customer!). Sometimes the best way to respond is to say NOTHING. We are fixers by nature and want to make bad things good. But in most cases, allow your customer to have their say—bad words and all. Let them let it out—completely. Then, you can get to the real point and fix it. Further advice-giving patronizing answers makes your customer look and feel stupid. Dad won't let you get

away with it, nor will Mr. or Mrs. John Q. Public.

If you want a kitten, start out by asking for a horse. - Naomi, age 15

Almost all kids who want pets really don't understand the time, commitment, and cost of having a fur baby. But most kids still want a cat, dog, hamster, or if you are lucky, a horse. Top salespeople EXPECT to sell something to everyone who walks

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into their store. They know that selling a \$299 queen mattress or recliner beats selling NOTHING. However, these same top salespeople know that showing the best merchandise FIRST leads to more sales in the medium to medium-high end range. Essentially, they want to average \$1200-1500 a sale (kitten) and do it by showing a \$3000-7500 (horse) room package first. Savvy retail store owners know that they will sell the second highest priced merchandise in the store more than the highest price. That means if you want to raise your average sale, add a few thoroughbreds to your lineup. And since you need a few kittens too, keep a few \$299-399 beds, recliners, and sofas in a back room ready to go!

**Never tell your mom
her diet's not working.**

Michael, age 14

Take it from me, losing weight
is not easy and it is never fast!



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"When your shopper

says she is looking for a brand, technology, or even packaging that you don't carry... belittling her selection is equal to telling her 'the diet isn't working'."

It takes perseverance, and a lot of "won't power" (the opposite of willpower). It's about the same with furniture and mattress shopping. While a shopper can try out merchandise in your store and make a 10-year decision in about 45 minutes, her time investment also includes hours of online research, clearing the schedule to shop, getting advice from friends, and visits to other stores. When your shopper says she is looking for a brand, technology, or even packaging that you don't carry, belittling her selection is equal to telling her "the diet isn't working". Respect the effort and research she put into her request by letting her know that her option is a good one, but you may have a more perfect solution.

Don't wear polka-dot underwear under white shorts. - Nellie, age 11

Many kids, and some adults, don't think about the long-term effects of their wardrobe choices. Bright underwear under white shorts becomes a case of "Wait 'til the sun shines Nellie" and things become more transparent

then they should be. In business, being transparent is a good path to follow, because anything you are hiding will eventually be seen. Over-selling merchandise as "cure-alls", fuzzy explanations about warranties, and under-quoting delivery expectations generally leads to customer dissatisfaction. It may not be today or tomorrow, but one day those polka-dots are going to show, and the result won't be pretty!

Conclusion

Some store owners think about hiring a star marketing consultant to review their business, which can be a good idea. I generally suggest that before they do that, they bring in some 20-35-year-old women (probably your main audience) to let you know what changes you can make to meet their expectations. Perhaps we would all be better off if we invited local middle school students to check out our stores. One thing is for sure, their comments would be simple, honest, and true.

Note: I have a couple of dozen

more quotes from kids most likely excerpted from "Kid's Little Treasure Books on What We've Learned... So far" by H. Jackson Brown Jr. - ed. E-mail me at ghecht@serta.com if you would like me to send you the entire list.

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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MATTRESS EXCHANGES

by David Benbow

Most stores, for good reason, regard exchanges as an annoying problem. What is the best way, for both store and customer, to handle an exchange transaction?

A customer calls your store with a complaint. Something is wrong with a new mattress, sofa, dinette, or plastic plant. What does your store do to satisfy the annoyed customer? About 90 percent of the time, the easiest resolution of the problem is to take back the product and give them a new one, with the hope that the new product will satisfy the customer. This is called an "exchange."

Who Enjoys Exchanges?

While I have not met everyone in this business, I have yet to meet a store owner who loves to do exchanges. Every owner wants a happy satisfied customer, but prefers that the customer be happy with the first item they took home.

I have also heard that customers don't like to exchange products. They like to use them immediately, and can really become incensed when they get a new item home that falls short of their expectations.

And, yet it happens to every-

body, sooner or later; no one is exempt from the occasional need to exchange a defective or disappointing product.

The question is, what is the best way for both store and customer, to process an exchange transaction?

Are They a Problem?

Most stores, for good reason, regard exchanges as an annoying problem. There are some who believe that the retail business gets harder every year, especially those retailers who are confined in a brick and mortar location and must face angry, often unreasonable, sometimes temporarily insane, dissatisfied customers. Big chain stores address this problem by having Customer Service Desks, often at the front of the store with specially trained staff (and, occasionally, an armed guard) who are there just to "take things back." Smaller stores, however, rarely have the resources to employ extra people to handle returns. This means the store



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"If a couple shares the bed in question, BOTH parties should agree to the new bed. If only one person decides, you are very apt to have another request for a comfort exchange."

manager, owner, or sometimes a Retail Sales Associate is stuck with the task of helping an unhappy,

customer. The big chains have another serious advantage over smaller retailers. They can push exchanged products back onto their manufacturers with impunity, while smaller stores sometimes have to "eat" the exchanged products if they don't meet the manufacturer's stiff requirements for an exchange.

Angry customers always want immediate attention. They don't care if there's only one staff member in the store and that they are currently waiting on another customer who is considering the purchase of a \$3,900 mattress. So, what do you do?

Before we talk about exchange "philosophies", let's consider the various types of exchanges and the reasons why a customer might be dissatisfied.

Comfort Exchanges

Many mattress and furniture stores, and virtually all online sellers offer some version of what has been called the "comfort exchange". The promise of a comfort exchange is this: if the customer is uncomfortable, for any reason, on the purchased mattress, he or she may, within a specified period of time, return

www.saotva.com

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www.support.zinus.com

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We want you to LOVE every Zinus purchase. So if you're not happy, you can return it within 100 days for a full refund. No sweat. If you purchased one of our products right here on Zinus.com, you have more than three months to know that these things can take time, so we give you 100 day return details to thoroughly test your new Zinus product in the comfort of your own home.

The item must be returned in good condition - no odors, stains or mysterious marks - and the necessary paperwork, parts, and accessories to ensure full credit. Or, and prior to purchase will be required.

When that's all in place, please submit the form for return and return. We'll send you a prepaid return label and instructions for changing a FedEx pick up. For decompressed mattresses and/or toppers, please reach out to us for special return instructions.

After we receive the returned item, a refund will be generated back to the original form of payment within 2-3 business days.

If you purchased a Zinus product at any of our partner sites, then your return window and conditions are defined by their specific retailer.

Excludes: Link - Customer Support Required Items

Google "mattress return policy" and online bed in a box companies like Saatva and Casper will appear toward the top of the search results. These policies tend to be straight-forward and written for maximum marketing effect with limited restrictions. Casper arranges "a pick up through a local charity or recycling Partner". Mattress Firm's online return policy is more involved. It includes information on restocking fees, mattress protectors, limitations on refunds and minimum purchases.

120 NIGHT SLEEP TRIAL - Like most brand-new things, there's going to be a bit of an adjustment period. Think of it like a brand-new pair of running shoes. It will take time for your body to adjust to your new mattress and vice versa. In fact, studies show most people experience some initial level of discomfort with their new mattress. Because of this, we ask you to sleep on it for a minimum of 71 nights to allow for this adjustment period. After those first 71 nights, if you are still not completely comfortable, we will do our best to match you to your right mattress within 120 nights of your original mattress delivery date. Subject to the above guidelines, our 120 Night Sleep Trial is valid for one exchange and/or one return per purchase, which must be done within 120 days of the delivery date of your original mattress. You may exchange your mattress once, with a return delivery fee of \$7999 (up to \$9999 in select markets), and receive, as credit toward the purchase price of a different mattress, the purchase price of your original mattress less a restocking fee equal to 10% of your original mattress purchase price (restocking fee not to exceed \$240). Restocking fee not applicable in Hawaii. If you still aren't absolutely satisfied with your new mattress, you can return it with a return delivery fee of \$7999 (up to \$9999 in select markets) and receive, as a refund, the purchase price of your new mattress less a restocking fee equal to 20% of your new mattress purchase price (restocking fee must not exceed \$500). Mattress Firm is unable to exchange or refund stained, unsanitary or damaged mattresses under the 120 Night Sleep Trial. That's why we highly recommend using a waterproof mattress protector to help keep your new mattress clean. In addition, we recommend keeping all original tags on your mattress. If you remove the law tag from the mattress or foundation, it will void the 120 Night Sleep Trial. Please note that our 120 Night Sleep Trial is not valid on warranty exchanges, clearance merchandise, floor models, pillows, mattress protectors, adjustable bases, furniture or other accessories. See a store associate or contact one of our live chat customer service representatives on our website for more details.

www.mattressfirm.com

RETURN POLICIES

How do I start a return or exchange?

If you decide that your Casper products aren't right for you within your trial period, we're happy to help troubleshoot or initiate the return process. For smaller items like our bedding, pillows, and dog beds, you can visit our return center. For larger items like mattresses or furniture, please contact us at +1 888-498-0003. We'll work with you to arrange a pickup through a local charity or recycling partner and refund you in full. Refunds will be credited back to your account within two weeks.

www.casper.com

MATTRESS EXCHANGES

the mattress and re-select another one that hopefully feels more comfortable. For years, the provisions of the comfort exchange were remarkably similar between brick and mortar stores. Then along came the online sellers of beds in a box. The standard three week trial period suddenly ballooned to one hundred days (or more) from the online vendors. And, this promise wasn't just a comfort exchange; you could return it for a full refund if you didn't want it.

Comfort exchange requests can come about from a variety of circumstances. Most of the time, the customer finds the bed is too hard, or too soft or too something else. Recently, I heard a story, a new twist on comfort exchanges from a colleague whose daughter and son-in-law purchased twin beds for a "tiny house." The house's bedroom was in the loft with a low ceiling. The thickness of the first mattresses put the sleepers so close to the ceiling that they bumped their heads

"Recently, I heard a story, a new twist on comfort exchanges from a colleague whose daughter and son-in-law purchased twin beds for a tiny house."

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Mattresses Exchange Policy*The Original Purple® Bed, The New Purple® Mattress*

You have 100 calendar days to exchange your Purple® Bed from the date of delivery. You are allowed one exchange.

To be eligible for an exchange, you must still be within your 100 night trial period and have had it for at least 21 days, and the mattress must be clean and undamaged.

To initiate an exchange, call Customer Care or 888-848-2006. Once eligibility is confirmed, a specialist will help facilitate the process. To be eligible for an exchange, you must still be within your 100 night trial period, and the mattress must be clean and undamaged.

An exchange is a two-step process: 1) A return of your initial mattress, and 2) A purchase of a different size or model. To complete the exchange process, you will need to follow the mattress return policy for your initial mattress and place your new order for the different size or model at your choice.

Our specialists will refund your initial purchase immediately. If, however, the order for the replacement mattress is not placed within 30 days of the refund, you will be charged (again) for the initial mattress.

Your 100-night trial will continue to run from the date the first mattress was delivered (or 30 days from the delivery of your second mattress, whichever is greater). In most cases, if mattress removal is selected your first mattress will be removed at the same time the second mattress is delivered.

As of the time this article was written, Purple offered an exchange with pick up of the old mattress at time of delivery. Macy's offers a 120-day return policy with an \$80 pick up fee and a 15 percent "preference fee". Art Van includes information on custom order bedding and foundation returns. Art Van also requires a 30-day waiting period for customers to adjust to their new mattress.

www.artvanmattress.com

Mattress Exchanges

If you purchase a new sleep set, with \$499, along with mattress protector and our Bedding Comfort Protection Program, you qualify for a one-time mattress reselection. If after a minimum of 30 days you are unable to comfortably adjust to the support of your new mattress, you have up to the 60th day from the original delivery date to make a one-time reselection. Failure to use the mattress protector as instructed voids the Comfort Protection.

- Any difference in price must be paid. If you select merchandise of lesser price, you will receive a merchandise credit for the difference.
- Reselections before the 30-day period are charged an additional 15% early exchange fee, plus a delivery fee.

Custom order bedding does not qualify for the Bedding Comfort Protection. Exchanges of foundation due to height will be charged with a 15% return fee and a delivery fee. After 7 days, we cannot accept foundation exchanges due to height. Mattress/foundation delivery damage or manufacturer defects must be reported within 48 hours of delivery to qualify for a no-fee inspected and authorized exchange.

www.macys.com

Mattress Return

Getting used to sleeping in a new bed can take time. Please allow your body to adjust to your new sleep set. If you are still not completely satisfied:

- Please contact Macy's Customer Service at 1.888.822.6229 within 120 days to schedule a one-time reselection or return.
 - The reselection must be scheduled within 14 days of your call.
 - The bedding must be undamaged, unsoiled and free of stains.
 - Your delivery fee will not be refunded.
 - A \$85.00 pick-up fee will be charged.
 - A 15% preference fee will apply.

MORE RETURN POLICIES

when they got up. I am told that the brick and mortar retailer, based in Arizona, cheerfully exchanged the thick mattresses for thinner ones and refunded the difference in cost. That solved the bumping problem. (I never did hear if the thinner mattresses were as comfortable as the thick ones).

"Have a time limit. The old 21-day industry standard may have changed, but a time limit is still important. A minimum time is a good idea."

Is this a real comfort exchange? I would say so, since it is pretty uncomfortable to bump your head when you get up.

Regardless of which, if any, comfort exchange policy your store offers, it is wise to publish the policy in writing for all customers and RSAs to see. Don't leave any ambiguities that can and will be argued over later. Note that all RSAs should be well acquainted with the store's comfort exchange policy. Following are some general guidelines that are frequently found in various comfort exchange policies. Bear in mind that these are guidelines, not rules.

Unless the manufacturer supports comfort exchanges of its products, it should be noted that this sort of exchange is usually a store policy, not a manufacturer promise or guarantee. There are exceptions to this.

Guideline #1: Only one exchange is allowed per customer transaction. It is worth pointing out that some customers would never be satisfied even with a dozen exchanges, so limit it to one only.

Guideline #2: The returned bed must be in NEW condition. This means no soiling, staining, odors or abuse. Be careful of offering a comfort exchange to customers who smoke. Some retailers insist that the customer also purchase a mattress protector or no comfort exchange will be allowed. The reason is it needs to be clean so that it's easier to legally re-sell it. Re-selling is explained later in the article.

Guideline #3: Have a time limit. The old 21-day industry standard may have changed, but a time limit is still important. A minimum time is a good idea, also. Some

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customers will call complaining the next morning after the sale.

Guideline #4: Many retailers require that the re-selected mattress be at least as expensive as the first selection. Or, if of lesser value, no refund of the price difference will be offered.

Guideline #5: It is wise to send your delivery staff to the customer's residence to deliver the new set and pick up the old one. Really bad things can happen to mattresses when customers bring back a mattress. I also highly recommend that delivery trucks be supplied with disposable rub-

ber gloves of various sizes. Also, make it a policy that all delivery men wear these rubber gloves when delivering a new mattress, and even more importantly, to wear the gloves when handling a used mattress. Who knows what pathogens or other creatures may be lurking in some of these used beds?

Guideline #6: If a couple shares the bed in question, BOTH parties should agree to purchase the new bed. If only one person decides, you are very apt to have another request for a comfort exchange, and the same problem all over again.

After reading all this, the following question may have occurred to you. What does the store do with the returned mattresses? Some manufacturers will take them back, and this is often done with a direct customer-manufacturer communication, which leaves the retail store out of the equation. Most of the time, though, the retail store has to dispose of the returned bed. In most states, if not all, it is unlawful to re-sell a used mattress unless it has been legally and properly disinfected and re-labeled so that it is clear to a prospective buyer that the mattress has a history of prior ownership.

Warranty Exchanges

A lot of so-called warranty exchanges wouldn't happen if the RSA did a better job of explaining the fact that virtually all mattresses will get some minor body impressions. Body impressions do not mean sagging, although the customer will probably describe them as that.

It is important to remember not to agree to an exchange until someone from the store has examined and photographed the offending mattress.

Another problem, not often analyzed correctly when processing a warranty complaint, is the absence of proper center support for queen and king sets. A mattress set that is not properly supported in the middle will most likely eventually "sag" in the middle. When this happens, the manufacturer is not at fault, and usually will not replace the affected mattress if they become aware of the cause of the problem. Every warranty examination should include looking under the bed, or removing the mattress from the frame to see if the supporting frame has broken, or was not built with the required center support. I have found that when this problem is fixed with a new frame or other substantial sup-

"Some retailers dispute exchange requests vigorously. Years of experience has informed them that many exchange requests from customers are based on silly and superficial reasons."

"When the old mattress

is picked up, it should not be loaded onto a truck that has new mattresses on it."

port, that the "sagging" problem usually goes away without having to replace the mattress.

Since this article is about the process of exchanging products, and not a discussion of the warranty itself, we will limit our warranty remarks.

Small retail stores should be especially careful about accepting warranty exchanges, especially without checking out the mattress before agreeing to the exchange. Not all manufacturers

are generous about taking back products where the defect may exist only in the customer's mind.

Mattress Disposal

Bear in mind that something has to be done to dispose of the old mattress that came back to the store in either a comfort or a warranty exchange. By dispose, we mean either:

- Re-sell
- Send back to the manufacturer

- Give it to charity or a needy employee
- Take it to the dumping ground.

Most state laws and local public health ordinances do not allow the co-mingling of new and used mattresses. This means the following:

1. When the old mattress is picked up, it should not be loaded onto a truck that has new mattresses on it.

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"Ultimately every retailer

must monitor returns and exchanges in a way to determine whether or not an exchange policy is profitable, or not."

2. When the old mattress arrives back at the warehouse, it must be stored in a separate facility away from the new mattress inventory.

3. If it is to be resold to the public, in most states, if not all, the reseller must properly disinfect the old mattress and re-tag it to make it clear to any buyer that it is a used mattress. None of this processing is necessary, as a rule, to give it away or send it back to the manufacturer.

Attitudes About Exchanges

Different retailers adopt different attitudes toward exchanges and these attitudes affect their policy.

Some retailers dispute exchange requests vigorously. Years of experience has informed them that many exchange requests from customers are based on silly and superficial reasons. They consider consumers, often correctly, as spoiled by the notion that "the customer is always right". Some customers, frankly, are not worth

the trouble they cause. This combative attitude, unfortunately, has some drawbacks. For one thing, it is more stressful to be forever battling customers over frivolous complaints. It also does not play well in the "word-of-mouth" advertising realm. In this day of social media, it will earn the fighting retailer some unwanted comments on various blog sites.

At the other end of the spectrum is the "We'll take back pretty much anything" retail store. Some of the big box chains are well known for this. I have noticed that some small store owners are adopting a similar attitude. The idea is, "Why fight it?" The customer certainly is happier when exchanging a product is done hassle-free. The retailer is under a lot less stress. It does have the possibility of creating an inventory of previously owned products, not to mention extra warehouse space to house these products.

A good solution to this problem is to create a "clearance area" somewhere on the premises. Many, if not most, customers like a bargain and there's no

better place for a bargain than in a clearance center.

Mattresses need a special disinfecting process before they can be resold. State laws may vary on this, but it is possible that previously owned (but cleansed) mattresses might possibly be allowed to co-mingle with new mattresses in an isolated area of the showroom. (Check state and local laws before proceeding with this.) And, of course, furniture, unless it is upholstered, does not need any special process to be resold.

A Few More Points

State and local laws vary on what is legal and what is not legal when it comes to returns and exchanges. Many of these laws concern the posting of the store's return policy so that this policy is clear to the customer who actually decides to read the notice on the wall behind the service desk. There is a website <https://consumer.findlaw.com> that lists, by state, some retail laws. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this site. I just ran across it while



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MATTRESS EXCHANGES

researching this article.

Exchanges and returns are part of being in business. There is no escaping this simple fact. The wise retailer will have a policy that keeps reasonable customers happy and therefore increases sales.

Here are some ideas to consider when developing a return and exchange policy.

1. Have the policy in writing and posted conspicuously at your store's sales desk.

2. Make certain every retail sales associate is thoroughly familiar with the policy.

3. While it is good public relations to have a liberal exchange policy, it is important to establish a time limit for exchanges and make sure the customer knows what the time limit is.

4. When a customer comes in your store to buy a new product, your RSAs should treat it as an opportunity to solve a problem. When a customer comes in your store to complain about his purchase, this should also be treated as an opportunity to solve a problem. Solving problems are how sales are made.

Final Thoughts

The willingness to exchange products, or refund the purchase price can be the difference between happiness and misery, especially for the smaller retailer. An overly generous, no questions asked policy might result in unscrupulous customers who just "borrow" from you, but never really buy. This could make a marginally profitable business quickly turn into a losing one.

Ultimately, the retailer must monitor returns and exchanges in a way to determine whether or not an exchange policy is profitable, or not. And, by profitable, I mean is the return policy making me more money due to goodwill than it is costing me in "eating" the losses that accrue from too many returns?

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 sell-

ing 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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Furnishings Future

POINT/ COUNTERPOINT

by Bill Napier & Ed Tashjian

Ed and Bill debate the many ways that millennials are likely to change as they reach their peak furniture buying years.

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, the future of independent reps and the top marketing strategies for 2020. See all of their commentary at <https://www.furninfo.com/Series/Debate/57>.

POINT: Ed Tashjian

As millennials mature and come of age, will they change in ways that baby boomers did, and how might this change affect the furniture industry?

Yogi Berra had it right, "The future ain't what it used to be." Of course, millennials will mature differently than baby boomers did, and this will have a dramatic effect on the furniture industry. And

unless you are prepared, get ready to follow the same path as Kodak, Nokia, Myspace and Blockbuster.

Let me be clear. People did not stop taking pictures, buying cell phones, using social media, or watching movies. In fact, all of those behaviors increased exponentially. It is how and where they did it that changed. Likewise, one of the beautiful things about the furniture business is that people will always need a place to sleep, eat and watch TV. It's not the need for furniture itself that will change, but rather what, how and where people buy it. If you can take advantage of disruption rather than being a victim of it, the future is bright. If you think like Kodak who was in the film business, you are toast.

First, allow me to define the parameters of what we are writing about. Millennials are currently 22 to 37 years old, and we are imagining the next 25 years of their furniture buying behavior, so

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"Millennials are

currently 22 to 37 years old, and we are imagining the next 25 years of their furniture buying behavior, so between 2020 and 2045."

between 2020 and 2045. There are about 71 million millennials now, which is approximately equal to the number of current baby boomers. Millennials will soon become the largest generational cohort.

Some things are obvious, but others are not. There isn't a trend that isn't driven by lifestyle change. If you understand how lifestyles are changing, it will always lead you to future trends. You can test this by taking any current trend and tracing it back to the lifestyle that spawned it.

Let's look at the obvious ones first and translate how they may affect future behavior. Then we will look at some of the less obvious ones, but just as impactful.

Urbanization

Approximately 85 percent of Americans now live in urban areas. The trend line is steep, and it is predicted that 95 percent will live in urban areas by 2040. This is consistent with most of the world. Barring some cataclysmic event, this is inevitable.

The implications are staggering. Urban areas are more congested, and as a result have less space. The consequence for furniture makers and retailers is that smaller scale and multifunctionality have a premium value. Pieces must fit through doors and on elevators. New buildings are likely to be high rise and have more modern and contemporary architecture. Deliveries will become increasingly difficult and will more often than not come by UPS rather than a store delivery truck. That means it needs to be designed to be easily assembled in the home. White glove will be usurped by "I assembled it myself, and damn proud of it."

Renting vs. Owning

The burgeoning rental market is both peril and promise. There are going to be a lot fewer of those McMansions that were once the mainstay of suburban furniture retail stores. There will be fewer rooms to furnish. Fewer second and third bedrooms. Fewer formal living and dining rooms. People will entertain in their homes less

often and in smaller groups. They will probably be more mobile. Again, furniture will need to be smaller scale and multifunctional. Occasional tables will need to nest. Console tables will need to expand into dining tables. Functional storage will be mandatory. The sofa will also need to be a "spare bedroom."

And renting is not exclusive to apartments. Some of the fastest growing channels for furniture are in rent to own. And now it's moving upscale. Check out <https://www.livefeather.com> positioned as "High-quality furniture delivered & assembled in less than a week that can change as your life changes." If you love it, you can buy it. If not, you trade it in for something else.

Clicks and Bricks

By the end of the next decade, I estimate that more than a third of all home furnishings will be bought over the Internet. If you don't have an e-commerce strategy, you should start planning your going out of business sale now.

Believe me, I understand the

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"Just as Casper

and Nectar disrupted the bedding industry with a bed in a box, there needs to be more sofas in a box that assemble and disassemble just as easily." - Ed Tashjian

resistance. It doesn't make sense to me, but you can't argue with the facts. The Internet is generally more expensive for branded items. You can't see it, touch it, sit in it or imagine the scale. You can't kick the tires, lift the cushions, test the drawers, ask pointed questions of an experienced salesperson for guidance. Who in the world would buy a sofa online? It seems totally illogical.

I'm embarrassed to say, my very own daughter who is furnishing her first apartment. With all of my furniture knowledge and 30 years of industry connections, she was

more comfortable buying from Wayfair. It took her less than 10 minutes to pick it out. She ordered it on Monday and was sitting on it Friday. By far, the hardest part was getting me to agree to pay for it and overcoming my arguments that it was probably junk, would not be that comfortable, and that she would not keep it for more than a few years. She explained that she had no intention of keeping it more than a few years. She did not see exactly what she wanted in the store, and did not have the patience to special order. She had no desire to haggle with a salesperson or wait for a delivery. The promise of an easy transaction and immediate gratification was far more powerful than the details of

fine craftsmanship and finishing. It is bittersweet for me to report that this story has a happy ending. She loves what she bought.

Now, let's look at some trends that are less obvious, but will be just as impactful.

Core Values

There are fundamental changes in core values. Furniture is far lower on the list of priorities of these generations. I don't need any research to tell me that the most important purchase for any millennial is a smart phone. And, it costs about the same as a sofa. If they lost their sofa and their cell phone on the same day, it doesn't take a genius to know which one would be replaced first. Entertaining at home is less important. These folks like to go out and meet in public restaurants and bars. It goes hand-in-hand with a lifestyle of being more urban, renting versus owning, and living in smaller spaces. They are more likely to spend on experiences rather than things.

There are deep or social changes that will have even more lasting impacts.

The screenshot shows the Bundle Living website. At the top, the navigation bar includes links for Shop Sofa, Shop Bean Bag, Company, Reviews, and FAQs, along with a phone number +1-800-630-4333. The main hero section features a woman standing next to a light-colored sofa and a child sitting on a large blue beanbag chair. Text on the page reads "Flexible Seating for a Modern Life" with buttons for "Shop Sofa" and "Shop Bean Bag". Below this, there are two columns: "Shop Sofa" with a description of the sofa's features and a "Shop Sofa" button, and "Shop Bean Bag" with a description of the beanbag's features and a "Shop Bean Bag" button. At the bottom, there are two images: a person sitting on a sofa and a person sitting on a beanbag chair. The footer includes "The Bundle Guarantee" and a statement: "We offer flexible, durable seating with performance fabrics built to last a lifetime." There is also a small logo for "bundle living" in the bottom right corner.

Ed suggests that Furniture World readers check out bundleviving.com. It's a DTC retailer offering an innovative solution that "checks all the boxes". The website features great reviews on comfortable, easy to set up (and break down for easy moving), modestly customizable sofas that ship for free.

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"They've been told that their careers, partners, and homes will change more often, Why would they want to be saddled with a bunch of bulky furniture?" - Ed Tashjian

The institution of marriage continues to change. Only half of adults today are married. This is a substantial decline from the boomer generation. Cohabitation among married partners has increased and the share of U.S. adults living without a spouse or partner has also increased. When people are not married, they tend to make different purchase decisions. It is either his or hers. How finances are shared is fuzzy and different in every relationship. This makes major purchases such as furniture more complex.

They are also delaying having children. This is one of the reasons that homeownership is declining. The rate of homeownership for couples with children declined to 70.1 percent in 2016 compared to a rate of 72.9 percent in 2013, which is down from a peak of roughly 79 percent in 1998.

At the risk of sounding sexist, most men think differently about

home furnishings. They want comfort and practicality. Women drive most of the style decisions.

Immediacy

I want it now and I don't expect to own it for a lifetime. This is a fundamental shift from boomers whose parents grew up during the depression and inculcated different values. Relatively speaking, consumers today are impatient. They want what they want, and they want it now. Anywhere that boomers gather you can hear this lament about their children. Regrettably, they don't want or even value their parent's furniture. They don't care how long it lasts if it's something they don't want. We thought they would covet it. They hate it. It reminds them of being old.

They have been told that their careers will change more often, their partners will change more

often, and their homes will change more often. Why would they want to be saddled with a bunch of bulky furniture?

The implications are that furniture must be designed to be more mobile. RTA needs to evolve from the primitive IKEA to elegantly designed easy to assemble and disassemble items. Just as Casper and Nectar disrupted the bedding industry with a bed in a box. There need to be more sofas in a box that assemble and disassemble.

"Occasional tables will need to nest. Console tables will need to expand into dining tables. Functional storage will be mandatory." - Ed Tashjian

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And this won't be just for ecom. Stores are going to want to carry these in inventory. They need to fit in the back of an Uber XL. The customer gets immediate gratification, and the store saves a \$200 delivery charge. A legitimate and believable discount.

Rising Income Inequality

The evaporation of the middle class will have an enormous impact on all buying behavior. First, there will be far less disposable income for home furnishings. Next you may not have the kinds of efficiencies of scale that will support smaller stores. Only 10 percent of the U.S. population is making more than \$100,000, and the median income is around \$40,000.

This means that as time goes on there will be more demand for less expensive furniture. The fixed costs of running the store—rent, labor, insurance etc.—will stay the same or will go up, but the average transaction amounts will decline. This means you will need to sell a lot more units or do it in a smaller space with fewer people. Technology will help, but it will still be a challenge.

AI and Automation

In the next decade augmented reality and automation will change the way we manufacture and sell furniture. The ever-changing politics of globalization will affect where we source parts and raw materials. If history repeats itself, many of the stalwart retailers of today will be replaced by new marketing, merchandising and delivery concepts we haven't yet dreamed of. Channels of distribution will change, materials will change, and living spaces will change. Two-thirds of C-suite executives believe that 40 percent of Fortune 500 companies will no longer exist in 10 years' time due to digital disruption. I don't know why furniture would be any different.

Some things probably won't change very much, if at all.

Designs

It is impossible to predict what differences in design the next 25 years will bring. But the past is often prologue. Even today, some of our design inspirations are hundreds of years old. Nearly every manufacturer still makes a version of a Klismos chair which first appeared somewhere between the 8th and 6th century BC. When we look through the

ads in old magazines we laugh at the changes in hairstyles, gawk at changes in automobiles, and marvel at the evolution in micro-processors and computers. But the silhouette of the furniture still looks pretty much the same. The shape of a sofa, bed or table are unlikely to change 50 years from now. Size, scale, materials, and how they are sold will all change, but the silhouettes most likely will not.

Human Nature Won't Change

If Shakespeare's plays written in the 1600s still resonate today, they will, 50 years from now, too. People will still fall in love, break up, and get back together. Kids will still fight with each other and

"Our survival depends on whether we remember what business we are really in or fall into what I call the Kodak trap of thinking we are in the film business." - Ed Tashjian



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become as thick as thieves when they mature. We will continue to have bouts of loneliness and sheer joy, and fight with our partners over the same stupid things. We are essentially stone age troglodytes, with ever improving living standards.

I have always thought that furniture was a great business. Even if we are going from place to place in solar powered flying cars, there is a high degree of likelihood that we will still be sleeping in beds, sharing meals around dining tables, and sitting on a comfortable chair or sofa to watch the next generation of sporting events. Through time immemorial families will be feathering nests and to create a cozy haven reflecting their personal lifestyle and personality. It is an inexorable human drive extending from

the Flintstones to the Jetsons.

In sum, our need for furniture will not change much. But the business will change dramatically, driven by lifestyle changes among the millennial generation. Our survival depends on whether we remember what business we are really in or fall into what I call the Kodak trap of thinking we are in the film business. No, the future ain't what it used to be. The best we can do is to observe and adapt to the obvious trends, and hope we catch those that other retailers and brands will miss. Be careful who you listen to.

COUNTERPOINT: Bill Napier

I'm not optimistic, but somewhat hopeful.

My take on Ed's POINT, if you

read between the lines, is ... Be scared, VERY scared. If you think millennials will change in the next 10 years, try bowling with three pins and without the ball and let me know how that works for you. I'll add to some of Ed's POINT and of course, add my own RANTS to this column.

The Future Ain't What It Used To Be

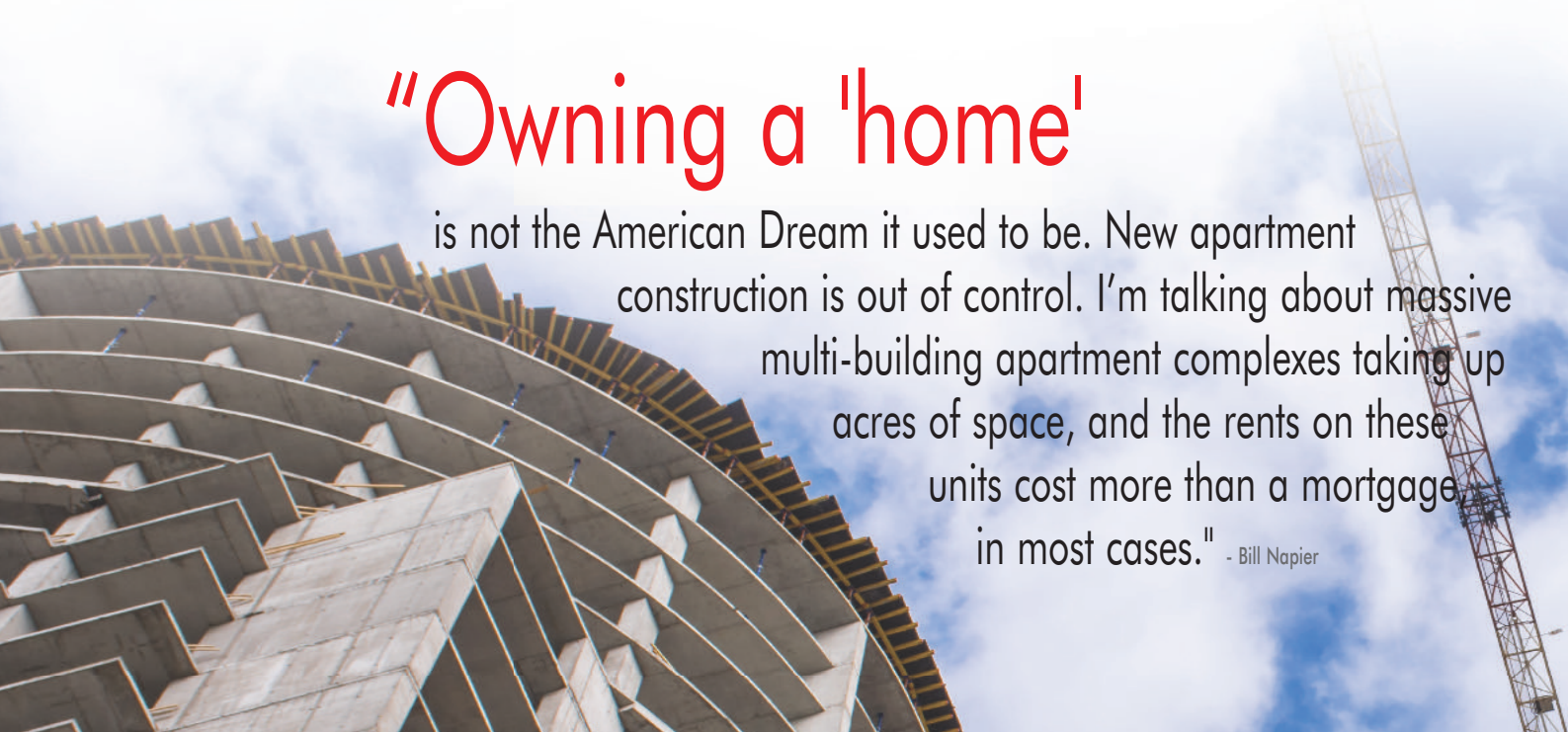
How true and how sad.

Renting vs. Owning

Owning a "home" is not the American Dream it used to be. I live in Minneapolis, and OMG apartment construction is out of control. I'm not talking about small buildings, I'm talking about

"Owning a 'home'"

is not the American Dream it used to be. New apartment construction is out of control. I'm talking about massive multi-building apartment complexes taking up acres of space, and the rents on these units cost more than a mortgage in most cases." - Bill Napier



POINT COUNTERPOINT

"Twenty-seven percent of millennials say they have no close friends and 30 percent say they have no best friends, so why would they need home furnishings, other than the very basics?"

- Bill Napier

massive multi-building apartment complexes taking up acres of space, and the rents on these units cost more than a mortgage, in most cases.

Case in point: I have a friend, who lives in a huge complex near the MSP Airport. It has all the amenities, workout rooms, a coffee shop, juice bar, etc. Her apartment is approximately 500 sq. ft. The living room and kitchen are in the same room. A small galley kitchen on one wall and the living room barely fits two sofa-like chairs and a stool. She pays \$1,650.00/month. A steal

for New York or San Francisco, but for Minneapolis... OUCH!

All these new buildings, and even older houses/apartments for rent in the cities are averaging around \$1,300-\$2,500/month. The lesser costs being one-bedroom, the higher costs, 2-3 bedrooms.

Doing the math, you can quickly understand that these costs, plus utilities, food, entertainment, quickly put this group out of the housing market, because they can't afford to buy anything and here's why...

The Truth About Millennials as Viable Consumers

The average MILLENNIAL has a credit score of 625, the worst of any generation, ever, but it's 687 for Gen X (35-49), 739 for baby boomers and the Greatest Generation (together, those generations include everyone older than 50).

Think about this, people over 50 buy 50 percent of everything, to the tune of \$3.2 trillion dollars, yet receive less than 5 percent of your marketing dollars and guess what, 76.2 percent of households age 50 and over, and 78.7 percent of households age 65 and

over—own their homes. With the aging of the baby boomers, 63 percent of U.S. homeowners are now at least age 50 and 31 percent are at least age 65.

The current savings rate for millennials is negative two percent. Not only aren't millennials saving any money, but they are also actually spending a good bit more than they are earning every month, on entertainment, their precious \$5 cup of coffee and more. (WHY, would you spend your marketing dollars on this group)?

Over 30 percent live at home with mom and dad. My son was in town this week and when I asked him if he visits his old

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"These costs,
plus utilities, food, entertainment, quickly put this group
out of the housing market, and here's why." -Bill Napier

friends from high school, he said that he doesn't. When I asked him why, he said they still all live at home and he doesn't want to visit their parents. OUCH.

According to the Pew Research Center, nearly four out of every 10 U.S. households that are led by someone under the age of 40 are currently paying off student loan debt, which averages over \$36,000, paying on average, \$203/month. Add that to the cost of living and renting an apart-

ment! The number paying off debt is an astounding 40,000,000 people, with a delinquency rate of over 11 percent.

Their Debt Won't Go Away

Today, millennials earn 20 percent less than their parents did at the same age, and only about one in three millennials under the age of 35 owned a home as of the end of 2018, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That's eight

to nine percentage points lower than previous generations' homeownership rates at ages 25 to 34, according to research from the Urban Institute's Housing Finance Policy Center.

To Ed's point, they are renting, buying smaller scale furniture and less of it. That's why the industry's largest player has entered the RTA business with a big bang.

Core Values

Social Media has devastated the social lives of a majority of millennials.

If you Google: "Millennials have no friends", you'll find, according to YouGov, that 22 percent of the millennials in a recent survey report that they have zero friends.

It gets even worse. Twenty-seven percent say they have no close friends and 30 percent say they have no best friends.

Let's do the math! 15,620,000 – 21,300,000 of this generation have no friends, close friends or

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POINT COUNTERPOINT

best friends, so why would they need a home, or home furnishings, other than the very basics?

And in my opinion, they are the most guarded and isolated generation in history. Parents who tried to guard them against the so-called evils of the world inadvertently created the "safe-space" generation. Rather than educating them on the realities of life, many developed a privileged mindset. If they want it, they feel that they deserve it. And after they get it, they need to replace it because they saw/heard something in their "feed". Obsolescence is a buzzword and it's important to stay cool and "relevant" in this generation.

Rising Income Inequality

I blame this on our education system, PERIOD!

Our education system teaches, or rather propagates, social justice instead of life values. This starts in our middle schools and high schools. The Education Trust

conducted a study of outcomes for recent high school graduates and found that while 82 percent were graduating, only around 8 percent were actually ready to take on college-level courses.

The obvious result of this is the "dumbing down" of our future generations. Colleges have to make their courses easier in order to feed their financial juggernaut – enrollment. The obvious result of this is that most college educations are less relevant, with students failing to learn the basics needed to thrive, improve themselves and engage with individuals and society.

Rather than get out and discover the world, make new friends and engage with "life", they engage with electronic communications, and false realities.

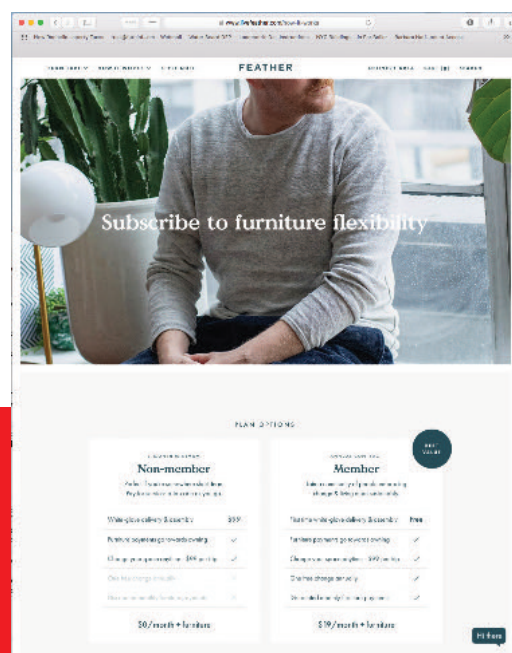
Clicks and Bricks

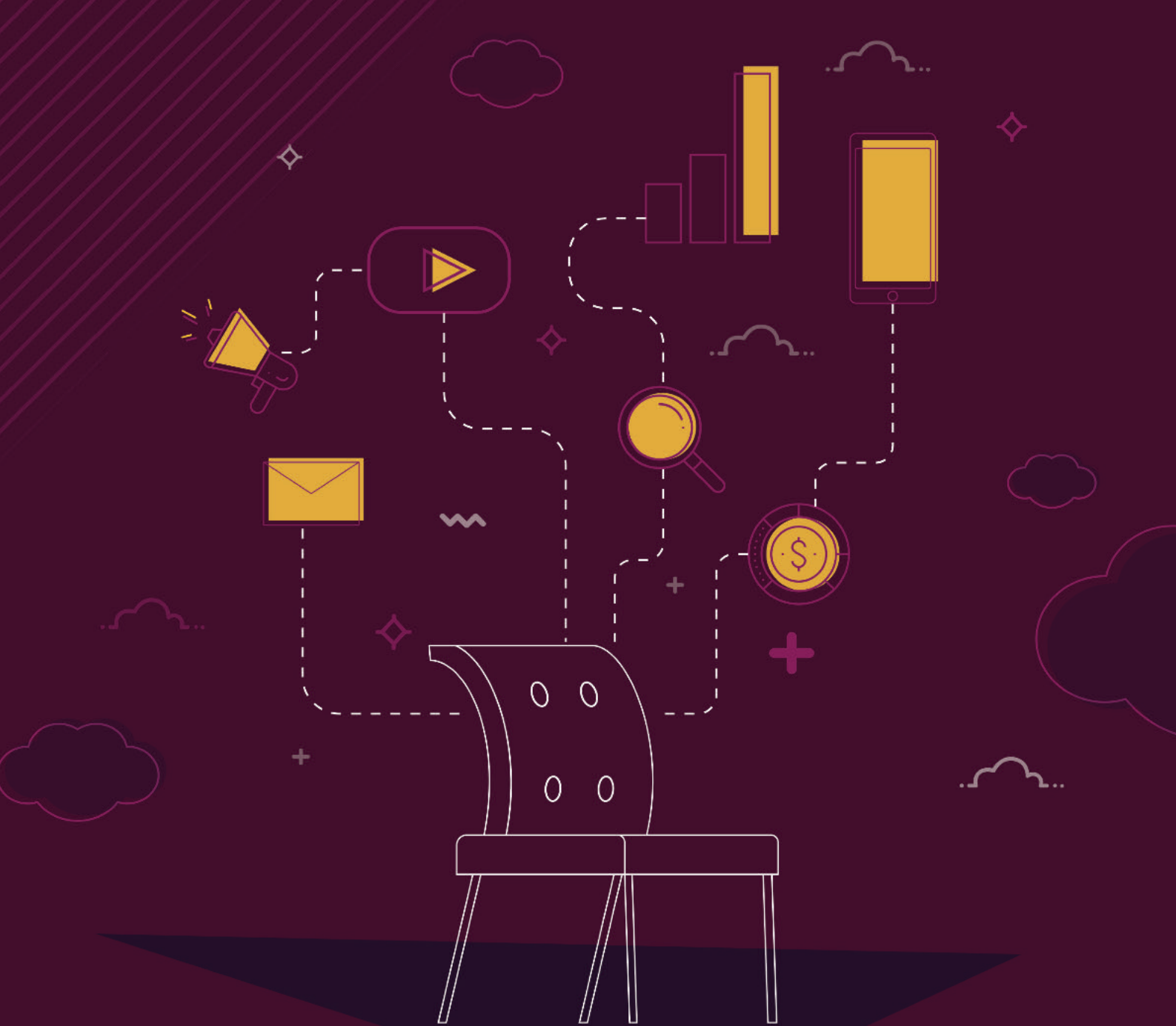
At this point I will temper my remarks by adding that my kids

are all millennials and they don't have the negative profile I've

"To Ed's point, they are renting, buying smaller scale furniture and less of it. **That's why the industry's largest player has entered the RTA business with a big bang.**"

Ed suggests that Furniture World readers visit <https://www.livefeather.com/> positioned as "High-quality furniture delivered & assembled in less than a week that can change as your life changes. If you love it, you can buy it. If not, you trade it in for something else." Also, "without spending a fortune or hurting the planet in the process."





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POINT-COUNTERPOINT

described. Many don't. But to Ed's point, they do buy everything online. My daughter has three kids and every time I visit, the boxes are in the hallway, and tons of them waiting for disposal in the garage. If you don't embrace this online generation, like Ed says, start your going out of business sale.

By 2021, 36 percent of all home furnishings will be purchased on-line. In 2021, over 2.14 billion people worldwide are expected to buy goods and services online, up from 1.66 billion global digital buyers in 2016.

Amazon is set to clear \$258.22 billion in U.S. retail sales in 2018, according to eMarketer's figures,

which will work out to 49.1 percent of all online retail spend in the country.

If these statistics don't convince you, maybe you like to bowl with three pins and forget your ball.

My Conclusion

No one aspires to be indentured to renting a space, living in an uncomfortable space and being lonely. Maturity is something people obtain at different times in their lives. Some people just "get it" at an early age, many others later in life, and others not at all.

I hope and pessimistically believe that this generation will change, mature and come of age.

I hope and want to believe this will happen, not only for the sake of my friends in the furniture business, but because living a life of mediocrity and hope, does not deliver personal fulfillment, which is innate in every human being.

About Ed Tashjian: Tashjian Marketing provides senior marketing leadership to the Home Furnishings Industry. It special-

izes 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.social4retail.com with hundreds of articles and "how-to" strategies for retailers and brands. Reach Bill at: billnapier@napiermkt.com or 612-217-1297.

More articles by Bill Napier and Ed Tashjian can be easily found online at <https://www.furninfo.com/Series/Debate/57>.

"If these statistics don't convince you, maybe you like to bowl with three pins and forget your ball." - Bill Napier



YOUR NEXT CALL



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From the heart of Southeast Asia and a country about half the size of Texas, Malaysia is performing way above its size when it comes to the global furniture supply chain.

Through sheer grit and hard work, generations of Malaysia's furniture makers have built themselves a thriving export business. Some 80% of the domestic production -- case goods and all types of other furniture -- are shipped out from its busy ports straddling the busier Straits of Malacca to 160 countries.

Home, commercial, indoor or outdoor, the demand for Malaysian furniture results from the country's capacity to produce high quality products, competitive pricing, big variety and ease of doing business -- just the value package and opportunities to benefit wholesalers and retailers.

Malaysia has 1,708 furniture factories nationwide producing furniture for the domestic and international markets. The country is famous for solid wood and wood-based products mostly made of rubberwood and a variety of fine furniture wood. Adding to that over the past decade, enterprising manufacturers have expanded their product and design range by using imported lumber e.g. oak, walnut and beech, and non-wood materials to come up with more styles and a sustainable competitive advantage. On the factory floor, greater automation and technology are taking over to ramp up production capacity, elevate quality, meet contract deadlines and safety standards.

To sustain raw material for the country's wood-processing industry, the Malaysian government approved the planting of approximately 62 acres (25,000 hectares) of forest plantation per year starting 2005 for 15 years. Every 62 acres of matured plantation can yield 5 million cubic meters of timber. The focus is mainly on rubberwood (*Hevea brasiliensis*) and acacia mangium and other timbers such as teak, African mahogany and eucalyptus. The first project is due to mature in 2021.

Head for the 2020 Malaysian International Furniture Fair or MIFF, as it is known in industry circles, to discover the huge potential offered by Malaysia's furniture manufacturers. So entwined is the success of the trade show and the country's furniture growth story, it is hard to imagine one without the other.

MALAYSIAN ORDERS SURGE AS U.S.-CHINA TRADE WAR BITES

Who are the biggest buyers of Malaysian furniture?

The United States has long been the largest single importer and it continues to top Malaysia's list of traditional markets that includes Japan, Singapore, Australia and the United Kingdom. Demand for Made-in-Malaysia is also growing in emerging markets of the industry in Asia, Middle East and Africa.

As the global furniture supply chain suffers the brunt of the U.S.-China tariff

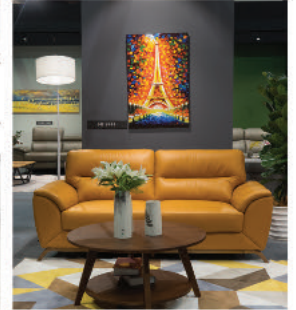
dispute, latest Malaysian trade figures reveal a surge in furniture exports from Jan-Mar this year headlined by double-digit growth in orders from the U.S. and Canada.

Overall exports jumped 9.16% to a value of US\$990 million (Malaysian Ringgit 4.14 billion) versus the same period in 2018. Top performers were seats with wood frames (24.1% growth), metal furniture (16.9%), wood bedroom furniture (14.8%), other wood furniture (8.6%) and kitchen furniture (6.8%).

Exports rose 20.8% to U.S. and 25.7% to Canada. Main purchases by U.S. retailers were wood bedroom furniture, seats with wood frames, seats and its parts, wood office furniture and wood kitchen furniture. The expansion signals a possible import diversion by American buyers who may be shifting their orders to countries in Southeast Asia, according to the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE).

At this year's MIFF held in March, the number of buyers from North America was significantly up by 53% from 2018.

"We had a great experience here. We were able to expose American designers to what Malaysia has to offer. It was great to see products similar to those offered in the U.S. here, but they were more interesting to us because the designs had a Malaysian influence which was not found in North America." Randy Fiser, Chief Executive Officer of the American Society of Interior Designers



MIFF 2020 LAUNCHES THE NEW ASIA SEASON

The 26th annual edition will take place from Mar 6th to 9th at the ultra-modern Malaysia International Trade and Exhibition Centre (MITEC) and Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) in downtown Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital. A free shuttle service connects MITEC and PWTC and to official hotels for buyers' convenience. As the first industry show of the year in Asia, buyers will get the first take of the latest collections and new products in the market.

Covering in total 100,000 sqm, MIFF hosts 600 exhibitors. Two thirds are Malaysian manufacturers led by the biggest export names. The remaining third comprises overseas companies from countries including China, Taiwan, Indonesia, South Korea and Japan. The myriad of vendors and merchandise options provides a refreshing experience every time, even to seasoned buyers.

Showcases of contemporary home furniture, the most sought after at the show, are equally divided between MITEC and PWTC. Dedicated segments like Muar Hall, MIFF Office, Sofa Hall, International Hall, MIFF Timber Mart, China Hall, Taiwan Hall, Designrena and Millennials@Design make it a breeze for visitors to navigate the show.

For buyers, MIFF has it all:

- ▶ Largest B2B furniture show in South-east Asia
- ▶ Largest market place for Malaysia's wood furniture
- ▶ Largest collection of office furniture in Southeast Asia
- ▶ Dynamic networking and building business relationships
- ▶ Visa-friendly Malaysia provides visa-free 90-day travel (including North American arrivals) or visa-on-arrival for many countries

MIFF is owned by UBM Malaysia, a part of Informa Markets, the world's largest exhibition organiser.

"I have been visiting MIFF since 2009 and in these 10 years, I've seen MIFF develop and grow each year. In 2018, with the new venue at MITEC, MIFF definitely established itself as the key trade furniture show in Southeast Asia. With this momentum, MIFF can become a landmark for all furniture trade in ASEAN, a market which is rapidly growing and will be one of the most important in the world in the coming years."
Roberta Mutti, Federmobili, Italy

THE MUAR FACTOR

No mention of Malaysian furniture is complete without Muar, the furniture heartland with 800 factories churning out the bulk of Malaysia's exports. It's

no wonder why Muar was officially named "Furniture City of Malaysia" in April 2018. This industrious small township is destined to make a bigger punch. A new Muar Furniture Park of 1,000 acres is being developed to accommodate between 180 and 220 manufacturers. It will be fully operational in 2023.

Muar companies are the dominant presence in MIFF. The bond between MIFF and Muar was further cemented in a strategic partnership with the prominent Muar Furniture Association (MFA) back in 2013. Muar Hall in MIFF is the only one of its kind organized by MFA.

A SHARED JOURNEY OF SUCCESS

Malaysia's furniture export industry goes back nearly three decades. Due to the small domestic market, Malaysian furniture makers turned their sights to the export market in the early 90s. MIFF was launched in 1995 to meet the lack of an international trade show at home for the fledgling industry to look for foreign buyers without the expensive cost of going abroad.

Fast forward 25 years, Malaysia has earned its ranks as a world producer while MIFF has expanded its wings into the largest show in the region, visited by buyers from as many as 140 countries and regions seeking quality medium to medium-high range of products and good value.

For exhibitors, it is hard to find a match for the robust trading pace of MIFF and diversity of international buyers who walk through the doors of the show. For scores of Malaysian companies, among them pioneer exhibitors, MIFF is the only show in which they exhibit to gain orders that keep their machines running the whole year.

BUYER TESTIMONIALS

"This is our first time here at MIFF. We are attending this year because we need to find suppliers from other Asian countries because of the effect of the China-U.S. trade war. We prefer eco-friendly materials and designs to suit our organic and rustic brand. So far we have seen a few interesting items." - Cynthia Bao & Jack Ying, Welland Industries, USA.

"Personally, this is my first time at MIFF but my company sends representatives here every year. We usually fill our need for mid-range home and office furniture here, and MIFF exhibitors have a good variety of products and display them well. Overall, the MIFF team has been

very helpful and has done a good job in organizing the show." - Kevin Dreger, CorLiving Distribution, Canada

"This year I am hoping to secure some suppliers for my business. I like the bustling nature of MIFF, so it's always exciting to visit. Malaysian exhibitors also have a wide variety of beautiful products. The designs are modern and fit into Dubai's cosmopolitan style. Price-wise, Malaysian products are still within a reasonable range." - Apury Bhatnagar, Fiona Environs, United Arab Emirates

"It's our second time here and we are keen on home furniture, especially dining sets and sofas. So far, we have seen a lot of great products and designs. Also, the booths are also beautifully set up. We will definitely be back next year." - K.Jayavel, Aruna Furnitures, India

A DELIGHTFUL EXHIBITOR STORY

Portugal's Colmol Bedding exhibited for the first time in 2019 to look for Asian



business. The family-owned company has a show office in Las Vegas but it was at MIFF that company vice-president Andres Soares met American buyers for the first time. *"We had the chance to exchange many new ideas. I am pleased as we have a strong possibility with the Americans. We made contact with representatives from around 20 countries or more, from New Zealand to Mauritius, from Spain to the USA, and from England to South Korea. It's been good ever since attending MIFF and that's the reason I am travelling now."*

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Best Selling DESIGN



Omnia

The Axel recliner pictured above has a power tilt headrest. It's small in stature, big in comfort and has stylish Mid-Century vibe. Made in America.

Contact information on page 140.



Twin Star Home

The Ellistone TV Stand with ClassicFlame® Electric Fireplace is finished in Weathered Gray on Birch veneer with a stacked stone fireplace surround. It has two side cabinets with two adjustable shelves in each.

Contact information on page 140.



Chromcraft

Breuer Seating updates classic design with deep 4" seats, memory foam, and upholstered backs. Offered in Textured Bronze (shown), Black Nickel, Stainless Steel and Sand finishes. Tempered Glass top tables are available in 48" round, square and octagonal shapes.

Contact information on page 140.



Sea Winds

These new Maui Barstools have bases constructed of solid wood. Seats are handwoven by skilled craftsmen using seagrass, supported by a strong webbing that provides comfort and durability.

Contact information on page 140.



Kas Rugs

From designer Libby Langdon, the Upton is hand tufted in India of hi/lo wool and viscose in transitional patterns with trendy colors.

Contact information on page 140.



Borkholder

The Franklin Table with tapered leg, waterfall edge and self-storing eighteen-inch leaf with the Emory side chairs.

Contact information on page 140.

Estro Milano

Diablo is a handmade leather Italian sofa that features optional recliner and a variety of color combinations.

Contact information on page 140.



Best Selling DESIGN



TOV

The Welsh Faux Shearling Armchair is accented with brushed gold legs. Chair measures 31.8"W x 29.1"D x 32.3"H.

Contact information on page 140.



Surya

The Malmo foot stool features a knitted wool design and is available in five colors.

Contact information on page 140.



Furniture of America

This oversized contemporary beige sofa from the Yates Collection features plush cushions upholstered in linen-like damask fabric creating an inviting atmosphere. With uniquely designed rolled arms and gold undertones in the nail head trim, this set will be the perfect centerpiece to the modern living room.

Contact information on page 140.



évolur

The évolur Loft Art Deco three-in-one Convertible Crib converts to a toddler bed and/or day bed to accommodate the growing child. Case goods include matching six-drawer dresser and three-drawer chest. This collection is presently available in a white and silver dual-tone finish. A special edition white and gold finish is also available.

Contact information on page 140.



Nourison

Deep inky blues float cloud-like on a textured ivory ground, making this Zermatt area rug a picture-perfect choice for the sophisticated living room, bedroom, or other special spot. The abstract design is enhanced by low-loop and high-plush pile.

Contact information on page 140.

Null

The small-scale six piece 9918 table collection features bold styling that combines metal, stone, and wood in a distressed acorn finish. The collection also features natural patchwork slate tiles, mineral finish metal legs and hardware and slatted shelves. Two cocktail sizes are available to fit any size room.

Contact information on page 140.



Best Selling
DESIGN



Nouveau Concept

This 72" TV base features a sliding door. It has all the space you need for electronics components plus more storage provided by small bookcase shelves built in on each side.

Contact information on page 140.



Skyline Design

The Bandido collection exudes a modern design sophistication that refines any outdoor seating, dining or lounging area. This collection features wide bands of strong and durable woven fibers over an aluminum frame, both lightweight and sturdy.

Contact information on page 140.

Klaussner

Nashville is a casual living collection created by Trisha Yearwood that embodies the essence of Tennessee's historic capital. This Platinum Record Player Cabinet features custom finishes, such as this soft white hue, Cloud, a matte finish with antique detailing.

Contact information on page 140.





Norwalk

The crescent-shaped Luna sofa features an ultra-low, lounge-like seat, providing comfortable support while sitting in the center, as well as more casual seating on either end.

Contact information on page 140.



Elran

The Audrey collection features wide track arms and chaise lounge seating enhanced with metal details. It has a two motor design for power recliners and is also available as a manual recliner. The ratchet headrest has five different positions.

Contact information on page 140.

Legends

The Middletown collection features exotic Mindi veneers with Poplar solids in Vintage Hazel finish.

Contact information on page 140.



Best Selling
DESIGN



Craftmaster

This modern-styled metal cocktail ottoman features a nickel finish with X shape detailing and a plush tufted top.

Contact information on page 140.



Muniz

The Cyclone acrylic Sculpture is 28" tall, shown here in blue. Available in different colors.

Contact information on page 140.



Huntington House

This sectional is part of the Outdoor Living collection, constructed with the finest outdoor-grade materials to withstand years of outdoor use without rust, mildew or degrading with exposure. A unique waterproof cover protects its cushions and throw pillows.

Contact information on page 140.

Bellini

The Giuli dining table creates a luxurious and warm atmosphere with Marazzi Golden White ceramic top and solid Ash frame. Available in two sizes.

Contact information on page 140.



Country View Woodworking

This unique two-tone, double pedestal table features an Oak, wire-brushed top with Brown Maple double pedestal base. Multiple finishes and upholstery options are available.

Contact information on page 140.



Collection Tuff Avenue

The Brooklyn bedroom balances a modern edge with a warm, inviting glow. It is constructed of Acacia veneers that exude a rustic appeal and a natural wood grain look.

Contact information on page 140.



Best Selling DESIGN



Whittier Wood

The Addison Vinyl Record Station is made of American Alder and Black Walnut hardwoods.

Contact information on page 140.



Feizy Rugs

Traditional Oushak designs come to life in the Carrington Collection. Hand-knotted in pure wool, each design offers varying degrees of color saturation in warm and cool tones throughout.

Contact information on page 140.

Sealy Sofa Convertibles

The Galway is a sectional sofa convertible with storage chaise. It features an innovative pull-out mechanism that allows easy conversion into a bed. Built with pre-loaded pocket coils for added comfort and ample storage within the chaise.

Contact information on page 140.



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THE MERCHANDISING MATRIX

By Martin Roberts

The Matrix is the starting point for retailers to adjust square footage allocated by product category over time, for optimal results.

When a retail store owner hires a store designer to re-imagine an outdated store interior, it's most often because he or she wants displays updated, traffic flow and sales improved.

As a retail designer, I've helped hundreds of store owners rethink their showrooms, so I don't dispute that the showroom layout is vitally important.

But before you can configure a space, maximizing sales requires looking at the product categories you currently sell and figuring out what percentage of sales come from each category. Why? Because, as a rule of thumb, the amount of merchandise you display should correspond to the percentage of business you do in each category.

In other words, if you have a 100,000-square-foot store, and 55 percent of your business is in upholstery, you'll dedicate 55,000 square feet of retail space to upholstery. There are exceptions of course.

The Merchandising Matrix

A good way is to start with a simple tool called a Merchandising Matrix that enables store owners to figure out how much square footage they might devote to each product category.

This matrix (See Chart) lists product categories, bedroom, living room, dining room, etc. It also lists current square-footage, and percentage of business done for each category.

The value of optimal floor space allocation to product categories cannot be over-estimated. To do it right, assemble a team that includes managers, buyers, visual merchandisers and designers to develop your Merchandise Matrix.

First determine the room set size you use for a category, then multiply it by the number of rooms you display. So for example, if you currently use a 10' x 15' room set size for stationary upholstery, and you have 28 room sets, that department takes up 4,600

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MERCHANDISE MATRIX

square feet of floor space, excluding main access aisles.

Once you've calculated square footage for each department, the next step is to analyze your sales figures. By determining the percentage of sales that come from stationary upholstery, for instance, you'll be able to compare the amount of space you now allot to that department to the percentage that should be allotted. You may discover that you have too much or not enough stationary upholstery in your product mix and that you'll need to make adjustments. But, you might also

discover that in some cases you were fairly accurate in estimating the amount of merchandise for a given category.

Most furniture retailers tend to stick with the floor space allocations they already have when designing a new store or upgrading an older one. If they are showing 25 bedrooms, they stick with that number. It's not the best way to optimize sales or profitability.

One of my clients, an owner of a well regarded furniture store, adopted the Merchandising Matrix, only to be surprised by

the results. He realized that some of his guesstimates for how much product he should purchase were way off the mark. In one instance, he thought he needed five or six sets in a department, only to discover that he really needed three, and he already had two in the warehouse. In the first month after redesigning his store, sales increased by 24 percent, a fair amount of which can be attribut-

The recliner department at Walker Furniture is pictured below. Simple changes for some retailers such as adding a sign that says "free design service" can get people to buy custom upholstery, a category that's difficult to buy online.



CHART #1: Merchandise Matrix Worksheet

Department	Current Percent of Sales	Current Percent of Space	First Adjustment	Second Adjustment	Adjusted Percent of Space
Living Rooms	51%	39%	Add more custom displays and accent chairs.	Add more motion groups. Make design center stronger.	45%
Bedrooms	18%	19%	Add "flat" on wall and stacked displays.	Less space for "good" products. More space for "better" & "best".	15%
Dining Rooms	9%	13%	Reduce number of finishes shown.	Add chair wall and stool wall.	10%
Bedding	10%	8%	Increase spacing and quality options.	Increase displays of pillows and protectors.	10%
Rugs & Accessories	4%	5%	Add celebrity branded rug collections and display on rods.	Hang more rugs on perimeter and display more in room sets.	5%
Service Departments	8%	16%	Review delivery charges and warranty sales.	Reduce employee areas. Add cafe and bar amenities.	15%
Total Display Space	100%	100%	Update store color palette.	Update all digital displays.	100%

Chart shows the Merchandise Matrix for a full line furniture store. Floor space is first adjusted to account for current sales and then again taking other factors like industry averages, competitive situation and improvements in merchandising, displays, sales education, signage, advertising, etc.

ed to the new merchandising process.

The Merchandising Matrix chart allows retailers to give pride of place to products that are doing the lion's share of the business. I am not exaggerating when I say that this method will radically improve your bottom line, enabling you to achieve higher dollars-per-square-foot.

Purchasing Pitfalls

Too many merchants, like cowboys in the Old West, shoot from the hip when making purchases for their store. Being strategic and disciplined in displaying the right

amount of product per department goes hand in hand with purchasing.

Most retailers start with the best of intentions, shopping list in hand, when market rolls around. Unfortunately, there are so many ways to lose sight of the original plan and start buying emotionally. It's all too easy to get caught up in the excitement of market and to make spur-of-the-moment purchases. Or, decide to take advantage of a hot market special, or feel you owe a sales rep a generous order out of friendship.

But when you follow the Merchandising Matrix approach, you are more likely to make well-

"If the average retailer is doing 30 percent of its business in a category such as stationary upholstery, and your store achieves 20 percent, you have to look at why your store is under-performing."

"Most furniture retailers

tend to stick with the floor space allocations they already have when designing a new store or upgrading an older one."

thought-out purchases, since you know in advance exactly how many items will fit in each category of your showroom layout.

How you use the most valuable asset you have as a retailer—your square footage—can be crucial to your success. You air-condition it, heat it, light it, maintain it, and spend money on real estate, taxes and everything else. Why not adopt a strategy that helps you make the best and most profitable use of that space?

Adjusting Matrix Results

Applying the results of the

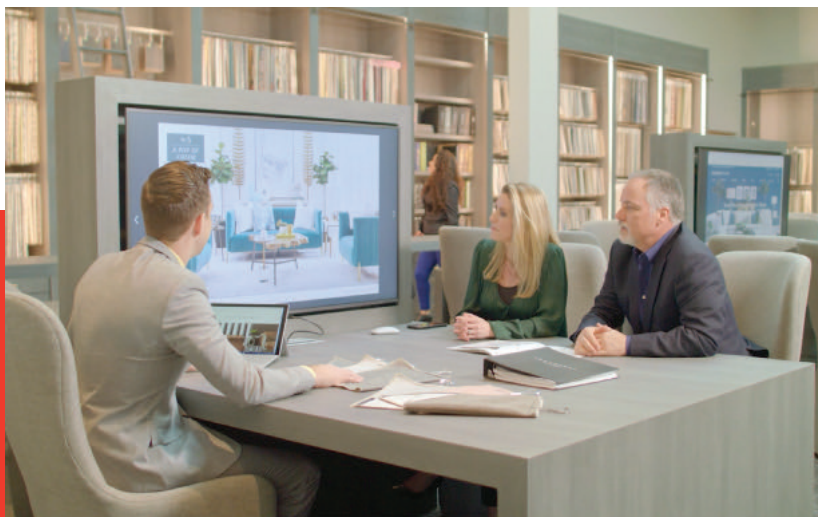
Merchandise Matrix is more art than science. It's important to interpret the numbers.

Check industry averages: Check research done by the trade press regarding the average space retailers say they allocate to product categories and sub categories to ascertain where your space allocations might be obviously out of balance or under-performing.

For example, let's say the average retailer does 20 percent of its sales volume in mattresses, but your store only achieves five percent. Using the Matrix, you might consider reducing the floor space

devoted to mattresses to five percent and increasing the footprints of your upholstery and bedroom furniture departments.

However, if published industry averages say the average retailer is doing 30 percent of its business in a category such as stationary upholstery, and your store achieves only 20 percent, you first have to take a close look at why your store is under-performing. Is it because your other departments are over-performing, or that something else is hurting return on investment for a particular product area? It's important to look at the relationships among all departments and apply a test of reasonableness.



"Other than increasing a department's floor space, retailers can take many other actions to improve product category performance."

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Look for ways to increase the number and visibility of displayed products without taking up additional floor space. Pictured above are rugs that define an attractive perimeter.

Evaluate your competitors:

Let's say the industry average for upholstery sales is 50 percent of total sales volume. If your competitors do a great job of selling upholstery, then selling 50 percent of your volume in upholstery might be just fine for your store. If, on the other hand, your competition does a poor job of selling upholstery, there might be an opportunity to increase the upholstery business through a variety of means.

Get results fast: If a department is doing well, it can usually do better quickly. What we've learned is that it's better to improve an already high producing depart-

ment. If 50 percent of a retailer's sales volume is produced out of its upholstery department, increasing sales by one percent there, yields a lot more dollar volume than getting a one percent increase out of a department such as youth furniture that might produce only five percent of total volume.

Other options: Other than increasing a department's floor space, retailers can take many other actions to improve product category performance. They can adjust staffing, focus on product selection, replace poorly performing sales associates, invest in sales education, purchase new signage, work on visual merchandising, upgrade lighting, offer better credit options, encourage add-on sales, and initiate free design services to increase the size of average sale.

Creating a retail selling machine

is not about adding carousels and fun things for kids to do in-store. These types of attractions may increase traffic, but won't actually sell product. What a retailer sells,

"When you follow the Merchandising Matrix approach, you are more likely to make well-thought-out purchases, since you know in advance exactly how many items will fit in each category of your showroom layout."



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"You may discover

that you have too much or not enough stationary upholstery in your product mix and that you'll need to make adjustments."

how they sell it and how they emphasize areas within their retail environments, are what makes a difference in terms of sales volume.

Simple changes: Simple changes for some retailers such as adding a sign that says "free design service" can get people to buy custom upholstery, a category that's difficult to buy online. Customized upholstery usually yields higher margins, and is less subject to internet competition, a definite

advantage.

Expand popular and growing product categories: Many retailers can, for example, benefit by working to increase their motion upholstery sales. It's a popular and growing category under-represented in terms of space allocation on a lot of retail floors.

Small stores: If you are a small store that carries a broad selection, consider eliminating categories that contribute a small percentage of sales. You might decide not to carry children's products if they only contribute between one

and five percent of overall business. Allocating space to higher volume categories can help to maximize sales volume.

Outlet Stores

Often stores have spaces at

the back of their stores that were formerly warehouses or used for a receiving area that can be re-purposed. Ideally, they can be converted into an outlet store with a separate entrance, devoted to products at lower price points that

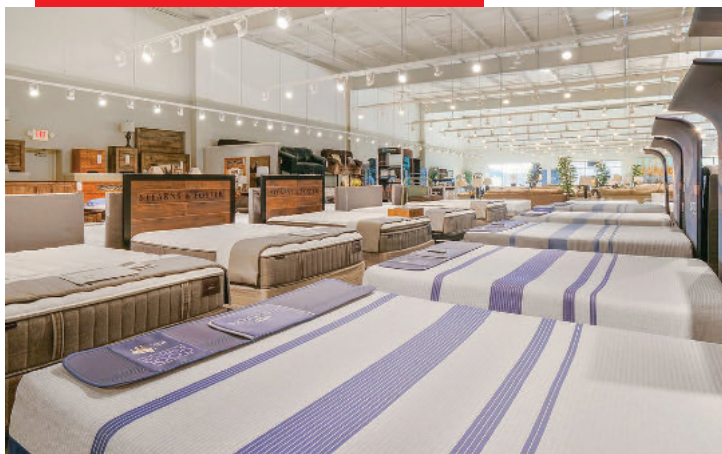
don't compete with the existing business.

Retailers may also find space for an outlet center at a distribution center or warehouse space that services a number of stores. As malls are becoming less populated with major brands, furniture retailers are finding opportunities to lease cheap spaces, which can make good outlet stores.

We are seeing more good, better, best, selling. Good is an outlet, better are regular priced goods, and best are designer collections. Retailers are seeing an opportunity to create a ladder for customers at different points in their life.

One of our top-100 clients has multiple stores in close proximity. Its main store at 150,000 square feet sits next to its higher end store at about 40,000 square feet. Also, an Ashley's store which is about 30,000 square feet, a clearance center that's about 15,000 square feet. Five blocks away is its outlet store that is about 60,000 square feet. And they all do well because each appeals to a different audience.

Circling back to the topic of floor space allocation in outlet stores, we've found that showing a lot of inexpensive accessories in them is a waste of time. They just



In the Merchandise Matrix chart, the size of departments such as bedding are adjusted for current sales, but also taking into account other factors. These include, the spacing between mattresses, signage, department location, competitive situation and product mix.

What Does Designer Corey Damen Jenkins...

say about High Point's Bienenstock Furniture Library?



“The Bienenstock Library gives furnishings and interior designers an ideal place to start, grab a cup of coffee, and get an additional dose of inspiration before they shop the High Point Market. It has everything from the Chippendale experience to Saarinen, and so much more under one roof. It's accessible for students, design enthusiasts, veterans and newbies coming up in our industry.”



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MERCHANDISE MATRIX

don't produce enough sales to make it worthwhile. Outlet stores that replace accessories with upholstery, find that sales have gone up dramatically, as much as 25 percent. It reduces clutter and they avoid having items that sit around for years and look dated.

Upholstery can be piled up three high against a wall, like Ashley is doing now, and it can be priced sharply in an outlet store because at least 50 percent of the business is in upholstery anyway. Smaller footprint stores need to be especially careful with editing their selections, and devote more floor space to the strongest sell-

ing categories to increase sales volume.

Rugs, pillows, lamps, and decorative objects of various kinds are often best placed into a boutique inside a designer store. When they start looking dated, perhaps once a year, they should be pushed out by holding a garage sale or moved to an outlet store for a period of time to free up space because it's bad business to have old accessories in a designer store.

In a regular, better-priced store, accessories tend to be seasonally driven. Green and red at Christmastime for example. So, their sales become seasonally driven. Space permitting, many retailers move them out into racks at the back of the store and bring them back in again the following year. They are window dressing, really, no more than five percent of total business and usually three percent.

Rugs are a different deal. They work well in outlet stores. And the higher-end store we designed for a furniture retailer includes 2000 square feet of designer rugs. They are using

designer celebrity branded collections that brings credibility to the rug design and selection based on the personality of the designer.

Conclusion

Every space allocation has to have a reason. Why did a visual merchandiser allocate a 15 foot by 12 foot space to some room sets but only 12 foot by 12 foot to others? Why are some areas under-performing when compared to industry averages? And, can this be improved by adjusting the floor space allocation or is something else going on? These decisions should be overseen at a corporate-team level based on strategic factors, not only by a visual merchandiser. That way a

"Outlet stores that replace accessories with upholstery find that sales have gone up dramatically, as much as 25 percent."



Space-saving bedroom on wall display at an Ashley store.

retailer may make errors, but at least they know why they made those decisions.

When you look at the percentage of space allocation, along with the return on investment by category and then track the number of sales per month in each category, it becomes possible to get your head around and adjust areas where business is performing well or under-performing.

About Martin Roberts: Martin Roberts is an internationally known designer and the President of Martin Roberts Design, LLC, an award-winning team of retail

consultants, architects, industrial, interior and graphic designers.

Martin Roberts Design has been a leading influence in guiding the home industry's visual merchandising, branding and re-branding concepts for which their expertise has placed them at the forefront of the retail design industry.

Over the past 50 years Martin has worked worldwide for many of the best-known brands from Cartier to Wal-Mart.

Martin Roberts Design employs an integrated design approach to developing and executing brand-focused retail solutions that meets the needs and goals of the

individual client DNA. Questions can be directed to Martin at martin@mrobertsdesign.com or call 212-365-4809.

"Every space allocation has to have a reason. Decisions should be overseen at a corporate-team level."



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CIFF: Innovation Driven - Design Inspired

The new age of Chinese furniture design begins at CIFF Guangzhou 2020, March 18-21

Preparations are underway for the 45th edition of CIFF, the most important furniture design event in China. "Innovation Driven, Design Inspired" is the new CIFF strategy, developed in collaboration with a team of excellent curators.

CIFF Guangzhou - Two Phases

CIFF Guangzhou 2020 will be held in two phases organized by product sectors: the first, from March 18-21 will be dedicated to home furniture, home-decor & home textiles, and outdoor and leisure furniture; the second from March 28-31, dedicated to office furniture, commercial furniture, hotel furniture and furniture machinery, components and raw materials.

In addition to being the biggest exhibition in the world for the furniture industry and the most important business platform dedicated to the promotion of Chinese companies in international markets, CIFF will devote more space to high level international brands in order to introduce innovative content, quality and design into the Chinese market. This confirms CIFF as the privileged hub for interchange between the Chinese and international furniture industry, as

well as the leading and effective gateway to the increasingly wealthy and sought-after Chinese furniture market.

The project to create an innovative exhibition with an international vision and a solid local basis, will promote the quality of "Design in China" and "Made in China". It will come to life starting at CIFF Guangzhou 2020. Further biennial developments have already been scheduled for 2021, 2023 and 2025.

Show Expansion & Curation

The first step will begin with the construction of a 50,000-square meter space dedicated to original Chinese home furniture design and the designation of an entire Office Show pavilion devoted to the latest trends in office furniture design. In addition, more space will be reserved for international brands with the goal of introducing an increasing amount of innovative content and giving attention to global trends.

A team of high profile curators, composed of Wen Hao, Hou Zhengguang, Song Tao and Frank Chou will select companies that invest in design and creativity with the aim of consolidating CIFF Guangzhou as the event dedicated to global trends in the furniture industry.

Design & Home Furnishings Events

During the first phase of CIFF Guangzhou, dedicated to home furnishings, the curators will select and invite design companies and designers to participate in the "China Furniture Designers 10-years Exhibition". The event, organized in pavilion 3.2, "Creative Hall", will be full of design and trend content, touching on technical and innovative aspects without neglecting commercial and ethical issues such as environmental sustainability.

With this new project, CIFF continues to innovate the exhibition concept, working alongside the furniture industry in order to respond to new needs and to bring additional benefits to exhibitors and visitors.

The optimization of CIFF's exhibition layout, and the organization of design events rich in content and inspiration include the New Arrivals of Home Furnishing Brands, Parallel Space Exhibition, Design Dream Show, Office Theme Pavilion, China Interiors & Decorations Conference, and the Global Garden Lifestyle Festival. Information and catering services within the exhibition complex have been upgraded, and an exceptional range of hotels



CIFF is a privileged hub for interchange between the Chinese and international furniture industry, as well as the leading and effective gateway to the increasingly wealthy and sought-after Chinese furniture market.



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18-21 March 2020
Home Furniture

PAZHOU

28-31 March 2020
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See you at the 45th China International Furniture Fair in Guangzhou Pazhou, to catch global home furnishings trends and find new and exciting business opportunities!



and transport services, make CIFF an unmissable event for home furnishings industry operators world-wide.

See You at CIFF!

See you at the 45th China International Furniture Fair in Guangzhou Pazhou, to catch global home furnishings trends and find new and exciting business opportunities!

18-21 March 2020: home furniture, home decor & home textiles, outdoor & leisure furniture.

28-31 March 2020: office furniture, commercial furniture, hotel furniture and furniture machinery & raw material.

About CIFF: Founded in 1998, CIFF, China International Furniture Fair (Guangzhou/Shanghai) has been successfully held for 44 sessions and creates the world's most preferred one stop trading platform for product launch, domestic sales and export trade in the furnishing industry.

Both editions of CIFF, the March edition in Guangzhou Pazhou and the September edition in Shanghai Hongqiao, the two most dynamic commercial centers in China, host the home furniture, home decor & home textiles, outdoor & leisure, office furniture, commercial furniture, hotel furniture and furniture machinery and raw materials

sectors and, together, represent the most significant and influential exhibition system in all Asia.

The spring and autumn editions of CIFF bring together more than 6,000 world-leading brands respectively and host a total of more than 340,000 professional visitors from 200 countries and regions.

CIFF, known as "Asia's furniture sourcing center" and "the weatherglass of China's furniture industry", is a flagship platform among the exhibitions in China's furniture and home furnishing industries. Committed to realizing Chinese furniture dream, CIFF creates more value for exhibitors, visitors and the industry with enhanced quality and optimized exhibition experience!

CIFF Organizers: CIFF is hosted by China Foreign Trade Centre Group and organized by China Foreign Trade Guangzhou Exhibition General Corp (CFTE).

- China Foreign Trade Centre, a government-sponsored institution affiliated to Ministry of Commerce of China, is responsible for organizing China Import and Export Fair (also known as the Canton Fair). It operates two mega exhibition centers in Guangzhou and Shanghai.
- China Foreign Trade Centre Group, its affiliated business entity, mainly organizes large and specialized exhibitions.
- CFTE is a wholly owned subsidiary of China Foreign Trade Centre (Group). As

one of the leading industrial players, it completes tens of exhibitions in China and overseas annually, covering a gross space of more than 16.2 million square feet. CIFF and China Building Decorations Fair (CBD Fair) are well known brand exhibitions organized by CFTE.

CIFF Curators:

- Wen Hao: Wen Hao is the founder of China's Contemporary Furniture Art Brand "Haostyle" is the President, Associate Professor & Master Supervisor of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts Furniture Research Institute. Also, the Deputy Director of the China National Furniture Association Design Work Committee and Deputy Director of China National Interiors Decorations Association Furnishing Art Committee
- Hou Zhengguang: Master of Furniture Design, University of Buckingham, Design Director of "MoreLess" Creative Furniture Brand and Curator of the Shine Shanghai Concept Design Show and EAST Design Show. Also, the Deputy Director of China National Furniture Association Design Work Committee, and Vice Chairman of Shanghai Industrial Design Association.
- Song Tao: Founder of O-Gallery is also Chairman of the Beijing UCCA Design Committee and Convener for Poly International Auction.
- Frank Chou: Winner of the Special Mention Award of the SaloneSatellite Award. Winner of Rising Talent Awards China of Maison & Objet and Young Design Talent of the year for EDIDA.



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The state of sustainability in the home furnishings industry

by Susan Inglis, Executive Director Sustainable Furnishings Council

In spite of progress Sustainable Furnishings Council members have made, there is still much work to do to improve the state of sustainability in the home furnishings industry.

Today, Nearly 400 SFC Member companies are taking steps to make responsible choices in operations, production and product selection. They also advertise their sustainability policies, announcing them in consumer-facing media to make sure consumers are aware of available eco-friendly options. SFC Member companies include the Member seal with social media widgets on their home pages, and link to SFC landing pages, showing visitors a list of the actions they are taking to address one of the most important issues of our time.

The Sustainable Furnishings Council has two major initiatives that aim to address global warming and pollution issues.

1. What's It Made Of? This initiative is designed to help home furnishings industry suppliers, manufacturers, and brand marketers to take a close and necessary look at what the mate-

rials and products they specify are made of.

2. The Wood Furniture Scorecard: This program encourages furniture suppliers and retailers, large and small, to implement robust, responsible wood sourcing policies. When retailers have strong eco-friendly policies in place, they drive earth-safe wood sourcing practices throughout their supply chains. In so doing, they support healthy and growing forests which may be our greatest hope for reducing CO2 emissions.

Lost Opportunity

SFC member companies are actively engaged in the work of protecting customers by paying attention to their sourcing and chemical output. Many others in our industry, however, lag behind. It's our view at the SFC that managers who ignore this issue through inattention or short-term thinking will ultimately suffer consequences to the health of their own companies and the planet.

It's impossible to generalize about why such a large group of companies are sitting on the

sidelines. We believe that natural disasters and the resulting changes in consumer attitudes will light a fire under corporate managers. According to SFC's consumer research, 80 percent of furniture consumers are more aware of and concerned about global warming as a result of recent disasters.

Changing Attitudes

The good news is that across industries, business owners say they are more aware of the need for risk mitigation. The 2017 Atlantic Hurricane season caused more than \$250 billion in estimated damages and more than 250 deaths throughout the

"When retailers implement strong eco-friendly policies, they drive earth-safe wood sourcing practices throughout their supply chains."

Caribbean, the southern U.S., and southern Great Plains. The Tubbs, Atlas, Nuns, and Redwood Valley Fires in October 2017 caused 44 deaths, and their combined destruction represented the costliest wildfire event on record. This damage was eclipsed the following year by California's Camp Fire.

Responsibility

It's no secret that we are living through some of the hottest years ever recorded and are fast approaching a situation that will disrupt the lives of our children and grandchildren. Global industries, including ours, carry a huge responsibility to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

We must also do a better job as well of taking responsibility for harmful pollutants such as volatile organic compounds and others

that still find their way into our customers' air and water.

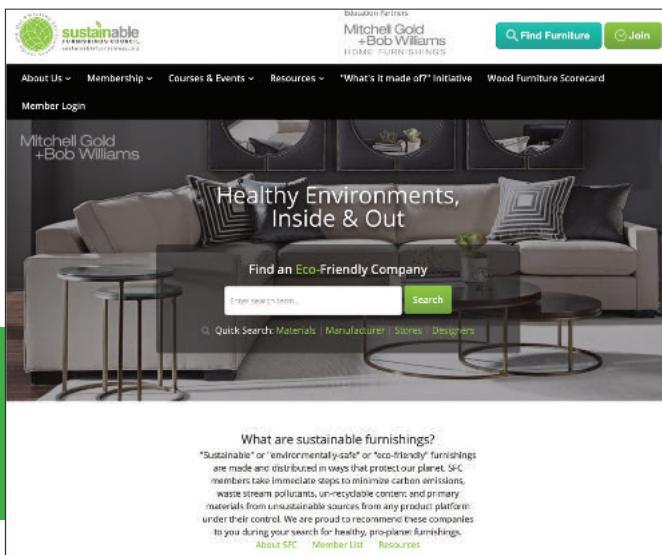
Join SFC at High Point

This fall, Cisco Brothers, a company that earned the highest score among all those assessed on SFC's Wood Furniture Scorecard will host a panel discussion on this topic during High Point Market, Saturday, October 19th at 5pm. For more information on this event, call 252-368-1098 or email susan@sustainablefurnishings.org

When furnishings companies care about sustainability and work to slow climate change, they generate positive change and goodwill in the communities they serve. And what happens at the grassroots level can influence critical environmental policy at state, regional, national, and global levels.

"When furnishings companies care about sustainability and work to slow climate change, they generate positive change and goodwill in the communities they serve."

About Susan Inglis: Susan Inglis is Executive Director of the Sustainable Furnishings Council, and resident expert with the organization she helped found in 2006. She has led SFC to work with industry leaders to establish criteria to gauge the sustainability of furniture products and practices; develop programs for educating all sectors of the industry; and attract hundreds of companies to membership. For more information call 252-368-1098 or email susan@sustainablefurnishings.org



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

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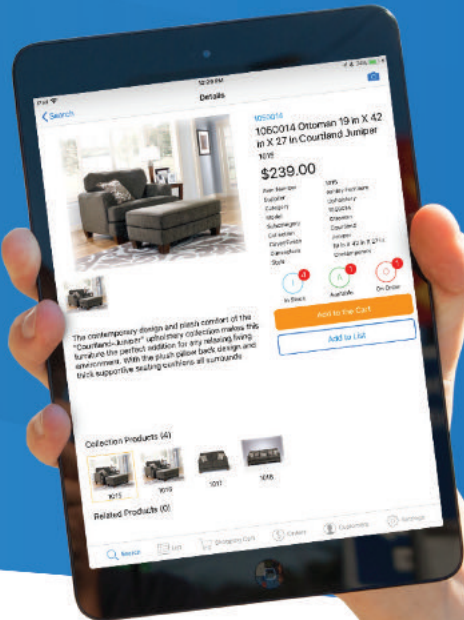


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