

VOLUME 150 NO. 3 SPRING 2020

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Powerful Family Product Reporting
COVID-19 Business Checklist
Retailing: Roby's Model For Community Service

what do we do now?



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COVER: This generously scaled sofa from Craftmaster has a modern look with marshmallow soft comfort. Plush, blend down seating and a lower seat height create a feeling of ease. Featured are loose back pillows and French seaming plus a wide, low track arm. For more information see page 12 in this issue or visit <https://www.cmfurniture.com>

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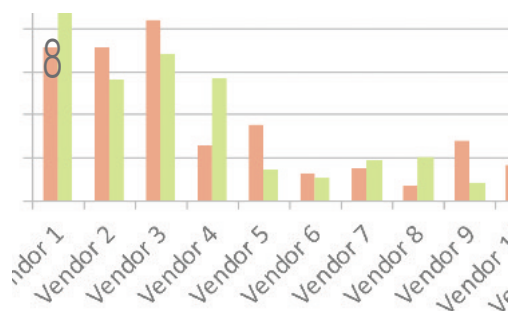
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A large, dark brown leather sectional sofa is the central focus, positioned in a modern living room. The sofa has a rich, textured leather finish and deep, tufted cushions. Behind it, a large window offers a view of a city skyline with several tall skyscrapers. On the windowsill, there are decorative items including a potted plant, a vase of yellow flowers, and a round, ornate clock. In the foreground, a glass coffee table holds a silver tray with three crystal decanters. The room has a light-colored, patterned rug and a textured wall.

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Patience and a Bit of Luck

By the time my grandfather Sandy Bienenstock joined Furniture World in 1922 the 1918 influenza pandemic had receded to memory. Somewhere between 20 and 100 million died worldwide (nearly 700,000 in the US) — a terrible loss.

It's humbling that over 100 years later not much has changed in the ways we've responded to the current pandemic. The primary strategy employed — social distancing — is the same as in 1918. The political response to COVID-19 across the globe has followed a similar trajectory. In 1917, California Senator Hiram Johnson repeated the often-quoted observation that "The first casualty when war comes is truth." Denials and wishful thinking always lead. But in times like these, everyone eventually comes to understand that we will be in a mess for some time.

Conditions change, but human nature stays more or less the same. That is a cause for optimism. People are resilient and those of us in the furniture industry perhaps more than most.

I invite you to digest the topical information in this edition as well as peruse current news and useful articles that can be found on the www.furninfo.com website in the coming weeks. Editorial features written by some of the best minds in our industry will help you to respond to fast-moving events and position your businesses for future success.

Providing useful content to the furnishings retailers in both prosperous and difficult times is what Furniture World has done successfully for the past 150 years.

I wish you patience and a bit of luck as you navigate your businesses and lives. If you have experiences and strategies to share, or information you've uncovered that will help others, please let me know. We will be glad to spread the word!

Regards,

Russell Bienenstock
Editorial Director/CEO
russ@furninfo.com

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THE POWER OF FAMILY PRODUCT REPORTING

by David McMahon with Jamie Winter

Here's how one retailer adopted product family reporting to seize control of its inventory and dramatically increase GMROI.

A couple years ago, and more recently as part of our Sigma Operations Performance Group, I visited the Furniture Mall of Kansas (FMOK). This fifth generation, five store retail operation provides a unique service. Like all successful retail organizations, the company's management is committed to continuous improvement. One takeaway from the visit to FMOK was how it uses the power of product family reporting. Family reporting combines the sales of all items in a collection (a family) together to determine if that family of products is earning its keep. For example, it's important to know if the sofa on your showroom floor is turning as shown, but, it is even more important to understand how well the "Family" that sofa belongs to is doing. The family might consist of the sofa plus matching loveseat, matching chair, special ordered colors and special ordered sectional. In this article we will look at family reporting in more detail.

Case Study: Z-Stores

After my first visit to FMOK, I consulted with a furniture retailer we will call Z-Stores which produced about \$20 million in sales volume. Z-Stores typically produced 45 percent gross margin and carries \$5 million in inventory on average. Their overall business is decent but not performing up to its potential for a number of reasons.

Its margins were stagnant. Z-Stores could not get above 45 percent even after experimenting with multiple pricing strategies. Their salespeople constantly complained about not having the product their customers wanted. They were often out of stock in their top selling items. This led to a constant state of disarray at Z-Stores' showrooms with too much dog-merchandise that did not sell despite aggressive markdowns. Eventually, Z-Stores held frequent massive liquidation-type events geared towards cleaning out old inventory. This presented a huge

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What Does Designer Michelle Workman...

say about High Point's Bienenstock Furniture Library?



“ The Bienenstock Library offers designers the opportunity to discover that tiny spark of inspiration that helps them create inspired furnishings and interior designs. Looking on social media, flipping through tiny images on a phone, can't compare to the touch, feel and scale of the original materials found here. You will be happy to spend some real time at the Bienenstock Library. ”

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"It is hard to imagine making critical merchandise and financial decisions on this type of manual reporting."

-Jamie Winter, co-owner of Furniture Mall of Kansas

This is what one wall at Z-Stores looked like before it started using family reporting.



challenge for Z-Stores regarding proper display. As well, cash flow during the year had extreme peaks and valleys due to fluctuating inventory levels.

An analysis of this situation pointed to poor business systems and processes as the main cause. Specifically, systemic problems with merchandise had produced unfavorable results. Z-Stores needed a plan to increase sales, maximize margins, and stabilize cash flow at higher levels.

Something had to be done to increase their GMROI, which was stalled at 1.8. The formula for

GMROI is Gross Margin Return on Inventory = $GM \$ / Inventory \$$. In this case, $\$20 \text{ Million} \times 45 \text{ percent GM} / \5 Million . That meant that a dollar of inventory invested produced a \$1.80 return. From that \$1.80, Z-Stores had to pay for all operating costs and produce profits to generate cash in the business.

Family Reporting Tactics

To actualize the desired outcome, product family reporting became Z-Stores' change engine. Here is a summary of the tactics used.

Tactic #1: Understand and implement the methodology of "Family Reporting."

In retail, effective product line-up management is where all merchandising needs to start. Before family reporting, Z-Stores had lists of items and miscellaneous pictures posted all over their office walls. Management believed that this system helped them to understand which items were selling, whether they had any in-stock or on-order, what it looked like, and where it was displayed. Also, which items were not selling and needed to be dropped. They constantly battled

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"Constant review of the stock levels and rates of sale for the most important families allowed for a smoother flow of merchandise and fewer stock-outs."

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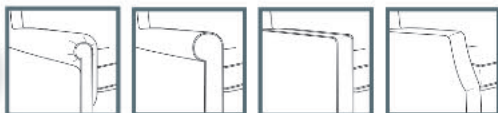
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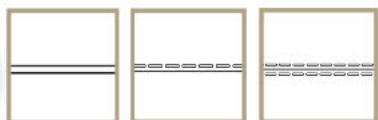
1
Choose
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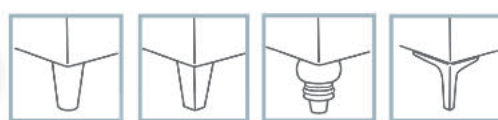
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FAMILY PRODUCT REPORTING

with how many of these items were being special ordered and which inventory SKUs those sales were coming from.

Commenting on the malfunctioning system at stores similar to Z-Stores, Jamie Winter, co-owner of Furniture Mall of Kansas said, "Special orders can be a significant portion of a store's business but matching a special order back to the exact group on the showroom floor that generated the special order can be challenging."

See the image on the previous page of what one wall at Z-Stores looked like before family reporting. Jamie stated, "It is hard to imagine making critical merchandise and

financial decisions on this type of manual reporting."

Enter Family Reporting

As mentioned previously, family reporting is the systematic grouping of items with like-frames together. For example, Z-Stores offered an upholstery collection of items called the Napa Collection, shown on the retail floor as sofa model #500-01 Fabric Y, loveseat model #500-02 Fabric X, chair model #500-03 Fabric S, ottoman model #500-04 Fabric Y, and several other items. The Napa Collection was customizable, with any item in the collection available in numerous fabric

colors, grades and add-on options. Z-Stores could only show a few of the thousands of available configurations of the Napa Collection on their floor at any given time. Their management software system included a SKU for any item in this collection displayed or carried for stock. Since it was impossible to create SKUs for all the thousands of possible permutations and combinations, salespeople used miscellaneous SKUs whenever customers wished to customize orders, which was often.

Z-Stores came to realize that what really matters for the purpose of inventory management is how the family or group of items in the Napa

Table #1: Automated Family Report Sorted by 120D Margin

Picture	Family	120 Day Sales	120 Day Margin	120 Day Margin %	Store 1 Quantity Sold Per Month	Store 2 Quantity Sold Per Month	Store 1 On Floor Quantity	Store 2 On Floor Quantity	Warehouse Quantity
	ENG 2222	\$51,912	\$24,934	48.0%	7.3	6.0	7	7	20
	FLE 1234	\$33,459	\$15,273	45.6%	2.5	5.0	5	7	17
	ASH 2323	\$17,251	\$7,829	45.4%	3.0	8.0	4	4	14
	ASH 2939	\$16,864	\$6,516	38.6%	3.5	4.3	4	4	5

Summary chart with important information such as product snapshot, sales, margin dollars, margin percent, and quantities in the stores and DC.



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and other collections performed. "Although the specific configuration and color combination on the sales floor may not sell very often," continued Jamie Winter, at Furniture Mall of Kansas, "if it is generating significant special orders in different fabrics and different configurations, the family is working and earning it's spot on the floor. If a family produces a bigger proportion of revenue

at a decent margin with the appropriate quantities, it naturally yields a higher return on investment." Those families that are productive deserve floor space. Table #1 shows a sample of Z-Stores' data in the type of automated family report format used by Furniture Mall of Kansas, summarized with important information such as product snapshot, sales, margin dollars, margin per-

cent, and quantities in stores and their DC.

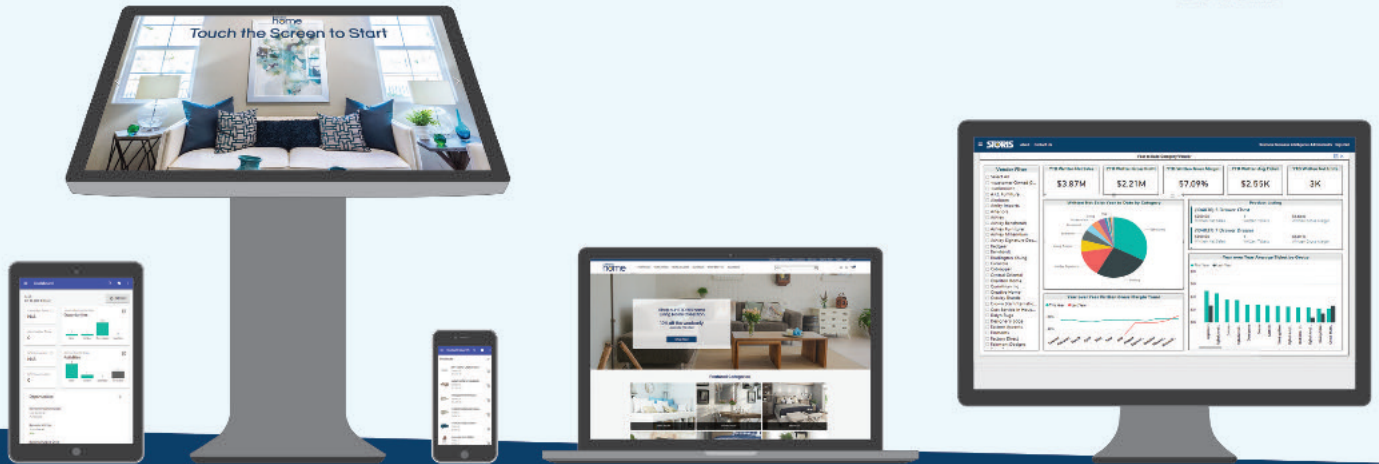
Table #2 shows a sample list of items in the Napa Collection family in it's expanded form. As you can see, there are a significant amount

Sample report (below) shows items in the Napa Collection family in it's expanded form. As you can see, there are a significant amount of special orders contributing to total sales.

Table #2: Best Sellers by Family - Detail Report

Picture	Family	Item ID	Description	Description 2	120 Day Sales	120 Day Margin	120 Day Margin %	Store 1 Quantity Sold Per Month	Store 2 Quantity Sold Per Month	Store 1 On Floor	Store 2 On Floor	Warehouse Qty
	ENG 222	*LRU ENG	ENG 2222 Special Order 1	FAB:634-70 EARTH	\$1,300	\$773	59.5%	0.3				
				FAB:967-02 PIL: (2) 508-01!!!	\$1,300	\$773	59.5%		0.3	5	7	17
				FAB: 143-01, PIL: 458-70 Lapis, F:F	\$1,300	\$773	59.5%	0.3		4	4	14
				FAB: 645-02 PIL: 689-80 FN: FLORENT	\$1,300	\$773	59.5%		0.3	4	4	5
				FAB: 143-01 PIL: 065-20	\$1,300	\$682	52.4%	0.3				
				FAB: 065-01; FIN: F	\$1,950	\$608	31.2%	0.5				
				FAB: 41472 PIL: 85442	\$1,170	\$575	49.2%	0.3				
				FAB: 119-70 PIL: 700-80 (2)	\$975	\$425	43.6%	0.3				
			ENG 2222 Special Order 2	FAB: 424-72 PIL: 217-90 FIN: D	\$1,500	\$862	57.4%		0.3			
				FAB: 634-01 FIN: R 2PHIL: 089-80	\$1,300	\$773	59.5%	0.3				
			ENG 2222 Special Order 3	FAB: 818-02. PIL 228-60 (2)	\$1,800	\$1,221	67.8%	0.3				
			ENG 2222 LAF LOVESEAT	FAB: 296-80 PIL: 228-2 FIN: F	\$1,385	\$617	44.6%		0.5		1	1
			ENG 2222 34 RAF CORNER SOFA	FAB: 296-80 PIL: 228-2 FIN: F	\$1,959	\$873	44.6%		0.5	1	1	
			ENG 2222 34 RAF CORNER SOFA	FAB: 296-80 PIL: 506-40 FIN: F	\$2,620	\$1,532	58.5%		0.5	1	1	4
			ENG 2222 27 LAF LOVESEAT	FAB: 296-80 PIL: 506-40 FIN: F	\$1,443	\$624	43.3%		0.5	1	1	4

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"The time for a non-producing family

to be dropped from the line-up was shortened allowing for faster testing of new merchandise."

of special orders contributing to total sales based upon the few items actually shown on the showroom sales floor.

Tactic #2: Give more floor space to vendors with more productive families.

Family reporting needs to be dynamically connected to a data-

"In Table #3, vendor numbers one and four are OVER-performing, while vendor numbers two, three and five are UNDER-performing."

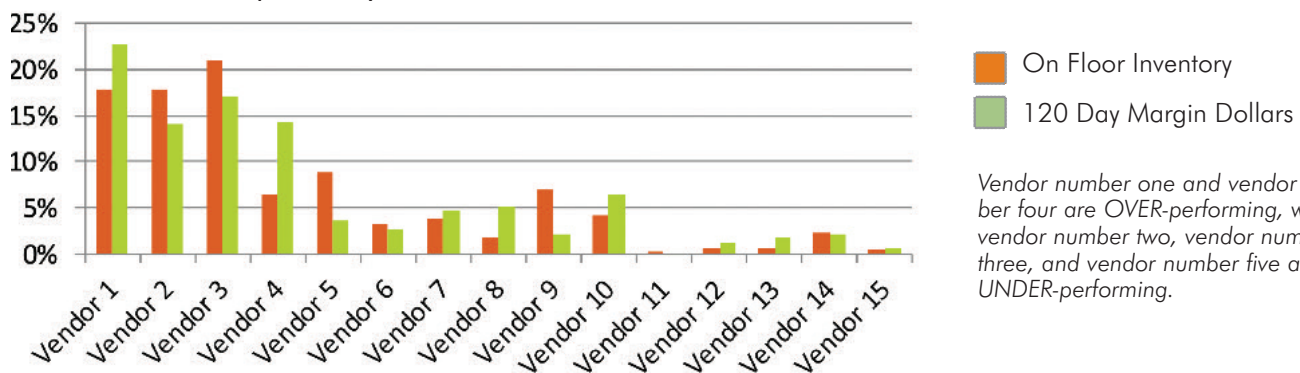
base so real-time information is automatically compiled. Z-Stores' old reporting system created a time-lag between the re-printing and re-posting. It was always out of date. By updating their systems and moving to family reporting they were able to access their data for timely decision support.

Jamie Winter explains, "Once you have all this information compiled real-time and automatically, it becomes a fantastic tool to look at return on investment by category, by vendor, and then, by family." After switching to family reporting Z-Stores was able to easily review the amount of floor space allocated to vendor lines. Wisely, they chose to expand the lines that generated higher returns. This helped them to leverage the Pareto 80/20 principal, which states that the majority of results are produced by the minority of inputs. Giving more valu-

able space to best selling families of goods makes excellent business sense.

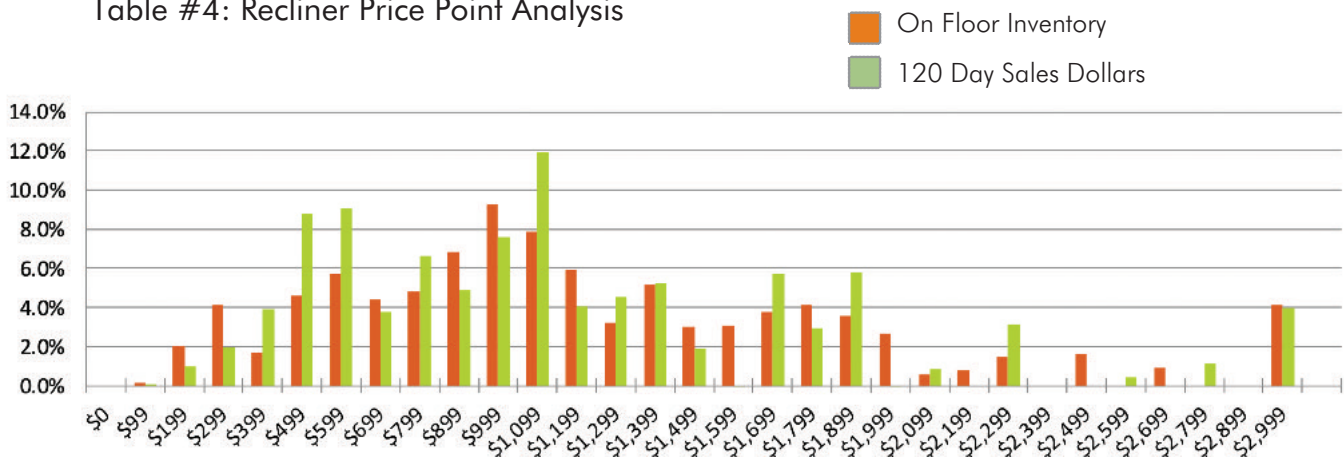
Table #3 shows a graphical tool format used by Furniture Mall of Kansas to determine which vendors are earning their keep on the floor and which are not. The orange bar represents the percentage of stationary upholstery located on the showroom floor by vendor. The green bar represents the percentage of margin dollars returned for that vendor. This presentation provides a highly visual analysis that facilitates retail decision making regarding floor space allocation for each vendor. Any vendor that has a green bar larger than the orange bar represents a vendor that is OVER-performing as the return is higher than the investment. Note that in Table #3, vendors number one and four are OVER-performing, while vendors number two, three and five are UNDER-performing.

Table #3: Upholstery Vendor Return on Investment



Vendor number one and vendor number four are OVER-performing, while vendor number two, vendor number three, and vendor number five are UNDER-performing.

Table #4: Recliner Price Point Analysis



Jamie said, "It becomes extremely obvious to identify which vendors you should expand and which you should shrink or eliminate that are just not earning their keep on the floor."

Tactic #3: Perform price point analysis to provide more options for customers.

With expanded family reporting at Z-Stores, it became easier to review and compare how display items were priced. This allowed them to provide customers with a wider variety of price/value options. Z-Stores could more easily identify opportunities to fill gaps in their line-up by shifting prices or selectively buying for a gap. This tactic enabled Z-Stores to realize previously untapped sales and margin dollars.

Furniture Mall of Kansas performs a price point analysis (similar to the vendor analysis in Table #3) that looks at their investment on the showroom floor vs. sales by price point. In Table #4, the orange bar represents the percent of inventory investment on the showroom floor by price point for the recliner category. The green bar represents the percent of sales by price point. By looking at orange vs. green bars,

it's easy to see that the \$1,199 price point is UNDER-performing while the \$599 and \$1,099 price points are OVER-performing.

Tactic #4: Focus on top family items when re-buying stock.

Top turning items from top families at Z-Stores are now given priority when re-buying for stock. Non-special order items that customers purchase as displayed on the floor provide quick revenue when the supply chain performs well. Focusing closely on the families that produce margin dollars makes this process at Z-Stores more efficient because buyers do not have to look through pages of paper and hundreds of items. Constant review of the stock levels and rates of sale for the most important families allows for a smoother flow of merchandise and fewer stock-outs.

Tactic #5: Ensure top-quality display processes.

Prior to looking at merchandise in family groupings, Z-Stores often had best-seller holes in one or more of their showrooms. This meant that the revenue normally produced from certain collections went unrealized. Depending on the time period,

"By looking at orange vs. green bars, it's easy to see that the \$1,199 Price Point is UNDER-performing while the \$599 and \$1,099 Price Points are OVER-performing."

this could equate to thousands of dollars in lost sales from one collection alone. For example, the Napa Collection at Z-sales normally produced \$50,000 during a 120-day period. They had a 30-day period of no display for this collection before they instituted family reporting. The cost of this missed opportunity was \$416 per day or \$12,500 for the 30-day period. Now that they review showroom display quantities on the family report, the chance of stock-outs has become much less likely.

In addition, all this new information enables Z-Sales' merchandiser

FAMILY PRODUCT REPORTING

to increase her focus on the most important groups when doing floor-walks. Even though all collections should be displayed impeccably, the priority for display review should be top family collections first, followed by new product showings.

Tactic #6: *Closeout non-producing families faster.*

Merchandise line-ups always have a component of dog merchandise. Reviewing and reporting by family grouping enables Z-Stores to take a look at their bottom family producers. Pricing markdowns can be quickly triggered by a scan during a floor walk or report review daily or weekly, rather than monthly. In this way, the time for a non-producing family to be dropped from the line-up has been shortened, allowing for faster testing of new merchandise. Markdowns have become much more manageable as well.

Just because a family overall is producing top numbers, it does not mean that all SKUs in the family are selling. For example, if a collection's loveseat has low sales compared with the rest of the family, that loveseat might be closed out or replaced with a different fabric option.

Conclusion

We've reviewed just a few of the

advantages produced from improving processes and procedures using the power of family reporting. Looking at your merchandise in this way is an effective way of getting your arms around the ever-changing life cycles of inventory.

Fast forward to the current time: Z-Stores grew same store sales to \$25 million, inventory grew to \$5.3 million, gross margin grew to 48 percent and GMROI grew from \$1.8 to \$2.26. The switch to family methodology, new reporting processes and procedure was a success.

Although Z-Stores did improve considerably, their journey is just beginning. Operations like the Furniture Mall of Kansas and other great organizations in the performance groups I lead understand that real success is never-ending. To be effective, continual improvement practices should be conducted during the daily course of doing business. There will always be one family collection that is the hottest thing, and another family that falls from grace. Pay close attention, develop good processes and SOP's, spot changes quickly, and take decisive actions.

About Jamie Winter: Jamie Winter is co-owner of Furniture Mall of Kansas and Tools2Win (www.tools2winretail.com) a company that pro-

vides Purpose-built reporting tools. Please contact Jamie Winter at jamiew@furnituremallofkansas.com or bdodge@Tools2WinRetail.com for more information.

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A word on software: Family and collection reporting should be configurable in most industry management software platforms such as those provided by PROFITsystems, Storis, Myriad, Furniture Wizard, Genesis and others. Purpose-built reporting tool suites that are integrated with the various platforms are available through Tools2Win and Furniture First's Tools2BFirst programs.



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Corey Damen Jenkins

by Melody Doering

Designer
Corey
Damen
Jenkins
literally knocked
on 779 doors
before one opened.
He shares his
experience about
persistence,
emerging design
trends and his
observations about
retail sales.

Featured this month in Furniture World's Design and Designer series is acclaimed designer Corey Damen Jenkins. Located in Birmingham, MI (north of metro-Detroit), and New York City, Corey has designed for both commercial and residential spaces. Not limiting himself to any one design aesthetic, Corey's use of color, patterns, layering, and well-appointed materials results in homes that are "always classic, livable and without an expiration date."

Mr. Jenkins has been featured in House Beautiful, Traditional Home, Vanity Fair, and Elle Decor, to name only a few. Besides winning HGTV's Showhouse Showdown, he has earned numerous industry honors. Corey designed for the Kips Bay Decorator Show House in 2019, and has recently appeared as a guest designer on The Rachael Ray Show.

Furniture World began by asking Corey about breaking into interior design.

"I'm from Detroit, a great comeback city, a phoenix that has risen from the ashes. There's a saying here that Detroit hustles harder. As the wellspring of the North American automotive industry, when the recession hit in 2007, Michigan was the first to really suffer.

"It was around that time that I lost my nearly 10-year career working for the automotive Big Three doing commercial design. Back then it was

basically a nine-to-five job. I think of it like being a hamster on a wheel – like the classic "9 to 5" song by Dolly Parton.

"At that time here in Detroit, people believed that they would work with one company until retirement. At age 31 this was a heart-rending experience for me and many others who had the rug pulled out from under us."

Unexpected Career Change

"My dad was CFO for a major banking enterprise; my mother and brothers are also in the financial services business. I think my dad only saw one pathway to success, especially for men of color. It was either working on the line in the automotive industry or getting an office job. The idea being an artist, a fashion designer or interior designer, was completely outside the realm of conversation for him. My family thought I was crazy.

"I applied for dozens of jobs, but at that time, literally thousands of people were vying for one job. So, after not getting any of them, I decided it was the time to take control of my own destiny by launching a design firm.

"First, I developed an interior design presentation and created a website on GoDaddy. Then, I stepped back and waited for the phone to

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"That's the real lesson. If you are a designer or sell furniture at retail, that's how the universe works. You have to hustle."

ring. It didn't!

"Collecting unemployment meant having to let go of my fancy condo, beautiful green Volvo sedan and the luxury of healthy shopping at Whole Foods. I decided to go door-to-door looking for my first clients in the suburbs of metro Detroit where high-wealth individuals had large homes.

"Not wanting to drive my old Honda Accord into wealthy, gated communities, I made a deal with the local Enterprise Rent-A-Car to rent me the same car every single time I went looking for clients. They agreed to rent me a black Chrysler 200 sedan. I drove into gated communities in the dead of winter — snow

boots, trench coat, scarf, and toting a satchel full of sketches and color boards."

"Instant" Success

"Over several months I knocked on a total of 779 doors. People would come to the door, look out the peephole and then walk away. If the opportunity to identify myself arose, I would say, 'My name is Corey Damen Jenkins. I'm an interior designer and decorator. Are you in need of interior design services today?' That was my simple spiel. Ninety-five percent of the time peo-

Jenkins says the Neo-Trad design trend features designs that "still have clean, straight lines with traditional details that are less fussy."





Corey Damen Jenkins

ple either did not answer or said they weren't interested.

"Being turned away, having doors slammed in your face, getting laughed off the construction sites after losing your job does something to your emotional enamel. But in December of 2009, I finally got a warm response. A couple invited me into their home, and offered me hot chocolate and cookies. When people offer hospitality, it's a sign that they look at you as a potential collaborator, possibly even a friend. This couple decided to give me a shot, and proposed a few hundred

grand to get started. I played it cool saying, 'Yes, that's quite acceptable. I'm sure that if we need more, we can discuss that later.'

"When the job was finished, photographed, and uploaded to my little GoDaddy.com website, about two weeks later HGTV contacted me to do my first television show. My first big break came just that quickly.

"When I'm a guest instructor at design schools like Parsons, I tell students that all the pomp and circumstance and the press and accolades are wonderful. But none of that would have happened if I had not first knocked on 779 doors. That's the real lesson. If you are a designer or sell furniture at retail, that's how the universe works. You have to hustle."

Hustle and Hospitality

"When I walk into an average furniture store, first I look to see if their designs are in step with where the industry is going, and if they look like they are interested in forging strong relationships with members of the design community.

"Then I look for the hospitality. Too many times when I enter a manufacturer's showroom in High Point or a retail furniture store, nobody

bothers to provide a proper greeting or offer help. If it doesn't happen in the first five minutes, I'm gone.

"When shoppers feel that they are not worth acknowledging, it comes across as just plain rude. It's understandable that salespeople get caught up in the rat race, but if they forget that they're in a customer service position, don't hustle, or have trouble focusing on potential customers, it's an automatic turnoff for people – and one of my biggest peeves. Just about everyone is pleased to be asked if they need help and maybe offered a cup of coffee.

"I like to shop at stores that make their retail environments hospitable, warm and inviting. Displays should be laid out in an attractive way that's easy to absorb and easy for people who may not have design training to find their way around and make decisions. That goes a long way towards how any retailer is perceived as a brand."

That Goes for Websites, Too

"The same rules apply to retail websites. They have to be laid out so that they are easy to navigate, with products that can be found and purchased quickly.

"I think we're going to see the pendulum swing back more towards what I call neo-traditional. It's a clean look with a bit more embellishment. It's also been called Minimalist-Trad."

"Virtually 100 percent

of the people who fill out our client questionnaires say they want to incorporate more color and pattern in their homes. Yet they are terrified of adding it by themselves."

"People are in a hurry; they're trying to get through their day. Often retail furnishings websites are not equipped with enough key searchable words to find a specific product, even though that product is probably there. Retailers need to make sure designers and retail customers can more easily find items and information."

Collaboration With the Design Community

"When interior designers visit furniture shows, they are looking for ways to grow their businesses. To do that, obviously they have to be able to make a profit. The same is true

when designers shop online or at local retail furniture stores.

The question for retailers who want to do business with the design community is how to develop programs that are a win-win for the store, designers, and the clients who appreciate products that are not mass produced or available everywhere."

"A retail space that is beautifully outfitted in emerald green, sapphire blue and gold will attract attention," says Jenkins. "Even if most customers will ultimately play it safe with neutrals, it's worth taking risks with presentation." Pictured below is a Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, home library designed by Jenkins, courtesy of Traditional Home/Meredith Corporation.

How Will Customers Vote?

"Furniture retailers are like politicians running for office. Politicians benefit from understanding the needs of their constituents. They take polls. They talk to supporters and others in their communities face-to-face.

"Without good information, sales associates are not in a great position to service their customers' needs or give them what they want.

"There is a lot to be said for asking shoppers point-blank questions and for developing questionnaires to collect information. Questions might include, do you have a personal or favorite decorative style? Favorite colors? What kind of budget are you working with? Who do you look to for design inspiration? What furniture or fashion websites have you visited recently? Do you look to Pinterest or Instagram for design ideas? How might you describe your lifestyle?

"If you ask these questions often enough, you start to get a sense of where your shoppers' general ideas and aspirations lie."



Color Trends

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"Furniture retailers are like politicians running for office. Politicians benefit from understanding the needs of their constituents. They take polls. They talk to supporters and the others in their communities face-to-face."

Gathering Data

"Making house calls is one of the most effective ways to quickly understand potential clients' lifestyles, family situations, design preferences, and items needing replacing.

"I've found that there's often a herd mentality that develops in certain communities based on word of mouth and what neighbors, friends and family are thinking about in terms of design and furnishings. For example, people who live in a certain area may favor shabby chic, bohemian, traditional or mid-century modern.

"Collecting and sharing this data within retail organizations can be helpful to designers as well as retailers. Both groups need to better answer these two important questions: what do my customers need; and, what are they likely to vote for with their wallets. Just like running for political office — now you're getting votes because your platform reflects the constituents in the area you serve. It's a very simple science."

Generational Trends

"There are definitely changes in consuming and buying behaviors among the generations.

"Although a lot of young people I work with in their 30s and 40s

are financially well off, they're still concerned about the costs of raising children, funding their 401Ks, and saving for tuition.

"They don't have the same mindset as their parents. They may not want to purchase a high-end Baker sofa, even though that's probably a better long-term investment. Instead they want to hit up an online retailer and get a sofa for 300 bucks. It serves their purpose for the short-term, but it will need to be replaced in a couple of years. They seem to be okay with that.

"Our industry needs to help the younger generation understand and appreciate the value of quality furniture. There's an opportunity for designers and retail design associates to convince them to repair and recover their grandmother's wonderful old sofa. Customers will benefit by having a cool vintage item, a comfortable and sustainable investment. They will also save money that can be used to purchase new furniture and accessory items from quality retailers."

Usage Trends

"More of my clients are asking for casual dining spaces attached to kitchens. The days of families having formal dinners at six o'clock when the kids get home from school are



Pictured above is a room Jenkins designed for the Kips Bay Show House in New York City benefiting the Kips Bay Boys & Girls Club. It's a charity he supports that raises funds for education, and provides other resources for about 10,000 inner city children. He converted a formal "gentleman's study" into a ladies library featuring a dramatic mural on the ceiling, modern furnishings by Kravet and a snow leopard print rug from Stark.

over. Great dining room spaces are not getting used at all. They're just sitting there collecting dust except on Christmas or Thanksgiving.

"My clients are also choosing to invest much more in their exterior spaces. They are looking for competitively priced outdoor furniture with gorgeous, colorful fabric choices. They want pattern as well — basically the same personalized options they have for interior spaces, including nice rugs and fabrics. That's an opportunity for many retailers.

"Consumers are also looking for ways to make their homes smarter with USB drive outlets everywhere. Clients are asking us for places to charge devices in the bedroom, the bathroom, and in their theater seat-



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ing. There are lots of different ways the components of technology are advancing the conversation about how we furnish the home.

"We're also designing a lot of multipurpose spaces these days, where children can do homework as well as play, work on puzzles, or wrap gifts for the holidays. These rooms incorporate storage to put away all of that gift-wrapping paper, board games and toys. I expect that furniture retailers who have not already adjusted their floor space allocations to include multi-functional furniture and storage will be negatively impacted going forward."

Minimal or Maximal?

"Ten years ago the pendulum

had swung very hard toward a mid-century modern look. It's been said that for every action there's an equal and opposite reaction; I think we're going to see the pendulum swing back more towards what I call neo-traditional. It's a clean look with a bit more embellishment. It's also been called Minimalist-Trad.

"Furniture designs will celebrate clean, straight lines with traditional details that are less fussy.

"I adore Mario Buatta's work, but we are still years away from seeing those types of designs reappear in a different vernacular. I don't think we're ready to see full-blown maximalist design coming back in a big way yet.

"Pattern is used judiciously in my work. Many of my more mature clients, who tend to prefer a traditional

design approach, have asked me to restrict pattern play to accent pillows or window treatment trim, versus wrapping the entire sofa in a bold patterned fabric. My younger clients also appreciate pattern, but they are more likely to incorporate it into table-top accessories, or a lamp shade versus a larger investment."

Color Trends

"Many retailers have a monochromatic approach to product display. For Restoration Hardware this is part

"More of my clients are asking for casual dining spaces attached to kitchens," says Jenkins. "The days of families having formal dinner at six o'clock when he kids get home from school are over." Pictured below is a breakfast nook Jenkins designed in a Bloomfield Hills, Michigan home.

Dining Trends



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"I expect that furniture retailers who have not already adjusted their floor space allocations to include multi-functional furniture and storage will be negatively impacted going forward."

of their corporate branding - the grays, whites and earth tones. It's a neutral story that works for them. Other retailers and manufacturers have created their own version of that.

"But many of my clients reside in areas where it is dreary outside for a large portion of the year - in the greater New York area, Michigan, Minneapolis and Toronto. They don't want gray. They want vibrant color, jewel tones and pattern. The pendulum is starting to swing, forcing a lot of retailers to become a bit more individualized in their approach when it comes to how they style their showrooms and their

websites.

"Fashion and interior design are tied together, with trends in fashion tending to lead the way. So, it's important to look to the fashion runway. I keep an eye on Valentino, Elie Saab, and Jean Paul Gaultier. The current color palettes seen there now reflect vibrant color, with blushes, pinks and golds. These trends will eventually seep into interior design and dominate one or two years from now."

Color is Nothing to Fear

"Virtually 100 percent of the peo-

ple who fill out our client questionnaires say they want to incorporate more color and pattern in their homes. Yet they are terrified of adding it themselves; they don't know where to start or when to stop. That's why they hire designers and why they visit stores to get ideas. Here is a consumer need we in the furniture industry can fulfill.

"Many sports teams use bold, vibrant color palettes. If you are a fan of the NBA or NFL, ask yourself why the uniforms are so colorful. The answer is that it focuses spectator attention on the playing field in a way that an all-white uniform or an all-gray uniform just can't. Here in Detroit, the Lions are outfitted in silver and Cobalt blue. It doesn't help us win, but it does help the fans focus on the game. Likewise, getting shoppers to spend more time in stores in a focused way is a big part of playing the retail game.

"Speaking practically, since just about everyone loves some shade of green or blue, consider incorporating vibrant jewel tones to arrest the eye in a way that white and gray simply does not. Neutrals can be the supporting actors in displays. A

Multi-Function

"We're also designing a lot of multipurpose spaces these days," says Jenkins. "Children can do homework as well as play, work on puzzles or wrap gifts for the holidays." Pictured is a loft lounge he designed for adolescents to enjoy such activities.



Corey Damen Jenkins

retail space that is beautifully outfitted in emerald green, sapphire blue and gold will attract attention.

"Even if most customers will ultimately play it safe with neutrals, it's worth taking risks with presentation. It's about knocking on those doors not knowing who is going to answer but knowing that you are putting forth an eye-catching statement that's different from your competitors."

Where To Find Great Ideas

"In order to get display ideas, consider following the fashion runway, or the Met fashion show with its beautiful people in amazing, over-the-top costumes that you and I probably wouldn't wear. The purpose is to push the imagination and appeal to the human senses.

"I subscribe to House Beautiful, Veranda, Traditional Home, Elle Decor, and Architectural Digest. These are industry leaders in showing what can be done to push the envelope for interior design. Aside from staying focused on fashion, I look to nature and also ancient civilizations — the Greeks, Romans, Medo-Persians, and Egyptians. Their architecture and color choices are vibrant in a way that remains influential thousands of years later.

"For creative people and retailers, there are almost limitless sources of inspiration for buying and designing, including museums, outdoor spaces, historic sites and domestic and international travel."

One More Design Resource

"The Bienenstock Library in High Point, NC, is incredibly impressive. It's a resource that the design community at large needs to know about and take more advantage of. The building's architecture is fascinating and beautiful. More important, however, is what it contains — a bevy of information designers and decorators can take advantage of and benefit from.

"Designers often come to High Point Market to find better resources for clients and projects. Many times, the creative process starts with finding inspiration. The collection at the Library gives 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.

"The library has everything from the Chippendale experience, to Saarinen, and so much more under one roof. It's easily accessible for students, design enthusiasts, veterans and newbies who are coming up in the industry. I can't think of a better way to grow: as individuals and as a society, we benefit from learning from the past and engaging the present. That is what will dictate our future.

"As a furniture designer, I know that it's very difficult to reinvent the chair. There are certain things you just can't get around as far as the form and function of furniture. But if you look at what's been classically tested, remix it, tweak this, change

that, make it more useful for the present, and for the future, then you may be on to something. That's why this library can play a key role for designers who are looking for ways to make their clients' homes look their best."

Future Plans

"Besides my existing collections with Leathercraft and Hudson Valley Lighting, I have recently signed new deals with DownTown Company and Leftbank Art. I'm also planning to introduce an exciting textile, rug and wall covering collection with a premier fabric house in the near future. My first coffee table book is coming soon on the Rizzoli International publishing label. So, we are very busy."

"In order to get display ideas, consider following the fashion runway or the Met fashion show with its beautiful people in amazing, over-the-top costumes that you and I probably wouldn't wear."

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

by Joe Milevsky

Five positive steps your business can take to more effectively deal with the COVID-19 crisis.

1. Let customers know that you are doing everything you can to keep them safe.

Assuming that you have not been ordered to close your stores completely, or you have chosen to do so on your own for now, how do you convince your customers that your stores are safe?

First, take steps to make sure that your customers and employees are as safe as possible by following the CDC and other government guidelines. Be especially careful with elderly employees and even more so with those having pre-existing conditions.

Then, depending on your current situation, consider posting on social media, your website, and perhaps sending an email blast to your customer list a message such as the following.

Sample Note: *This is an unprecedented time. The safety and well-being of our customers, staff, family and friends is our top priority. As the coronavirus (COVID-19) affects your community, we want to share some immediate steps we have taken to keep those we come in contact with safe and healthy.*

Like many of the other emails I'm sure you have received, we are closely following the guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), state and local health organizations. We continue to receive the most up-to-date information and have taken the following actions:

While we take great pride in the cleanliness of our store every day, we have increased the emphasis on cleaning and disinfecting high-touch areas such as door handles, desks, phones and displays multiple times throughout the day.

We've instructed all employees to take precautionary health measures, including frequent hand-washing and staying home when sick.

We've instructed our delivery staff not to shake hands and to practice social distancing as appropriate.

Our staff has been empowered to share information via email, online chat and phone. We want you to shop from whatever environment you feel comfortable with, be that in-store or online.

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2. How to handle layoffs should it be necessary.

If you find it necessary to temporarily lay off employees, file unemployment insurance for them online if you can. Recently the system has been overwhelmed by the sheer volume of applications. Be aware that if you continue to pay people during this period, they may not be able to file for unemployment insurance in some states. Keep abreast of changes in state laws that may affect your business unemployment insurance account.

3. What should your hours be if you are not forced to close down?

In late March when this article was written, some furniture retailers had not seen a significant fall off in business, but going forward the overwhelming majority of furniture retailers will see a drop off. I suggest considering closing your store for a couple of days per week and even shorting your store hours as needed. All of this of course depends on the ever-changing regional, state, and

federal laws and regulations.

4. How do we weather the storm?

Take advantage of the slow down and forced time off to take an objective look at your company. Evaluate your systems and processes. Think about the tasks you've needed to do, but have procrastinated on, perhaps for years. Now may be a good time to build your infrastructure. Get input from your staff, your suppliers and reach out to industry organizations for assistance.

It may be advantageous for you to seek a business loan at this time. Investigate low- or no-interest government loans and others at very low interest rates and delayed start dates for repayment. Of course, you have to seek out lenders in your area to see what options are available. You may also want to see if you have business interruption insurance coverage. If so it may require some rapid action on your part.

5. What will happen when the threat subsides?

The week after 9-11 I visited a store in Arkansas that sold furniture, appliances, outdoor furniture, barbecues, and televisions. This client had a bank of televisions in his store tuned into the news, which of course was all about 9-11. The first thing I did was turn off every television. In times like these, should people visit

your store, it's because they want to make the best of a difficult situation, get on with their lives and perhaps buy products that will put smiles back on their faces. It's important to set the stage to help them do just that. After a terrible week post 9-11, this store had one of the best weeks in their history and finished out the month strong.

Dealing with the issues we are facing is extremely difficult for most of you, but this too shall pass.

More about Joe Milevsky: Joe Milevsky, CEO and founder of JRM Sales & Management, Inc., calls on his more than 40 years of industry experience to help hundreds of clients improve the performance of their companies and profit as a result of their business relationships with JRM. Before establishing JRM, Joe held various executive positions with several of the strongest companies in the retail furniture industry. He has authored numerous articles for industry trade publications and he is a regular speaker at national events for the Home Furnishings Association (HFA), Hearth Patio and Barbecue Association (HPBA), Nationwide Marketing Group, and various other buying groups as well as many other organizations both domestic and international.

Joe is available to field questions to help retailers deal with coronavirus related issues. He can be reached at 678-574-0937 or email joe@jrmsales-mgmt.com.

A man with glasses and a checkered shirt is standing in a warehouse, pointing at a tablet with a pen. The background shows shelves filled with boxes.

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lots to keep you up at night

by Gordon Hecht

Things you can do to respond when a large competitor goes out with a bang instead of a whimper.

Once the COVID-19 scare is in the past, I'm afraid that there will still be a lot of things to keep you awake at night. It wasn't that long ago that all we had to worry about in the retail world was making sure that our newspaper ad was on page three, the flowers on the box spring matched the flowers on the mattress, and that we knew what the store down the street was promoting.

Then the big chain stores came to town followed by big box stores selling our products. Next came magic 1-800 dial-in stores and shopping on that darn interwebby net thing. Scientists say that after an environmental disaster occurs, the rate of evolutionary change quickens. Retail, like the world itself, is in constant evolution.

Changing Retail Landscape

Once business returns to more or less normal, walk out the entrance of your store, look to the left and the right. Chances are good that you will see the changing landscape of brick and mortar retail right before your eyes.

Even in 2019, before COVID-19, 9,300 retail locations had been shuttered, with 2,600 more stores

already on the chopping block for 2020, including former industry leaders like Art Van. Before it all hit the fan you were probably thinking "Wow, I am really going to clean up after all of the dust settles!" And, most likely in the long term you'll need a giant Swiffer to collect all the dough you're going to make.

But before you can do that you are likely to see lots of Going Out of Business (GOB) sales. You've seen the yellow and black window posters, the sign walkers and the smashmouth TV ads claiming, "FINAL DAYS" (90+ of them) "SAVE UP TO 90%" (and more!) and "EVERYTHING MUST GO". It's like passing a car wreck on the freeway for your shoppers. They know it's a mess — but they just gotta look!

It's a sure bet that in the near-term shoppers are going to stay away from crowds no matter how good the deal is. But sooner or later, they will come back. And if they don't buy from you — then they will be out of the market for a year or more.

Say what you want about GOB companies — They know how to sell. Some will jack up the retail only to drop it down. I saw a mattress with a normal retail cost of about \$3K tagged at \$13,500 at

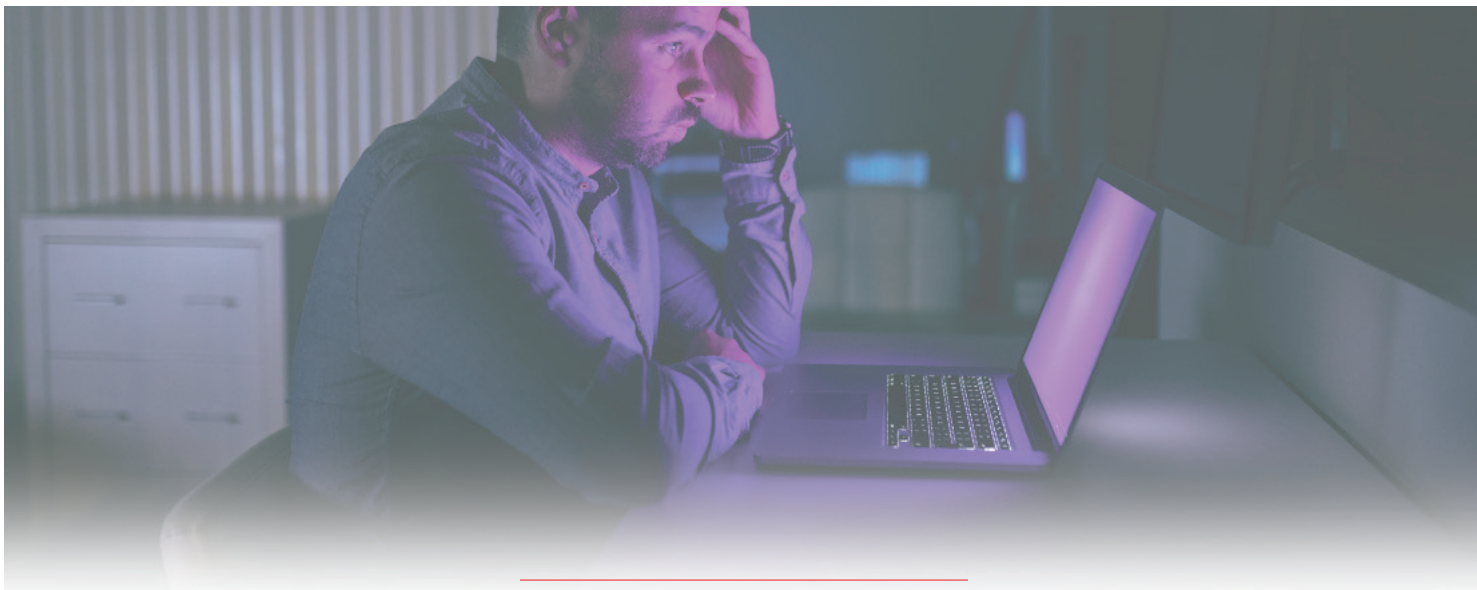
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a recent sale. Then it was tagged 70% off. (It's OK to take a calculator break here). Some of their sales people are rough, but they know how to close a deal and take the money. And each dollar they take is one more you won't make.

Control Issues

You can't control which store will close its doors next, or when business as usual will resume, but you can be prepared to change what you need to do to maintain or reclaim your sales growth.

Your good shoppers and loyal customers need to know that in the changing landscape, you are there to service their existing purchases and are in the community for the long haul. Start with your top ten customers (per location). They deserve a personal call from the owner or senior management. Start the call with "You may have seen some news about XXXX closing their store... I want you to know we are here to stay". After that, utilize that email list you've been building for the last few years (You have a list, don't you?). Include some loyal customer specials and add in a free item or two — or a \$50 gift card for your store. Deliver the same message to everyone else via a professionally designed postcard or letter.

Panic at the Disco(unt)

GOB guys like to promote big discount numbers. Fight back with some big discounting too! Plan for a warehouse, tent, or parking lot sale when the time is right. Drag out some of those non movers and floor samples and add a few special purchases, to meet the competition head on. Or promote a Half the Store-Half Off Sale!

Review & Rehearse Closing

They're closing so you need to CLOSE! The average person has an active vocabulary of 20,000 words. The average GOB salesperson has 19,998. They blocked out Be Back! Those guys and gals are trained to be first-time closers, and if they can't close the sale, they'll T.O. it to someone who can. If your in-store training only consists of product knowledge, your team is simply going to be out-sold. Review, rehearse and internalize methods to close the sale with your sales team. Have them roleplay it until they get it right.

Eye-Spy

Play Eye-Spy. Run a reconnaissance mission to your neighbor that is closing. See what the activity level

is, what the sales terms are (Final Sale?), delivery charges, and price tags. Take a few photos for when you get into a price match situation. Be stealthy, bold, and assertive in this operation.

Plan to Win

Our retail world always seems to be rocked by an external "Crisis of the Day." Right now we are in a really big one, but this too shall pass. Creating a plan to win and executing that plan will help you avoid an internal crisis and keep you in the game for the long term.

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 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.

The KAS logo is displayed in a bold, stylized font. The letters 'K' and 'A' are orange, while the 'S' is a darker shade of orange. The font is modern and sans-serif.

KAS

Live in Style

The background of the advertisement features a modern interior scene. In the foreground, a large, rectangular rug with a complex geometric pattern of triangles and stripes in shades of grey, gold, and white is laid out. This rug is placed on top of a larger, textured orange rug. In the background, a round gold mirror and a brass-colored side table are visible, along with a grey marble wall and a grey cabinet.

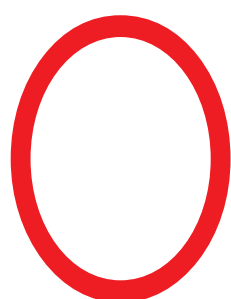
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DRIVE-THRU FURNITURE?

by Martin Roberts

 Outside of our industry retailers have developed multi-lane pickup and also drive-thru areas for customers to collect their purchases same day.

Brick and mortar furniture retailers have worked hard over the past few years to create unique in-store customer experiences. That's because building strong relationships through carefully curated in-store shopping has become essential for retailers who need to differentiate their offerings from fast-growing online-only retailers.

Social Distancing

More recently, that has changed. Consumers want to keep their distance from you. Yet, they still need to replace worn-out furniture and mattresses. There's demand right now for home office furnishings to make working from home more comfortable and efficient. And, parents are searching for ways to adapt their spaces for kids who never leave the house.

Furniture retailers are, therefore, now looking for ways to sell their products while minimizing face-to-face selling time. Many are doubling down on ecommerce solutions already in place, adding chat and looking for new ideas to facilitate a remote sales process.

Let's put aside for now the challenges of selling remotely and focus on the delivery angle.

Delivery Solutions

How can customers still get the things they need quickly and efficiently without waiting in for delivery services they fear might put their health at risk?

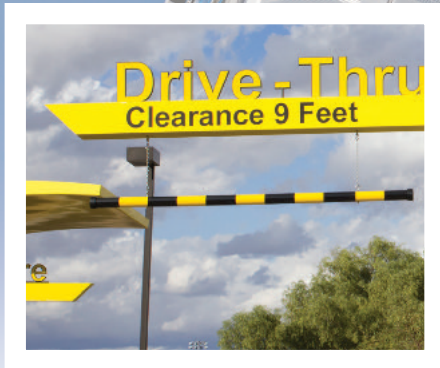
Right now we are seeing furniture retailers advertise curb-side delivery, promoted alongside white glove options. And in regions where most shoppers have access to pick-up trucks, retailers already have customer pick up areas.

Outside of our industry retailers have developed multi-lane pickup and drive-thru areas for customers to collect their purchases same day. Is such a solution in the furniture and bedding industry possible and promotable, especially right now? I think so, but there will be challenges.

Burger King Drive-Thru

Years ago, I designed one of the first drive-thru fast food stores for Burger King.

After putting a pass-through window into the kitchen, I set up a video camera to see how it worked and drove through while making a video of the customer experience. It was a DISASTER!



Pictured is a KFC drive-thru, a multi-lane retail drive-thru and a Carvana used car vending machine. Carvana is an online only pre-owned and used car dealership.

Many other challenges had to be worked out. Now 75 percent of their sales come from drive-through!

"There's demand right now for home office furnishings to make working from home more comfortable and efficient. And, parents are searching for ways to adapt their spaces for kids who never leave the house."

What About Our Industry?

Could the time spent to create this new form of furniture drive-thru in areas of the country where every second vehicle is a pick-up truck be feasible? Is it time for "click and collect"? I'm a big fan of drive-thru food, drive-thru banking, drive-thru pharmacies and drive-thru voting. Why not furniture?

Conclusion

No matter what you think about a drive-thru pick up for furniture stores to achieve social distancing, retailers need to adapt to consumers' needs for obtaining purchased items almost instantly. This innovation came to many other businesses decades ago, and it's time for us to take a serious look.

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.

Questions can be directed to him at martin@mrobertsdesign.com or call 212-365-4809. See more articles by Martin on Furniture World's website at furninfo.com/Authors/Martin_Roberts/60

ROBY'S PRESENTS

A MODEL FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE

by Russell Bienenstock

This third generation Oregon-based retail chain grows in smaller markets with an emphasis on serving local communities while being extra nice.

A Short History

Back from service in World War II, Chet Lewis arrived in Tillamook, Oregon, to found CE Lewis Appliance. Almost 45 years later, in 1994, Chet's son George Lewis and George's wife Cindy took over the store, adding furniture as a product category.

In 1995 they purchased Roby's, founded by Roby O'Bean in 1950 in the same town of Tillamook. Stores were added in Lincoln City and Newport, Oregon, both within a 90-minute drive of the original location.

In 2017 they opened a new store and discount center in Tillamook, plus a store in McMinnville closer to Portland.

Ryan Lewis and Andrea Langeliers, the third generation, joined the business in 2001.

Today Roby's has six full-line stores and one discount center. Andrea's husband Kyle Langeliers takes care of financials, major purchases, negotiations and appliance buying. Ryan Lewis handles furnishings buying and inventory. Andrea is Roby's President, as well as the face of the company. Cindy Lewis (2nd

Generation) works directly with the CFO.

Furniture World heard of Roby's exceptional focus on service, especially their "Serve Day" and asked Andrea Langeliers to provide information about that program and other community-focused initiatives.

Customer Experience

"The largest community Roby's serves has 30,000 people. Most of these communities are right on the ocean, places with a lot of retirees. Right now, we own the real estate at five of our locations with plans to purchase the sixth.

"With regard to customer loyalty, actions speak louder than words. In the tight-knit communities Roby's serves, the customer experience we provide is a top priority."

Community Service

"Bringing families together is our main goal.

"In the late 90s, my husband Kyle, brother Ryan and I all attended George Fox University. The school encouraged students and employees

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What Roby's employees have to say about Serve Day (left to right):

"Serve day is one of our team's favorite days of the year. This is an awesome team-building event. We paint, clean, remodel and sometimes refurbish areas in need. All of the recipients have been so blown away that a business would close its doors for the day and come help them with no strings attached." -Todd Buehler, Manager, McMinnville, OR

"What a great way for Roby's to make a difference in our local communities. It's a nice feeling to know we are all having a positive impact on others!" -Tom Palmen, Lead Furniture Repair Tech

"Serve Day is a great reminder that it's not all about me. Good health, mentally-spiritually-emotionally-physically, comes when we reach beyond and outside of 'me' and make it all about 'you.'" -Lloydene Westmark, CFO

"Being able to make a difference, even if it's a small one, can make a huge impact. Being able to potentially change lives for the better is something that Roby's is proud to stand behind as one of the many reasons for Serve Days." -Christina Tucker, Office Specialist, Astoria, OR

to participate in a day of community service. This became the inspiration to start our own Serve Day.

The first Serve Day at Roby's was in 2010. Ever since then we close down on a Wednesday, usually the last Wednesday in January so each of our stores can work on a community service project.

"Our mom and dad were foster parents to perhaps 50 children, so it seemed natural that our first project goal for Serve Day would be to help foster families by refurbishing kids' rooms with new materials, furnishings and providing the labor.

"Serve Day is a reflection of the way we want our employees to act in the world. Its purpose is to honor what is important to our family and bring our employees on-board. As the program rolled out across our other locations, we discovered that each town has different needs. Now, ideas for Serve Day projects are generated by the employees at each store. It has been a wonderful way for our people to work together, to get out of stores and into their communities to do something good.

"We've assisted in senior care centers, libraries, homeless shelters

"Having a huge impact on the communities we serve translates into more loyalty for the Roby's Furniture brand. I encourage like-minded furniture retailers to consider adding a Serve Day to their annual giving!"

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and even helped create a laundry program for schools to make sure kids can feel confident about having clean clothes. Sometimes we get some free press, but that's not our goal.

"As a general rule, we donate materials, furnishings, appliances and our own labor. Decisions about how much to budget for Serve Days are left to store managers who earn their yearly bonus based on individual store profitability. So, there's an incentive not to go too far. Our

stores are always closed for Serve Day and all employees are paid."

Team Building

"Serve Day has had a positive effect on our organization, more positive than I ever could have imagined. It's only one day of service, but the team-building result has been huge, increasing morale and employee retention. Our customers tell us they've come to understand that Roby's is not just out to sell furniture. We're part of their communities, giving back not just with donations, but also time. Having a huge impact on the communities we serve translates into more loyalty for the Roby's Furniture brand. I encourage like-minded furniture retailers to consider adding a Serve Day to their annual giving!"

Out to Live Program

"Lots of shoppers assume Roby's

is open seven days a week and are a bit surprised to learn we're not. On Sundays, we hang a sign on the front door that reads, "Sorry, Out to Live." In the retail world, it's uncommon, but we believe that giving our people Sundays off to be with their families, or just have free time to do whatever they want to do, enhances the quality of their lives.

"Other retailers tell us that we could increase sales by opening on Sunday, but for us, it's not all about the money. It's about bringing families together. However, for customers who only have time to shop on Sundays, we're happy to open up the store on a case-by-case appointment basis."

Retail Traffic

"Our walk-in traffic was fairly consistent in 2019. At the same time, our online traffic increased, which is so important. We work to make sure that Roby's online experience



On Sunday, Roby's employees are "Out to Live." Weekend business hours are limited, but they offer to arrange a shopping time that's right for just about any customer.

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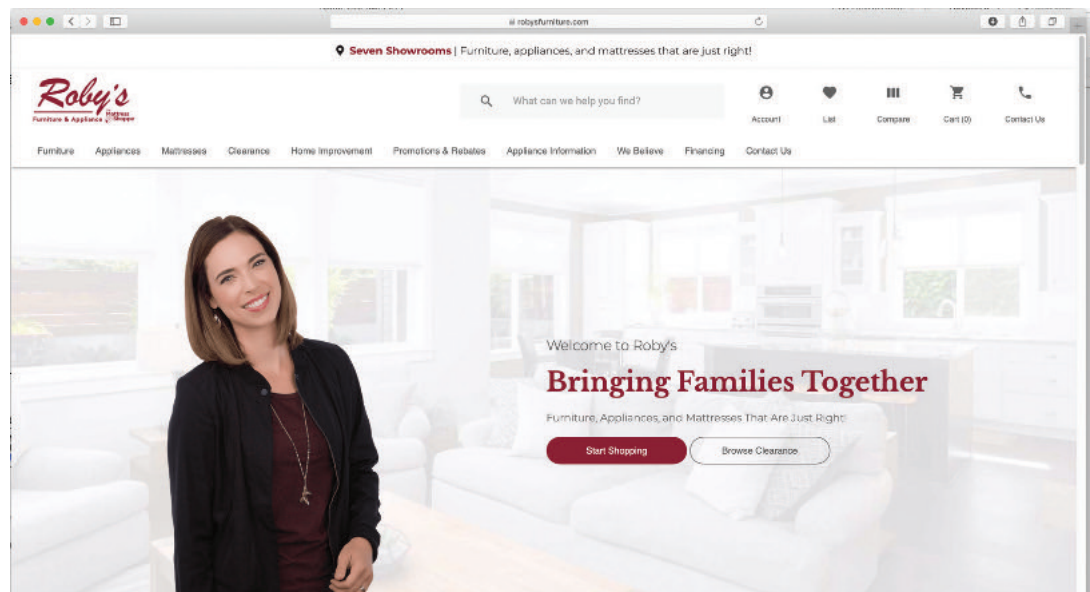
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Retail Card Services

Roby's website and advertising features company president Andrea Langeliers.



"If a customer buys a sofa or mattress at Roby's, we will take it back within 10 days for any reasonable reason. It's our Take it Back Guarantee."

matches its in-store experience. It creates problems if these two don't align, especially if shoppers find different prices listed online and on tagged items in stores. Especially in the appliance business, pricing changes all the time. We sell about 40 percent appli-

ances, 40 percent furniture, and 20 percent mattresses, so we are moving to digital price tags. This ensures that prices on the website, in stores and on our computer system all match."

Media Mix

"Roby's uses mostly digital and TV advertising. To keep costs low, TV commercials are created using an iPhone in front of a white screen. Most of Roby's advertising messages are designed to create top of mind awareness and hopefully allow people to get to know us a little better before they visit the store. In general, we don't use our advertising to promote huge sales. It's not a healthy way for our customers to purchase things, so we like to offer fair prices all the time."

Product Selection

"Roby's Furniture carries lines

including Flexsteel and Ekornes on the higher end, and Ashley for more promotional furniture. We try to sell as much made-in-Oregon products as we can. Also, sustainable options including fabrics made out of recycled plastic bottles, which is a really big thing here in Oregon. Stanton Furniture, manufactured in Oregon with custom features and quick delivery, is one of our favorites.

"Our outdoor lines include Hollywood and Seaside Casual. We believe that outdoor furniture has a lot of upside potential for Roby's. The wind can be very strong in coastal Oregon so we sell a lot of outdoor furniture made of heavy composite wood that won't blow away.

"Over the past few years, with dedicated mattress stores popping up all over the country, our mattress sales declined. We recently re-branded our mattress area as the Mattress Shop at Roby's, technically a stand-alone mattress shop, to solid success."

"Most of Roby's advertising messages are designed to create top of mind awareness and hopefully allow people to get to know us a little better before they visit the store."

Customer Service Philosophy

"If we sell somebody a sofa or a mattress they absolutely hate, then every night when they go to bed or sit down to watch a movie, they'll think of us. That's why if a customer buys a sofa or mattress at Roby's, we will take it back within 10 days for any reasonable reason. It's our Take it Back Guarantee. We just switch it out.

"It's important to have our customers' expectations met. That's why we focus on setting clear expectations for what they buy at Roby's. For example, if we know that our customers have had poor repair experiences with a specific appliance brand, we will order this brand for them, but first we let them know that they are more likely to experience service issues. It's the same with furniture. A \$399 sofa may be a great deal, but before someone buys it, we want to make sure that their expectations are in line with how that sofa

might wear over time."

Next Generation Planning

"We feel it's never too early to make sure that generational transitions go as smoothly as possible for our employees and families.

"Before joining Roby's, my brother Ryan had been on track to be a screenwriter in LA. I planned to become a teacher. After joining the family business, our parents ran the Tillamook location, Ryan managed the Lincoln City store and I was based in Newport. That was the setup for quite a few years. It worked really well, and we learned a lot. Even today we all have our own responsibilities and our own space.

"Through our involvement with the family business program at Oregon State we've discovered that there are often big challenges in transitioning family businesses from first to second-generation

control. Moving to a third generation successfully is even more difficult.

"Going forward into a possible fourth generation at Roby's, we want to decide whether to scale up or down and examine what that might look like for our kids."

"Through our involvement with the family business program at Oregon State we've discovered that there are often big challenges in transitioning family businesses."



THE COVID-19 BUSINESS CHECKLIST

by David McMahon

Here's a quick checklist of things you can do to minimize the damage due to recessionary pressures on your business.

Just over a year ago I wrote an article for Furniture World titled "Planning for Uncertainty". [If you missed it or want to refresh your memory in light of current events, visit Furniture World's website at https://www.furninfo.com/Furniture_World_Articles/3769.] The geo-political events at that time led me to think home furnishings retailers should plan for an eventual recession. I never thought that the trigger for this economic turn-down would be a flu-like virus. Regardless of the cause, the game plan outlined in the article is still valid.

Here, are some additional ideas — a quick checklist of 11 important considerations that can help you to either prevent a large downturn in your business or at least reduce the damage. In a recession, both short and long-term thinking is required. Hopefully, many of you will be able to take advantage of the current situation to sling-shot your sales and profitability higher when all of this blows over.

Recession-Preventing Actions

1. Be a strong and supportive leader.

Communicate with your employees, with your customers and with the public at large. Let them know that together you will move beyond the current challenges. Do not panic! Panic is not part of any success equation. Be strong. If you lead, people will follow. If you hide, people will seek an alternate leader.

2. Carefully monitor your traffic numbers.

Most of you should have traffic counters by now to measure customer traffic accurately. During this virus spell, depending on your area, you may see an immediate drop. Know that this drop will be temporary. If, after the virus blows over, the drop persists it will also be temporary. You may need to make adjustments in various operating activities such as non-lean staffing, advertising and business processes, if this occurs.

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"Roll out new products and services

Examples: In-home design, annual delivery clubs, in-store workshops, realtor referral programs, customer point loyalty systems, text follow-up systems, curb-side delivery drop-off, face-time shopping."

3. Take advantage of any government business incentives.

At the time of this writing, these incentives are unclear. However, it is clear that there will be some. They may include lower payroll taxes, cheaper loans, filing extensions, and reduction in labor-related costs. Regardless, ensure you capture all of what is possible to benefit your business.

4. Negotiate leasing costs. An economic downturn is a buyers' market.

I have been through many successful lease renegotiations, so it definitely is possible. Whether it be short-term or permanent, it is definitely worth a try. You ideally want

to get to an occupancy cost that is a maximum of 10 percent at your lowest possible volume. Or, better yet, negotiate a temporary percent of written sales lease.

5. If looking to expand, take advantage of lower than normal site costs.

This could be a huge longer-term play if you have a five year time horizon. Or, if you are currently renting, maybe it is a good time to buy.

6. Take a good look at the reliability of your vendors' supply chains.

Move towards vendors that have best sellers available. Whether stocking frames or customized, the customers who want to buy will likely

want speed. Align with reliability and speed.

7. Increase gross margin when traffic goes down.

When traffic goes down, the close rate should go up if you focus on providing a pristine service. Best-sellers can often fetch a slightly higher price. As well, in times of uncertainty, insurance (aka product protection) can grab more attention if presented correctly. If you are successful in growing margin, you need less traffic.

8. Mine your list of past customers.

In times of challenge, people must "lean in". Those who wait will lose. Dust off your follow-up systems and

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processes and set yourself apart from everyone else.

9. Roll out new products and services that you have not tried before.

Roll out new products and services that you have not tried before. Some examples are In-home design, annual delivery clubs, in-store workshops, realtor referral programs, customer point loyalty systems, text follow-up systems, curbside delivery drop-off, face-time shopping. If you have more time on your hands, launch something new! Pick or cre-

"You ideally want an occupancy cost that is a maximum of 10 percent at your lowest possible volume. Or, better yet, negotiate a temporary percent of written sales lease."

ate at least one of the suggestions listed above and make it awesome.

10. Employee-wise, focus, on revenue earners rather than revenue burners.

Seek to get as many of your employees interacting with customers as possible. Directly or indirectly, this is what makes money. Eliminate fixed costs that do not produce at least three times the cost in revenue. This is based on my rule of thumb equation using contribution margin. [For more information on fixed costs and contribution margin see furninfo.com/furniture-world-archives/12522.] You may need to downsize and it might be better for your employees to take a temporary layoff and come back with full benefits when things normalize.

11. Try to take the emotion out of the equation.

Consistently analyze your business for possible areas of improvement, prioritize your strategy, actualize/execute the results you need to achieve your strategy and continuously seek improvement.

maybe even closure for a time. But you will open up again and your employees, vendors and customers will be ready to get back to work. It will be sluggish at first and then I predict a rapid period of growth back to, and for some, above normal. Hopefully, we will soon put this bio-economic anomaly to rest and get back to normal business. I truly believe that those who take calculated, strong actions of leadership without panic will be those who come out of it on top in their market areas.

About David McMahon: *David McMahon is a retail financial and operational professional and Founder of PerformNOW. He directs multiple consulting projects, is proud to lead 6 business mastermind performance groups: 3 owners groups, 1 sales manager group and 2 operations groups. PerformNOW has 4 primary products to help businesses improve: Performance Groups, Individual Business Consulting, Quarterly Business Reviews and Coaching, Performance Accounting. He is a Certified Management Accountant and Certified Supply Chain Professional. You can connect with David at: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/davidwcmcmahon/> or david@performnow.net.*

Conclusion

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RETAIL'S WEAK LINK

by David Benbow

It's been said that retail salespeople (median compensation \$29,760 per year) are the weakest link in the buying chain for furniture and mattresses.

Everybody has heard the old saying, "a chain is only as strong as its weakest link."

The chain we will talk about here is the one that unites the furnishings buying public with retail furniture stores and the rest of the furnishings supply chain. It has a great many links that when woven together make up the source pipelines that nourish the furniture and mattress businesses.

Retail Sales Associates form a critical link in this chain. They are responsible for successfully completing the penultimate step required to complete the chain from raw materials to final delivery of furniture and bedding products which are the topic of this article.

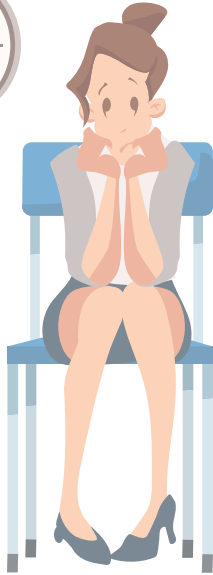
A Few Statistics

According to IBISWorld, a market research company, there are 29,291 furniture stores and 16,000 Mattress stores in the United States. It's important to note that there is

some disagreement in our industry regarding these numbers and the definitions used to derive them. Statistics are scarce regarding the total number of furniture and mattress retail sales associates, but 250,000 is a reasonable guess. This means that about one out of every 1,300 people is a mattress or furniture RSA.

How well paid are furniture RSAs? The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) states that the mean compensation for a furniture RSA is \$29,760 per year. This equates to about \$14.31 per hour based on a 40 hour week.

How does this compare to the average salary in the U.S. for all workers? According to a BLS report from 2019, the median income for a full-time wage or salary worker was \$936 per week, which translates into a yearly income of \$48,672 (\$23.40 per hour based on a 40 hour week). If all these figures and the assumptions that underpin them are correct, furniture RSA mean compensation is only about 61 percent of the median



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MATTRESS

WEAK LINK

compensation for full-time workers across all industries.

All Kinds of Salespeople

Those of us who make a living selling home furnishings know that furniture and mattress showrooms are staffed with every kind of retail sales associate, from recent high school drop-outs to PhDs in classical literature. There's also a wide range of compensation between the extreme lower rung of the pay ladder and the top. In the eyes of statisticians, all furniture RSAs are equal. But, there are pros who earn six-figure incomes and others whose earned commissions are

much nearer to absolute zero.

I believe that most Furniture World readers will agree that the so-called lower average pay (let's call it LAP) estimated at \$29,760 is generally NOT for want of opportunity.

Sometimes the responsibility for poor performance sits on the shoulders of management, but often lack of initiative, discipline and hard work are the main causes.

Store Sales & Revenue

My intuition is that sales ability, incorporating natural talent, initiative, discipline and hard work follow more or less a bell curve distribution. Much has been written in Furniture World about the value of measuring sales metrics by salesperson and sales team. In his December 2017 Furniture World article on performance metrics posted to the www.furninfo.com website, industry consultant David McMahon reported, "average stores produced \$604,483 per salesperson per year, while the double-digit profit club produced a bit more sales with less people at \$651,460 per person. It holds true that most operations will usually produce \$50,000-\$60,000/salesperson/month." In addition to written sales per RSA, metrics such as average sale, average profit margin per sale, close-ratio to opportunities, RSA revenue per guest and others can and should be calculated. There are a lot of ways to evaluate

RSA performance. [For more information on that subject, consult the on-line archives of Furniture World at www.furninfo.com, especially David McMahon's many articles on retail metrics found at furninfo.com/Authors/David_McMahon/6].

Once gathered, these metrics should be used for coaching. For example it might be found that an RSA is efficient at closing a high percentage of ups, but their average unit selling price is lower than average. This might be the fault of spending too little time with each up. Others may only close one up in a day, but achieve higher total sales. Each metric must be evaluated and used.

Who Cares?

I visit lots of home furnishings stores in my consulting work and also in my free time to check out how RSAs are doing. I'm almost always amazed at what I consider to be the typical RSA's careless, lackadaisical and unprofessional attitude. Occasionally an RSA will show me something new and interesting, but generally, there is a woeful state of unpreparedness among retail sales associates.

Sometimes sales associates telegraph the feeling that they lack product knowledge and would rather be somewhere else. People often buy, but not because of anything the average salesperson may say or do.

"In a 2017 Furniture World article on performance metrics, industry consultant David McMahon reported that, average stores produced \$604,483 per salesperson."

"There is a tremendous opportunity for aggressive, motivated, smart RSAs to absolutely crush weak competition in a vacuum of sales professionalism that is begging to be filled."

Stores leave large dollar volumes of sales on the table because of this weak link in the chain. The main saving grace for all these stores is that their direct competitors are often in the same boat. They say, "We'll miss some sales, yes, but we will also get some that the other stores let walk away unsold. The customer has to buy somewhere."

Reflecting back on the chain of events, you wonder how, with the millions of dollars spent to bring a product to the showroom floor, the success of selling it to the public is left in the hands of average or poorly prepared and motivated RSAs.

Crush the Competition

Why do some RSAs make comfortable six-figure incomes and others quit after a few weeks? There are lots of reasons including a lack of focus some retailers have on attracting and hiring good people.

I believe that there is a tremendous opportunity for aggressive, motivated, smart RSAs to absolutely crush weak competition in a vacuum of sales professionalism that is begging to be filled.

John F. Lawhon pointed out in his book "Selling Retail," that retail sales associates can achieve all this

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without investing a dime in store rent, store inventory, store utility bills, property taxes and all the other encumbrances that come with store ownership. The RSA's investment is energy, study, motivation, and dedication to becoming the best in the industry. Lawhon's book and its sequel are available new or used on Amazon.

As a dedicated, motivated RSA builds his or her customer base, referrals from other customers will spur and advance the growth of his or her personal business. That's

"Until recently, every store in America was looking for good sales help which had been increasingly hard to find.

A lot of stores had a steady stream of applicants of all stripes coming in nearly every day, killing time filling out employment applications."

because customers like to deal with sales professionals who CARE about them and know what they are talking about. Experience has shown that a modest investment by individual RSAs to cultivate appropriate attitude, knowledge and sales skill can move virtually any RSA well above the mean income level of \$29,760.

What's Holding Us Back?

From my viewpoint as a sales trainer, there appears to be a problem. But, on the other hand, it has always been this way and probably always will be. I understand why store owners and managers think that money spent on sales training is probably wasted. Unless RSAs are motivated, anything presented in a sales class may be in one ear and out the other. Also, in a lot of stores, RSAs are in one day and out the next. Why spend a lot of money on temporary help?

Hire Better - Train Better

Until the recent COVID-19 situation every store in America was looking for good sales help which had been increasingly hard to find. A lot of stores had a steady stream of applicants of all stripes coming in nearly every day, killing time filling out employment applications. That will become the norm again. It is not a stretch to assume that 95

percent of your applicants will not succeed in sales. When applicants do actually show potential, hire them immediately. Put extra effort into building a sales environment that attracts good people. Then, get them properly trained. Show them the potential that really does exist in retail furniture sales. Ask them to read this article.

More than anything, though, when a strong applicant begins to show strength on the showroom floor, make sure that you let them know that they have a bright future, both in earnings and job satisfaction. Guiding and developing sales talent is one of the most important jobs of management.

Invest Your Time

Store management, however, can only do so much. There is limited time to force-feed information into a new trainee. At some point, the trainee has to get out on the floor and begin earning their keep.

This means that it is ultimately the responsibility of new trainees to put in the time and effort to become competent on the floor. There is no other way around it. It takes a lot of hard work, study and dedication to become even a competent retail sales associate. Being a truly great RSA is an exclusive club. It is the one that has six-figure incomes as well as the prestige, recognition and often advancement into management or

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So, if you are one of those many retailers that don't have a formal and ongoing sales education program, you may be asking how you can help more of your sales associates to become the final, powerful link in the chain of retail sales.

Here it is. You will find that it doesn't cost much money at all.

Even stores that haven't traditionally invested much in formal sales training can and should take the time to encourage their RSAs to read past articles in this series that cover the basics of mattress sales (visit www.furninfo.com/Series/Bedding/1). Cherry pick links to articles in the series on topics such as: Up-Selling, Handling Exchanges, Negotiating, Be-Backs, Selling Luxury Bedding, Overcoming Objections, Steps of the Sale, Boot Camp For New Hires, and many more.

Give them or suggest that they order the book "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual." At \$29.99 plus shipping it is a great start for any would-be bedding RSA professional. Nobody can learn everything there is to know about selling mattresses and furniture. But just about anyone

can learn way more in a couple of weekends of focused effort than many bedding RSAs I've encountered who have years of experience!

Many mattress manufacturers have informative web-sites. I suggest putting informative websites and especially those for the products you carry on your "favorites" list. Then send these links to your RSAs to review as homework.

The Internet is loaded with information about sales training, advertising, prospecting, follow-up, etc. Motivated RSAs who want to have a chance to rise above the salary mean should spend some of their spare time learning about the mattress and furniture business.

Time Management

Finally, RSA's need to be reminded that time is their greatest resource. There is a lot of down-time in retail sales; meaning time when RSAs are sitting around on Tuesday morning at 10:30 AM waiting for their first up. Future sales stars do not waste this time playing silly games on smart phones if they want to become a strong link in the chain of

furniture and bedding sales with a bright future in our industry.

About David Benbow: A twenty-eight year veteran of the mattress and bedding industry and owner of Mattress Retail Training Company offering retailers retail guidance from small store management to training retail sales associates. His years of hands-on experience as a retail sales associate, store manager, sales manager/trainer and store owner in six different metropolitan areas qualifies him as an expert in selling bedding.

David is the author of the recently published book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual," a complete textbook 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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Health Insurance Changes For Retailers

Sharon Bradley, CEO, Home Furnishings Association



Furniture retailers have struggled to provide affordable coverage for workers.

Why offer health insurance to your employees? For starters, your business can deduct the cost of premiums from your federal business taxes. Some small businesses may qualify for a tax credit.

Besides being the right thing to do, studies have shown that a robust benefits package can appeal to both new hires and current employees alike while setting your business apart from your competitors. Those same studies show that employees who are content with their jobs and health benefits are happier, more productive employees. They also take fewer sick days because they're receiving good health care.

For years we've heard our members speak loudly and passionately about the need for a health plan they could offer employees. Finding the right plan was a little like Goldilocks romping through the forest. Some health plans seemed affordable – at least until you dug a little deeper and learned they were skimpy on benefits. Others had everything you could ever ask for – including ridiculously expensive

monthly premiums.

I'm pleased to announce the Home Furnishings Association will offer an association health plan we think is just right. Our new plan, which we expect to roll out later this year, would not have been possible just a few years ago. Recent changes by the Department of Labor loosened restrictions to an association health plan (AHP), allowing more businesses to participate.

Many furniture retailers have struggled to provide affordable coverage for workers, given the small size of their risk pools. With the new rules, coverage offered to employees of big companies will soon be available to HFA members and their employees.

We're convinced our association health plan will be a game-changer for many of our members. But before that happens, we need to hear from you! There's no obligation. Just contact your member specialist at <https://myhfa.org> to discover how this exciting new program can work for you and your employees.

Re-imagined Resource Center

Days after High Point's fall market ended, workers began tearing down the HFA Resource Center from wall to wall, working non-stop to ensure the space was ready for spring market. Retailers who visit the next show will find a new seminar room – more than twice the size of the old one – to accommodate presentations by industry leaders.

Thanks to the work of Connie Post and her team at Affordable Design Solutions, retailers will experience touches including comfortable seating furnished by Decor-Rest in a warmly lit, open lounge. There will also be easily accessible power, complimentary wireless internet, spacious private meeting rooms, and an updated café with complimentary beverages and healthy snacks.

The new Resource Center will support the HFA's initiatives in the areas of Leadership, Innovation and Education.

All retailers — HFA members and non-members — are invited to the Resource Center, located on the first floor of Market Suites.

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



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A s state tax compliance gets more complicated, retailers are scrambling to catch up. *-by Robert Bell*

For furniture retailers who do business entirely in a single store in one state, keeping up with sales-tax requirements is relatively simple. If that state has a sales tax, retailers charge the rate that applies where the store is located. If they deliver to customers who live in a different local jurisdiction that has a separate sales tax, the seller should add that.

It's when a company operates stores in several states and local taxing jurisdictions, regularly drawing customers across state lines that things get more complicated.

Royal Furniture

Home Furnishings Association member Royal Furniture in Memphis, Tennessee, recently hired an outside company to handle its sales-tax compliance programs, according to Michael Faber, Royal's president.

Memphis sits just across the Mississippi River from Arkansas, only a few miles north of the Mississippi state line. Royal Furniture operates stores in Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee.

The company, founded in Memphis in 1946 with a single store, eventually turned to an auto-

mated sales-tax reporting and filing service. The company it chose is Avalara, one of many that works to increase sales tax compliance and reduce audit risk.

"We're not going to have to keep up with it," Faber said. "They're going to have to keep up with it."

Sheffield Furniture & Interiors

John Gebhardt who handles accounting and human resources for Severeign Furniture Management, owner of Sheffield Furniture & Interiors, isn't ready for that step yet. He readily admits, however, to the difficulty of figuring out all the sales-tax requirements in several states.

"The rules are changing, and it's confusing," he said. Sheffield Furniture & Interiors, a member of the Home Furnishings Association, operates showrooms in Pennsylvania, Virginia and Maryland.

The most vexing problem is "trying to determine the taxability of services, what is taxable and what is not," Gebhardt added.

He's aiming at a moving target, as more states are imposing taxes on services in addition to goods. Sheffield offers design services,

as well as installation of window treatments, rugs and application of Guardsman protection and repairs. It's often unclear what services, if any, are covered by a state's tax code. And each state seems to differ from the next.

Diane Yetter understands. "That's why I'm in business," she said. "That's exactly why I'm in business."

Yetter runs the Sales Tax Institute, which she founded in 1996 in

"Some states place the responsibility for paying the tax on the purchaser. Whether the customer pays or doesn't isn't the seller's concern. But the difference may be a matter of how the goods are delivered."



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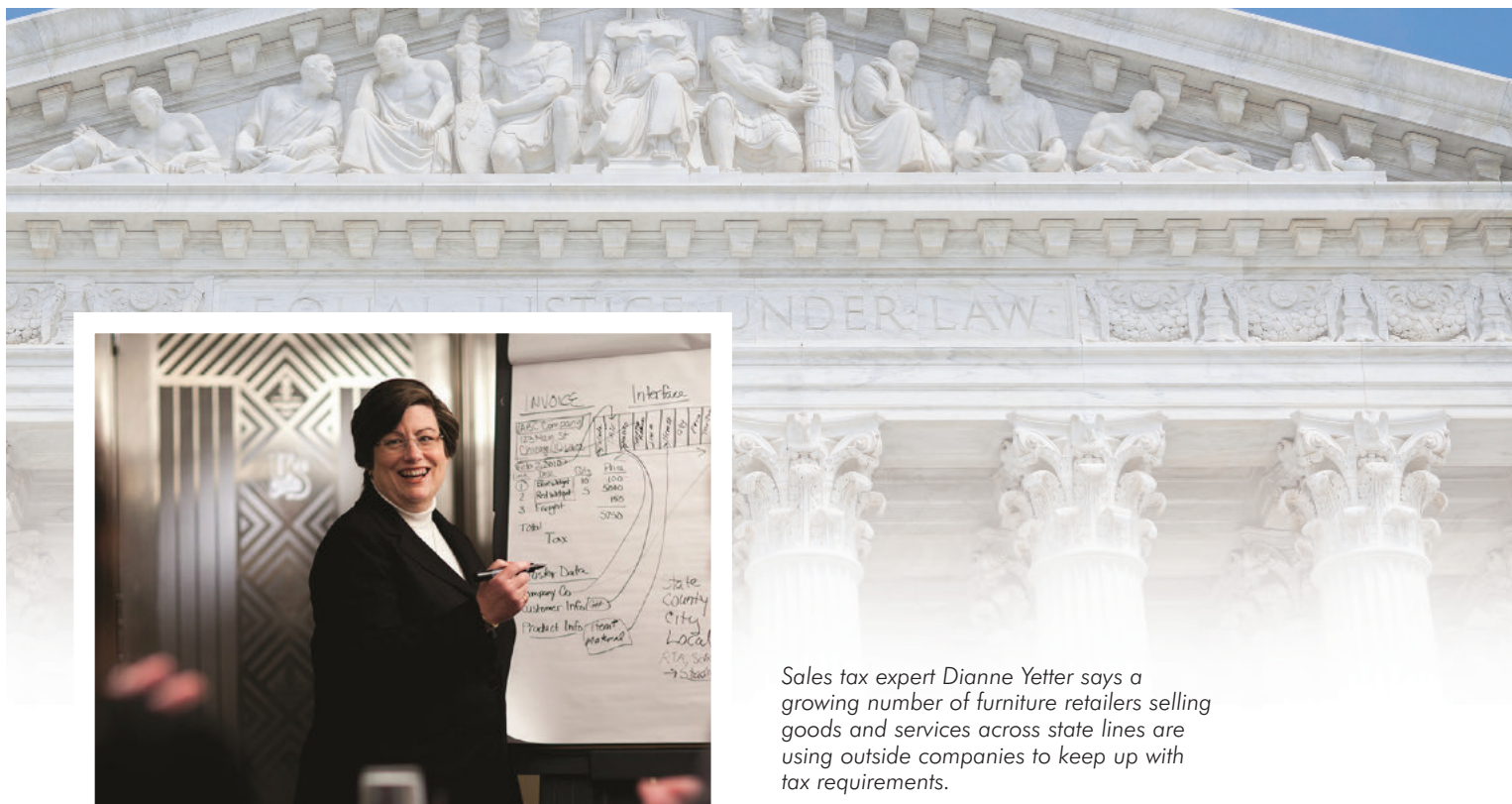
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Sales tax expert Dianne Yetter says a growing number of furniture retailers selling goods and services across state lines are using outside companies to keep up with tax requirements.

Chicago. Its website offers free resources about sales-tax laws in all 50 states. The institute provides on-site professional education. Yetter and staff members are available for paid consultations, webinars, speaking engagements and other services.

Delivering Across State Lines

One source of difficulty stems from delivering furniture, or services, across state lines. If a customer lives in another state and wants

"Often, even the temporary presence of a truck and crew making deliveries can establish nexus."

the goods delivered to his or her residence or business in that state, the "norm," according to Yetter, is that the tax is owed in that location. But, "whether or not you're required to collect it is a completely different question," she said of the seller.

Some states place the responsibility for paying the tax on the purchaser. Whether the customer pays or doesn't isn't the seller's concern. But the difference may be a matter of how the goods are delivered. If the retailer delivers a sofa, the retailer likely is required to collect the sales tax based on the cost of the sofa. In some states, such as New Jersey, the tax is based on the cost of the sofa and delivery. But if the retailer sends the sofa via a common carrier, the tax obligation usually falls to the purchaser.

Another factor that helps determine sales-tax obligations is economic nexus. A retailer establishes nexus with a physical location of a store, warehouse, office or any other facility. With nexus comes the responsibility to collect sales tax from a purchaser. Often, even the

temporary presence of a truck and crew making deliveries can establish nexus. Many states also have enacted laws that create economic nexus even if the seller doesn't have a physical presence. In that case, the seller would be required to collect the tax once its annual sales into that state reach a threshold, which generally ranges from \$100,000 to \$500,000. So, careful record-keeping is important.

For retailers who deliver furniture in relatively small amounts to customers in only a few states, keeping track of the various tax requirements can be manageable, Yetter said. It's when the numbers climb that the complexity multiplies. Then, hiring an outside firm might be worthwhile.

The best solution would be a uniform national approach to sales taxation. "I would not hold my breath waiting for any sort of federal action," Yetter said.

For more information on HFA membership and services for home furnishings retailers visit <https://myhfa.org> or call 800.422.3778.



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SunVilla

Darvin Furniture and Mattress uses a social media influencer to reach a new audience.

Customers who follow Darvin Furniture and Mattress' social media have met two influential people this year.

One is Gianna Cosentino, who is featured in a series of short videos. The other is company President Will Harris, who makes cameo appearances in some of the same videos.

"Hi, I'm Gianna," Cosentino says in the inaugural video, which debuted on Darvin's Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages Jan. 27. "Some of you may know me from my Instagram page, bloomstonebay. Today, I'm at Darvin Furniture, where newlyweds can find a huge selection of quality, stylish furniture, without breaking the bank."

Cosentino is a paid influencer, part of a marketing trend. The Home Furnishings Association offered a seminar on social media influencers at the Las Vegas Market in January. It was led by Ellen Gefen of Gefen Marketing.

Cosentino, with more than 5,000

Instagram followers, fits the bill perfectly. She's warm, personable, engaging, knowledgeable and – perhaps most important – genuine. She may be paid to talk up Darvin Furniture, but she was already doing that.

"She grew up with Darvin," Harris said. "Her parents always bought Darvin furniture, and when she got married, she became a customer as well."

That long relationship gives her credibility. The people who are interested in what she has to say about family and lifestyle matters may be influenced by what she likes and recommends. When Darvin approached her, "she jumped at the opportunity," Harris said.

He took advantage of the opportunity, too, by making brief appearances in several videos. "It's a subtle way of introducing me as well," he said.

Harris became president of the Orland Park, Ill., Top 100 retailer

in January after spending 16 years at Harris Family Furniture in New Hampshire. His roles were limited to smiles until the fourth video, posted Feb. 17, when Cosentino says:

"As a newlywed, I believe husbands and wives should both have a say when picking out their furniture for their first home. It will help create that even balance. What about you, Will? Did you have an opinion in your first home?"

"Well," he says, "my opinion was, 'Whatever you want, honey.'"

"The perfect man," Cosentino concludes.

The videos set a light, humorous tone, conveying the idea that customers will find a friendly environment when they visit the store. "Furniture is supposed to be fun," Harris said.

He's been pleased with the series so far, he said in an interview. The videos are reaching people who haven't known much about Darvin and are making a favorable impression. "We'll have to see how it translates to sales, but for now it's fun," Harris said.

"Her parents always bought Darvin furniture, and when she got married, she became a customer as well. That long relationship gives her credibility."



Pictured is Darvin Furniture CEO Will Harris making a cameo appearances in some videos with social media influencer Gianna Cosentino.

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C onsumers look for retailers to take the lead on social and environmental issues. What message are you sending them? - By Robert Bell

Home Furnishings Association member Andrew Tepperman wasn't sure how his community would react to the electric car charger installed in the parking lot of one of his six Ontario, Canada, furniture stores. Nor did he care. Tepperman is one of many HFA members pushing strong corporate social responsibility in the business – not because he thinks it's good business sense, but because he believes it's the right thing to do.

Turns out both ideas can co-exist.

Within the first month, members of a local electric car club asked store officials if they could hold their weekend meetings in the store's parking lot. Tepperman shrugged: Sure, why not?

Before the electric car geeks found their asphalt meeting space, none of the club members had ever set foot inside a Tepperman's showroom. Yet many of them ended up buying furniture from their new friends. A few weeks later, Tepperman received an email from a stranger:

"Dear Andrew, My wife and I were driving to Lowe's to purchase appliances. My electric car was running low on battery. I have an app that directs me to the closest charge station. That led me to your park-

ing lot. I plugged in. To kill some time while it charged, my wife and I walked into your store and were completely surprised. We had never heard of your company. In the end, we purchased five appliances from you. Thank you for the free charge."

That "free charge" generated more than \$2,000 in sales. That was three years ago. Tepperman, president of the family-owned chain, keeps the note to remind him of something other HFA members are starting to catch on to: Besides being the right thing to do, corporate social responsibility – initiatives that a business takes toward environmental or social well-being

– makes good business sense, too.

But how good? For years, retailers as large as Nike and as small as

"A five percent increase in corporate responsibility increases purchase intent by eight percent and levels of trust by six percent."



HFA member Andrew Tepperman with an electric car charger at one of his stores.



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Tepperman's have tried to quantify what a meaningful corporate responsibility program can add to a company's bottom line. According to a 2019 report by the Reputation

Institute, a reputation measurement and management services firm, a five percent increase in corporate responsibility increases purchase intent by eight percent and levels of trust by six percent.

HFA member Andrew Koenig, president of City Furniture in Tamarac, Fla., said customers want to do business with companies they connect with emotionally, that speak their language, are sensitive to their culture, value what they value. They want to work with companies that care about the greater good, not just the bottom line. "And when you understand that and align your values with the people you serve, both of you are going to benefit. How can you not?"

In today's fiercely competitive furniture retail landscape, corporate responsibility is as essential to your success as any marketing plan. Retailers who adopt a more thoughtful approach to CSR have undoubtedly positioned themselves to win the hearts and minds of communities, says Stephen Hahn-Griffiths, chief reputation officer of the Reputation Institute.

Pictured is HFA member Andrew Koenig, his wife Deana Koenig and their three children at a recent breast cancer awareness fundraiser, one of many local events supported by City Furniture.

"Unlike Tepperman's, which keeps a low-key approach to its CSR, City's outreach is well publicized on its website, along with the company's 2040 Green Promise, Koenig's goal of running nearly all City showrooms with renewable energy within the next 20 years."

"That is the strategic opportunity for any given business today," Hahn-Griffiths said. "Explain to (your community) what you're doing to have a positive impact on society in a way that's unique to your organization. That can make a huge difference."

Bottom lines should be secondary to implementing a CSR strategy. Indeed, Koenig believes being responsible corporate citizens should be every retailer's driving motivation. "The business will come, but first you need to ask yourself why would you not help your community," he said. "Find your passion in your community. Find what your community is passionate about. If you have a good product and you're selling it at a fair price, people are going to give back to you. Maybe not immediately, but they will."

City Furniture partners with at least a dozen local charities throughout the year, giving back at least five

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"Andrew Koenig, president of City Furniture said, customers want to do business with companies they connect with emotionally, that speak their language, are sensitive to their culture, value what they value."



percent of its annual profits to organizations that fit its five so-called giving pillars: home, health, service, education and diversity.

Unlike Tepperman's, which keeps a low-key approach to its CSR, City's outreach is well-publicized on its website, along with the company's 2040 Green Promise, Koenig's goal of running nearly all City showrooms with renewable energy within the next 20 years. That will offset

the company's electric use and help achieve its goal of carbon neutrality.

Koenig says his father, Keith, and late uncle, Kevin, the co-founders of City, always gave back to South Florida. "They started this long before I came along," he said. "I'm just pushing (City's CSR) where it needs to be."

That's one of the reasons he tracks the company's CSR in an annual report. City's 2019 CSR

report not only outlines the company's successes, it points out its goals for 2020. Andrew Koenig acknowledges some might view that as marketing spin, but there's another reason for the transparency.

"It keeps me accountable," he said. "Look, every retailer knows it's easy to get sidetracked, but (with this report) I can always look in 2020 and see where we are and whether we're living up to our promises."

Koenig is 36 – not the typical age associated with running a Top 100 retailer. But few other furniture retailers are as plugged into their communities through their CSR program as Koenig and City.

He's quick to acknowledge his millennial status and that he's in tune with what other millennials are looking for in their shopping journeys. "We want a relationship with who we do business with," he said. "We don't just want a transaction. We want to know that person or company we're doing business with is just as invested, as concerned as I am about where I live."

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Best Selling DESIGN



OW Lee

Pictured is the new Basso Chat Height Fire Pit. This taller version of the original design allows the propane tank to be housed inside the unit, eliminating the need for an exterior housing unit.

Contact information on page 102.



Kas Rugs

Lucia rugs feature neutral colors and elegant patterns. They are machine woven in Turkey of UV-treated polypropylene, specifically made for the rugged outdoors.

Contact information on page 102.

Whittier Wood

The modern good looks of the Bryce Bedroom Collection is elevated with soft brass accents. Rounded corner details throughout the collection accentuate the sleek silhouettes. Made of solid Alder and Black Walnut hardwoods.

Contact information on page 102.





Estro Milano

Emy, a high-end quality crafted Italian leather sofa is both elegant and practical. It features steel legs to compliment its contemporary style and has an optional dual power recliner option. Emy is available in over 200 color variations and as an armchair.

Contact information on page 102.



Arason

The Madrid cabinet bed features clean lines, with brushed aluminum hardware. The storage drawer provides 5.5 feet of storage space with plenty of room for pillows and bedding.

Contact information on page 102.



Country View Woodworking

The Quantum Dining Set in Brown Maple finish is available in twelve sizes with fourteen shapes and edge profiles. Here it's pictured with the Caprice side chair.

Contact information on page 102.

Best Selling DESIGN



Twin Star Home

The Media Mantel is finished in white paint with Weathered Gray finish and custom hardware. The mantel includes wire management and accommodates a 26" Infrared Quartz electric fireplace insert.

Contact information on page 102.

Simply Amish

The Alexandria Trestle Table is available in Cherry and Soft Maple. The 18" stationary butterfly leaf on each end slides underneath table end for storage.

Contact information on page 102.



Nourison

The Prismatic area rug with swirling abstract design is composed of radiant colors in brilliant, painterly combinations. This fine rug is hand-tufted of wool and shimmering Luxcelle™ fibers, with carved detail.

Contact information on page 102.

Furniture of America

The Oscar twin bunk bed is designed to look like a house. Its interior features fold-out tables and a fun slide.

Contact information on page 102.



Klaussner

The Allentown Drop Leaf Table is perfect for smaller dining and entertaining spaces. Drop leaves make extra seating space when needed.

Contact information on page 102.



Omnia

The Uptown looks and feels great. It's part of Omnia's Quick Ship program that offers affordable luxury, expedited nationwide to satisfy customers who need it pronto. Made in America, available in 100% top grain leathers and fabrics.

Contact information on page 102.

Best Selling
DESIGN



Craftmaster

This cocktail ottoman has clean modern lines with a retro flair. It features conical legs, five-button top and nailhead trim detailing.
Contact information on page 102.



Muniz

The new upholstered Venetian barstool showcases handcrafted thick polished beveled legs.
Contact information on page 102.

Copeland

The Linn Bedroom is crafted of solid American Black Walnut with GREENGUARD finish certified for low chemical emissions.
Contact information on page 102.



Screen Gems

The Clara Screen SG-339 is a room divider with hand-carved panels. It's a perfect piece to break up a room, divide an open plan space, or hide clutter.

Contact information on page 102.



Chromcraft

Portfolio is part of the new Comfort in Motion power recliner program. It is available in a choice of 100 custom fabrics, assorted leathers and Ultrafabrics Pro Reef fabrics.

Contact information on page 102.

Norwalk

The Sacramento features a unique roll-arm style that gives it a contemporary flair and outstanding comfort. Norwalk is known for producing custom upholstery and one-of-a-kind design ready to ship in 35 days.

Contact information on page 102.



Best Selling
DESIGN



Horizon Home

New from the Copper Canyon Collection is a 74" multi-purpose console featuring hand-hammered reclaimed copper top drawers, sand-blasted panels, a medium brown lacquer finish with burnished edges, brass-plated custom drawer pulls and full extension glides with felt-lined drawers. Comes in 66", 74" and 85" lengths. The collection includes bedroom, bars, accents and occasional.

Contact information on page 102.

Pelican Reef

Barstool from the Panama Jack's Sunroom Trinidad collection in Black Natural Rattan.

Contact information on page 102.

Bellini

The Oxford features crisp clean lines with motion headrest and power recline. This contemporary styled sectional is shown in full-grain gray Italian leather.

Contact information on page 102.



Aviva Stanoff

Gold Aztec Lace on Black from the Rockstar Artisan Collection is perfect for outdoor bar areas and any environment where one might fall into a pool or start a pillow fight by the grill. It is hand made in California.

Contact information on page 102.



Null

The small scale 6618-01 cocktail table from Null's Expressions Collection features plenty of storage. Family owned and operated Null furniture is known for producing furniture for use where living space is at a premium.

Contact information on page 102.



A-America

The Richmond dining collection is made of solid Mango in a rich textured brown sugar finish. Its diagonal lines and modern hour-glass look create visual interest.

Contact information on page 102.



HOW TO CREATE ENGAGED & FUNCTIONAL TEAMS

by René Johnston

One of the defining qualities of a good leader is an ability to actively and consistently work to understand who your retail team members really are.

Most leaders of successful businesses seek to build and manage strong, highly functioning teams. Leaders in the home furnishings industry are no different. One of the most effective strategies to ensure that you are able to reap the benefits of employing more fully engaged employees is to actively and consistently work to understand who your team members really are.

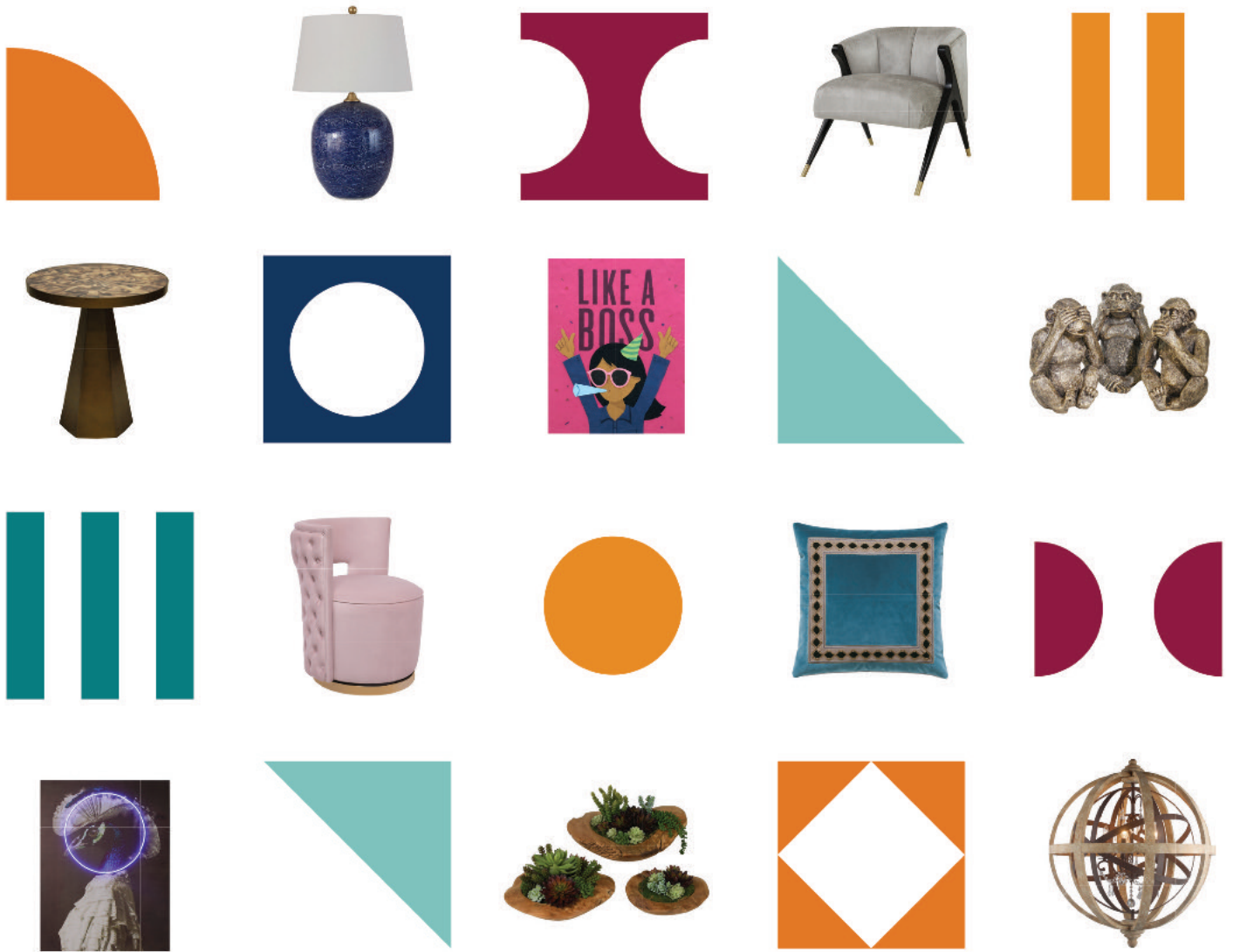
Getting to know them as individuals is incredibly valuable but takes time. You can begin by understanding some behavioral basics—communication styles, motivation, as well as traits that are often attributed to generational differences. A big part of this process is to understand that the individuals that make up your teams possess varying perspectives based on culture, background, life experiences as well as varying strengths and challenges. The more information you have, the better equipped you are to lead them. This includes matching their skills with specific roles within the workplace, leading them to greater fulfillment and higher engagement.

Below are just a few of the many benefits of getting to know your team members that will lead them to that greater sense of fulfillment and higher levels of engagement.

1. Better Coaching: If you know who your team members are, you can tailor your coaching style to be more effective. Ideally, you will be able to offer a more individualized approach to each team member. This is especially useful for sales managers whose primary responsibility should be ongoing coaching, allowing them to expeditiously recognize areas for improvement. Regardless of your leadership role (from sales to warehouse and operations or administration), tailoring your coaching style will allow you to connect, build rapport and encourage them to be more tuned into what skill-building resources are available.

2. More Frequent Feedback: This approach will provide you with more frequent occasions to gather important information, receive regular feedback and provide you with opportunities for reinforcement. This can be incredibly useful in multiple aspects of a retail furniture operation. Metrics are key. Measure, share, discuss, reward and strategize opportunities for improvement.

3. A Healthier Workplace: Knowing your team members will allow you to be able



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"Determining a team member's

communication style, provides a wealth of information regarding how to best approach them, how to most effectively deliver a message, and encourages team members to become more self-aware."

to tell sooner rather than later if a team member is happy and a good fit. Knowing this will prevent resentments from building up and possibly creating toxicity in your work environment. Most teams that work together in a home furnishings environment form relationships that are incredibly powerful and influential. Factor in a commissioned, or incentivized, environment and it is easy to understand why it is critical that leadership closely monitor team members. Only by monitoring the working environment can managers ensure that everything possible is being done to build and maintain a healthy dynamic. Tuning into this dynamic may even alert you to any possible safety concerns.

4. Career Development: If you are not plugged into people's lives opportunities are sacrificed to help them develop their careers by working with their strengths. Once you know them better, you can be more proactive in moving them around your organization or possibly out. As an industry consultant, I regularly see engaged leaders who move people, for example, from a warehouse position to the sales floor, or remove them altogether to improve the company's

organizational culture.

Beyond one-to-one engagement, self and peer evaluations, and team building activities, there are personality profiles and other assessment tools available that can help retail managers gain the insight need to understand team members' strengths and the challenges they face.

Brief descriptions of several commonly utilized assessment tools are included below.

Myers-Briggs

According to Myer's & Briggs Foundation (myersbriggs.org), "The purpose of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) personality inventory is to make the theory of psychological types described by C. G. Jung understandable and useful in people's lives. The essence of the theory is that much seemingly random variation in behavior is actually quite orderly and consistent, being due to basic differences in the ways individuals prefer to use their perception and judgment."

MBTI reports have been used to help companies measure employee preferences for Extroversion or Introversion, Sensing or Intuition,

Thinking or Feeling, Judging or Perceiving. The four preferences together make up 16 possible personality types. Results have been used to understand how individuals are likely to relate and interact with others of the same or different personality types as measured by MBTI.

Enneagram

Based on the ancient symbol, the Enneagram is a powerful tool for understanding ourselves and others. The test is divided into nine personality types: the reformer, the helper, the individualist, the achiever, the investigator, the enthusiast, the challenger, and the peacemaker.

Most all of the major Enneagram authors agree that we are born with a dominant type, and that we learn to adapt to our early childhood environment.

"By the time children are four or five years old, their consciousness has developed sufficiently to have a separate sense of self," the Enneagram Institute explains on its website.

"Although their identity is still very fluid, at this age, children begin to establish themselves and find ways to fit into the world on their own."



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DiSC

The DiSC personality test is a personal assessment tool based on the ideas of psychologists William Marston and Walter Clarke to evaluate behavior.

It is designed with a common language to help people better understand themselves and to adapt their behaviors with others. It also helps

employers to better understand their employees.

By giving each employee an understanding of four different personality traits, (dominance, influence, submission, and compliance) the DiSC test helps employees work more productively, understand and communicate with others and cooperate as a team. Some companies use the test to gauge an employee's suitability for a job, while others use it as a hiring tool.

and Kolbe.com.

Kolbe

With Kolbe, the focus is about understanding a person's "intrinsic knack for how they get things done," according to creator Kathy Kolbe. Her mission is to show people what drives their success. This assessment measures a person's cognitive strengths by using four key attributes to help a person discover the key to achieving. The four factors are: Fact finder, follow through, improvise, and implementor. There are no good or bad outcomes. The test points to ways employees may tackle challenges and be driven by instincts. The result is called an MO (method of operation).

CliftonStrengths

Hosted by Gallup, CliftonStrengths (formerly "StrengthsFinder") is an online personal assessment test that outlines the user's strengths.

It is a popular tool that companies use because, in its most basic form, the test is designed to reveal employees' talents and highlight their strengths at work. Therefore, it can help reduce turnover, improve employee morale and improve the organization's overall performance.

Brief descriptions of two other popular assessment tools can be found on www.learning-mind.com

Using Personality Testing

Tools like these provide retailers with a great deal of information about team members. Thoroughly research any assessment tool to discover if it is likely to provide you with the information you want to know.

"It should probably go without saying that strategies for getting to know your team are intended to be utilized within professional boundaries. Many leaders and coaches worry about blurring those lines."

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ENGAGED & FUNCTIONAL TEAMS

Keep in mind that a single assessment tool is not a substitute for simply paying attention and being present. Ideally, participation in assessments like those listed above not only allows leaders to learn more about team members, uncover valuable information, and begin a conversation, but also allows team members to learn about themselves, promoting increased self-awareness. Another benefit is that it promotes understanding among team members.

When working on-site with retailers, one of the simplest and most effective assessments I deliver is a brief communication style profile. This particular tool (you can find a variety of them online) takes about forty-five minutes and uses a short series of questions that determine which of four patterns each participant utilizes most often. Essentially, their default style. Determining a team member's communication style provides a wealth of information regarding how to best approach them and how to most effectively

deliver a message. It also encourages team members to become more self-aware and tune into the nuances of their co-workers, communication preferences.

Assessments, like any instrument must be used properly. Be sure that you utilize your human resources department or a training and development expert to fully vet your selection and learn how to deliver it appropriately.

Personal Boundaries

It should probably go without saying that strategies for getting to know your team are intended to be utilized within professional boundaries. Many leaders and coaches worry about blurring those lines. Knowing who your team members are and investing time into understanding their strengths and challenges does not mean you have to become friends. It simply means you are investing in useful resources, actively paying attention and

establishing yourself as an engaged, accessible leader. In the workplace, most team members are looking for a role model and a strong leader more than another pal to "hang out" with.

Conclusion

Getting to know team members is an investment of time and resources that will ultimately make your job as a coach and a leader easier. It will enable you to better engage them and keep them engaged. Fully engaged team members are more productive, satisfied and are much more likely to become long-term employees. A key ingredient in the recipe for retail success.

About René Johnston-Gingrich:

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

René served as a regular columnist for The Lewiston Tribune Business Profile and is an adjunct faculty member of Lewis-Clark State College's Business Division. René has a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Interior Planning and Design and a Master's Degree in Adult Education and Human Resource Development. She can be contacted at reneg@profitabilityconsulting.com.



Based on an ancient symbol, the Enneagram is a powerful tool for understanding ourselves and others. The test is divided into nine personality types.

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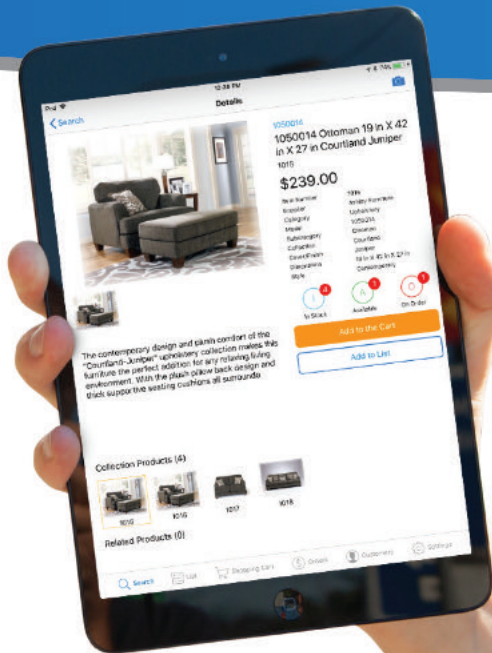


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