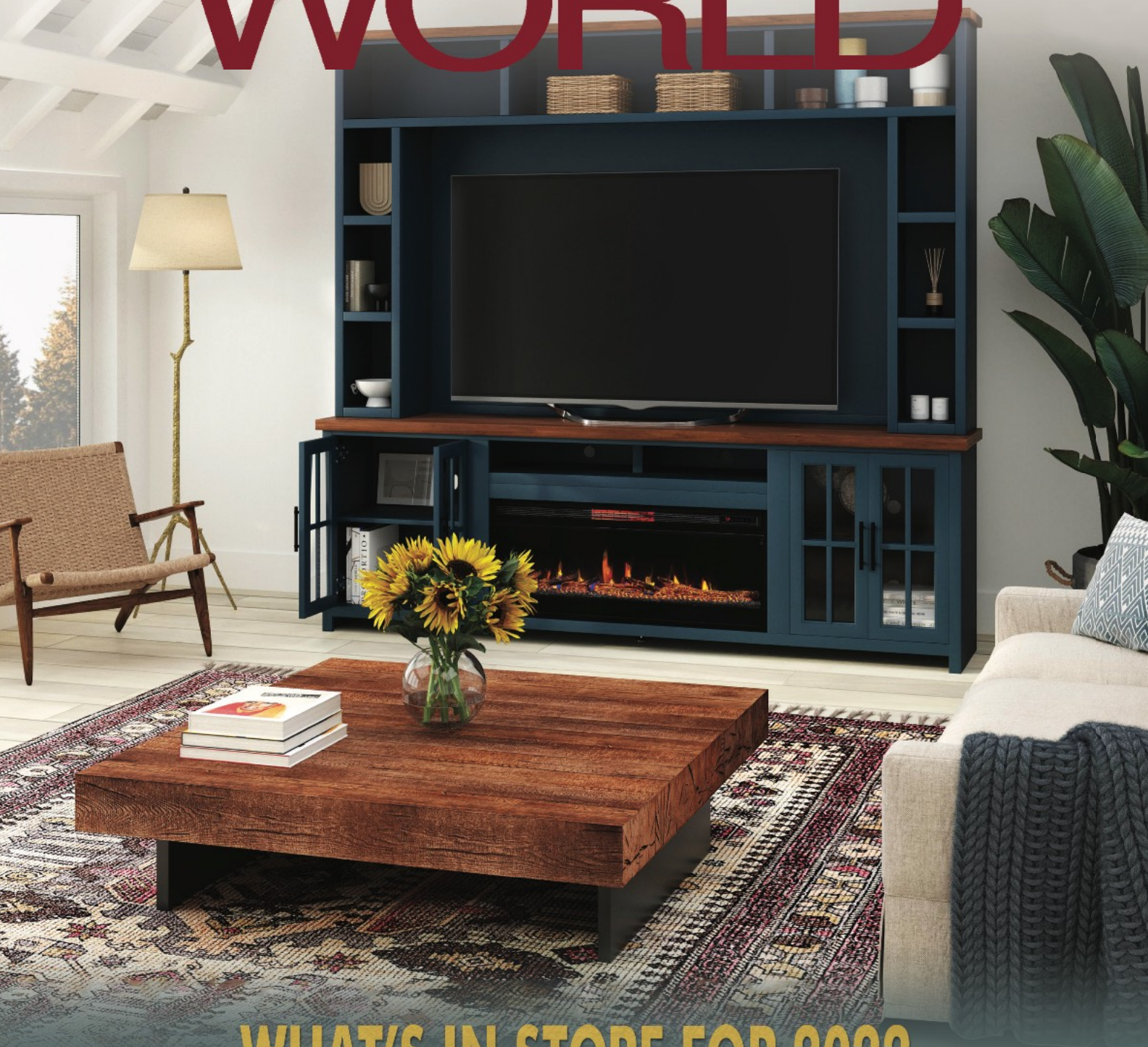
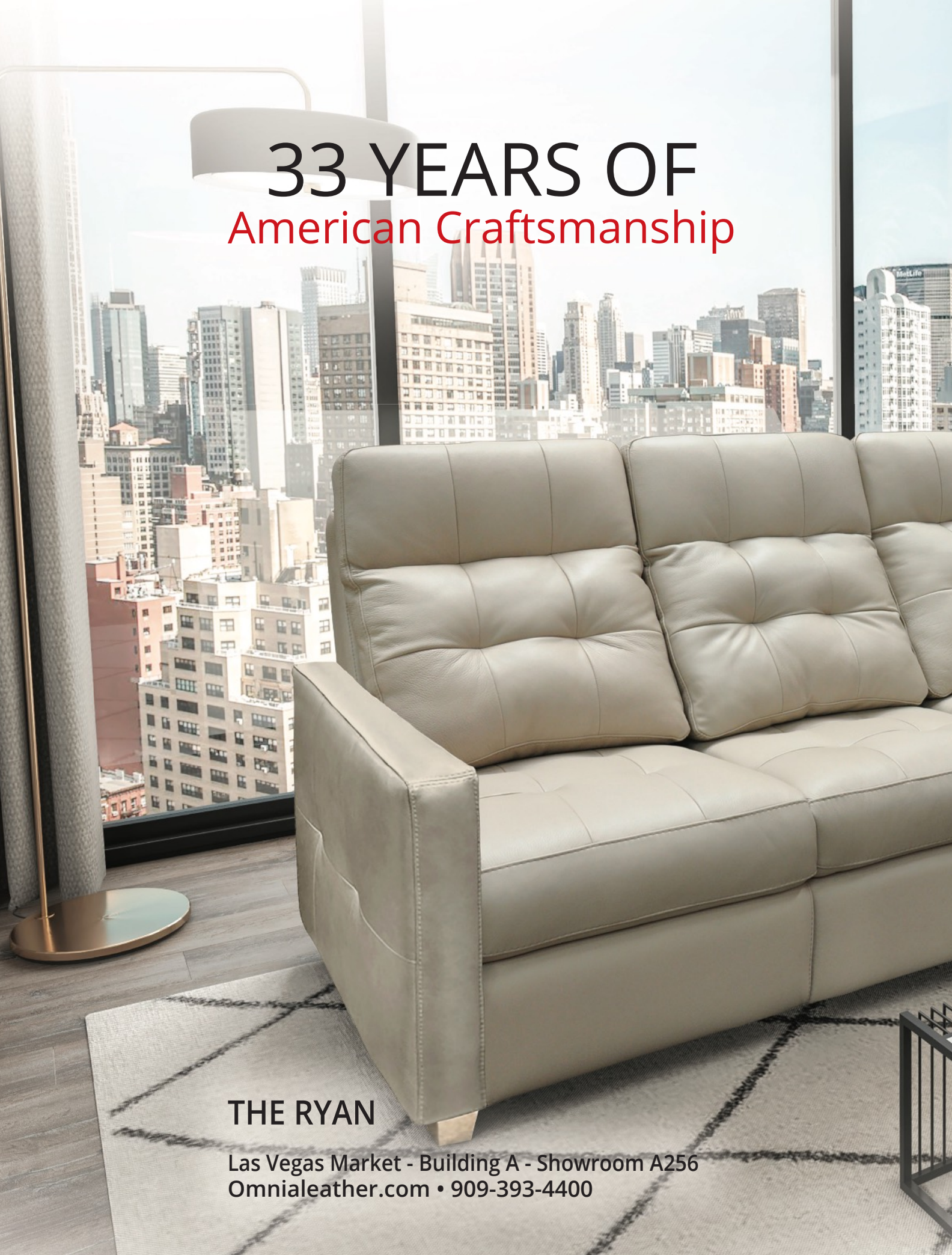


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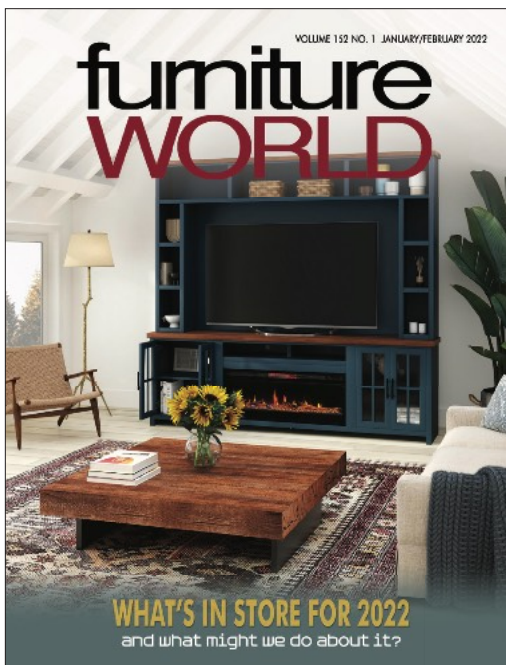
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CONTENTS

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COVER: The Nantucket Fireplace Center from Legends Furniture is dressed in an alluring two-toned Blue Denim finish with Whiskey top. It accommodates up to an 85" TV with plenty of room to store media gear. Oil rubbed hardware and glass panel doors make a noticeable statement. For more information see page 37 in this issue or visit www.legendsfurniture.com.

06 Editor's Corner

Read about the Happiest Man in the World.

08 What's in Store For 2022

There will be winners and losers this year. Industry observer Tom Liddell provides insights into potential problems and what if anything retailers might do.

24 Design & Designer: Patti Carpenter

Product developer and trend analyst Patti Carpenter provides insight into color, retail trends and ways to connect with the value systems of consumers.

40 Retail Funnel & Path Metrics

Improve the effectiveness of systems and move customers from an initial inquiry to a repeat purchase.

46 Trust & Delivery Accountability

Steps you can take to provide truthful delivery time estimates by keeping vendors accountable, plus keep sales and delivery personnel informed.

54 Focus on Design

Editors' picks of best-selling furniture and accessory designs.

62 Common Sense Approaches to Customer Service

Remove six major roadblocks to providing great customer service that exist in the vast majority of retail furniture stores.

72 Does Sales Training Matter?

Personnel turnover is high and training costs time and money.

80 Offer New Employees a 20 Percent Pay Increase

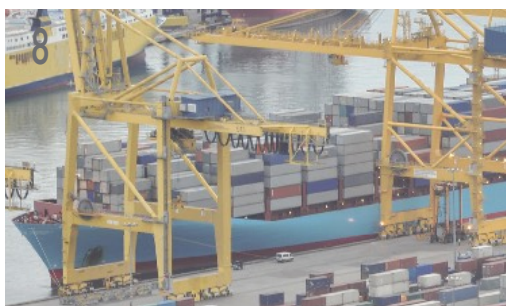
Help to find your next \$500,000 to \$1 million dollar closer, organize your business and keep fully staffed in this tight job market.

86 Next Level Training - Part 3

Sales training during onboarding often focuses on what's important to stores. Ongoing training needs to refocus on what's important to customers.

94 HFA Reports: What's Keeping Retailers Up at Night?

The Home Furnishings Association asked its members. Here's what they said.



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The Happiest Man in the World

Here's something we all know. It's a tough time to be a furniture retailer. In an environment where delivery disasters, people problems, supply snafus, warehouse worries, cranky customers and unrelenting uncertainty are the norm, it has to be tough for retail owners and managers to be happy.

The author Idries Shah tells a story about a man of "comfortable enough circumstances" who seeks out a sage to find a cure for his unsettled nature and unhappiness. The sage sends him on a journey to find the happiest man in the world and instructs him to ask for his shirt. Upon finding the happiest man in the world and asking him to be given his shirt, the man learns that not only is the happiest man in the world the same sage who sent him on his long journey, but also that the sage does not even own a shirt. Pronouncing the man cured, the sage remarks that "Striving for something unattainable provides the exercise to achieve that which is needed; as when a man gathers all his strength to jump across a stream as if it were far wider than it is. He gets across the stream." The journey the man took was, the sage explained, preparation to make that jump.

I suspect that after living through an anxiety-inducing 2021, many Furniture World readers can sympathize with the man in the story.

Those of you who know me or have read this column before realize that I am no sage. However, in this issue of Furniture World you will find useful information which I hope will provide a bit of wind at your back to help get you to the other side of 2022. Toward that end, please check out our interview with Tom Liddell, paying special attention to his sage-like advice about checkbook issues. Don't miss the Design & Designer interview with product and trend luminary Patti Carpenter as well as tips on customer service, hiring, delivery, retail funnel metrics and sales education, written by Furniture World's wise editorial contributors.

Be Happy & Good Retailing!

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WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2022?

Predictions and insights to help get you through to 2023

There will be winners and losers in the furniture retail community this year. Industry observer Tom Liddell provides insights into what may be in store.

Furniture World recently met with Tom Liddell, vice president of Planned Furniture Promotions to get his thoughts about the likely challenges and opportunities facing furniture retailers in 2022. Liddell grew up in furniture retail, became a sales rep and then a manufacturing executive. An astute observer of the furniture industry in his own right, he prepared his comments after surveying retailers in trading areas across the country.

Staffing & Paying Salespeople

The challenges furniture retailers are likely to face in 2022 will vary depending on the type of store and its price point. One issue that seems to be certain is that just about everyone will have trouble retaining salespeople, warehouse personnel or both.

Because of shipping delays, instead of paying salespeople on delivered goods, some retailers have switched over to paying on written business. Since lots of those orders may never be completed, it's a pretty big gamble. Let's say a retailer pays five to eight percent commission, a salary plus three percent commission or a tiered commission based on how much business a

salesperson writes. If a salesperson quits or leaves in the six months it takes to get products delivered, should 25 percent of these orders cancel because customers are tired of waiting or they find similar products in stock elsewhere, it's a problem. The retailer may have paid out eight percent of sales without seeing any benefit. But, for many retailers that pay commissions, it's the only way to have a chance to hire new salespeople.

A related issue has to do with commissions paid to salespeople on delivered goods. What happens if a salesperson gets fired or quits and the products they sold don't get delivered until six months later? That depends on the company's policy and state law. Only some states

"The problem is that it's not necessarily profitable for them or for their vendors. There's a big wakeup call coming for many retailers."

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"In 2022 the sky

will fall for some retailers. Those who were smart stashed customers' deposit money in escrow accounts or set it aside."

require that the salesperson be paid. From the salesperson's point of view, this seems harsh. The argument retailers have made to justify not paying, or paying a reduced amount, is that these salespeople are expected to follow up with customers until delivery to avoid cancellations and ensure customer satisfaction. They say that when salespeople leave the company before the goods are delivered, they haven't necessarily earned their commissions.

Sugar High at Retail

Lots of retailers are still cash-rich but many ignore the fact that it's cash borrowed from their customers. Let's say a furniture retailer collects 50 percent down on a \$2,000 sofa that costs them \$1,000. By the time it arrives from the factory, there have been three price increases so the \$1,000 sofa becomes \$1,300 dollars. The freight that was originally projected to be \$150 is now \$350. If the order was written before the retailer switched over to paying on written, they owe the commission. They

also owe sales tax and delivery-related expenses.

We are having a kind of "sugar high" in our business right now. Furniture is in high demand and retailers are enjoying some of the best business they've ever seen. The problem is that it's not necessarily profitable for them or their vendors. There's a big wake-up call coming for many retailers.

What About Cash Flow?

About a year ago, I warned retailers to watch their cash. Since then, the situation has worsened due to price and freight increases plus surcharges. In 2022 the sky will fall for some retailers. Those who were smart, stashed customers' deposit money away in escrow accounts or set it aside so that it didn't appear in their checkbook balance.

Some states mandate that retailers hold customer deposits in escrow. More than half of the states require they have as much cash in their checking account as they have taken in deposits. Retailers don't always follow these laws that are

rarely enforced.

Will Freight Problems Persist?

Many smaller stores that are dependent on warehouse programs and can't buy containers are having problems. For example, when a manufacturer finally does ship via LTL, not only is the freight

"I know of several manufacturing/importing companies that canceled all their sold orders. Then, they asked retailers to recalculate them so that they could find out how much was real."

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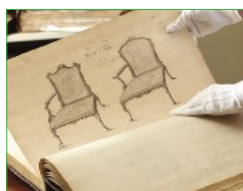
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STORIS Elevates the Point of Sale Experience with NextGen Mobile POS Launch

In October, STORIS launched the home furnishings industry's state-of-the-art Mobile POS. This modern Point of Sale is built into STORIS' NextGen platform, which is web-based and mobile responsive on all devices. NextGen's familiar user interface uses Google Material Design principles to increase adoption. In fact, over 50,000 Sales Orders have already been processed in Mobile POS. STORIS brings hallmarks of its proven in-store Point of Sale to Mobile POS such as advanced discounting logic, detailed pricing, and real-time available to customer dates. A new, sleek digital Shopping Cart is efficiently organized by the Order's fulfillment type.

Early Adopters Speak Out

STORIS' engineering team worked collaboratively with its Early Adopters. These retail partners included Broad River Retail and Wichita Furniture, who were instrumental in Mobile POS's direction. By providing early access to the solution throughout its development, the STORIS team gleaned firsthand user data from retail showroom floors. This allows STORIS to adapt processes to ensure the product is retail ready for its official launch. STORIS is thankful for their partners' effort and insight in guiding the product's development.

Wichita Furniture: Jordan Storey, Vice President of Wichita Furniture, discussed the value of the Early Adopters program

saying, "It is vital to align with the engineers developing the software to share the retail perspective that shapes its workflows. STORIS' Product Managers inspire how technology can enhance our showroom floors, while we as retailers provide best practices to develop tools that ultimately make our teams' lives easier."

Broad River Furniture: Charlie Malouf, President & CEO of Broad River Retail, echoed similar sentiments on the experience, "STORIS' NextGen Platform is the future of in-store customer experiences in home furnishings retail. We have a history of being an early adopter for STORIS, including their earlier mobile solutions. We are proud to have been a first mover for this important product launch. It is paramount to the essence of who we are at Broad River Retail to align our brand alongside innovative, retail technology-driven experiences at every touchpoint in the process. It's why STORIS remains such a vitally important partner of ours."

Broad River Retail shares that their favorite parts of NextGen Mobile POS include its intuitive design, which makes this technology easy to learn, and its fast processing speed. They enjoy that associates have the flexibility to switch back and forth when working with multiple guests simultaneously. But perhaps their favorite feature is the inventory search. Without leaving the customer's side, associates have all the product knowledge they need to close the sale,

including product imagery, pricing, discount eligibility, and availability.

Wichita Furniture also devised a dynamic selling process using customer and sales opportunity data in Mobile POS in organized, follow-up workflows. Using Mobile POS data in their Reputation Management System triggers consistent, personalized customer communications to close more sales.

Early in its history, Wichita Furniture's founder recalled the experience of losing a significant sale because of the number of times he needed to leave the customer to get pertinent information. This experience was commonplace and inspired Wichita Furniture's commitment to adopting technology for better customer experiences. Storey notes, "Technology is an investment in your people, company, and your business. STORIS' Mobile POS provides us with everything we need to prevent that scenario. With Mobile POS, there is nothing that we can't accurately answer for the guest without leaving their side."

About STORIS: STORIS' NextGen Mobile POS is now generally available to all home furnishings retailers. If the benefits shared by these industry leaders would enhance your business' showroom floor, contact STORIS today by visiting STORIS.com/mobile-POS to request a demo or call 1.888.4.STORIS.

"Since most dealers aren't paying

invoices until they receive their goods, and the transportation cost is included on the invoice, the factors are putting retailers on credit hold."

cost astronomical but at this point backlogs and delivery are made worse by a lack of transparency. Often manufacturers and retailers can't track their products. In some cases, they can't even get carriers to call them back.

Here's what I'm hearing from even big retailers. Manufacturers contract with carriers and bill for freight on their invoices to make it easy for retailers to pay one consolidated invoice. Manufacturers may take a slight mark-up on the freight, but here's the problem. Since most dealers aren't paying invoices until they receive their goods, and the transportation cost is included on the invoice, the factors are putting retailers on credit hold. Their invoices are going past due before they receive the furniture. Manufacturers and carriers are pointing the finger at each other. Ultimately though, it's dealers who are going to get hurt.

Who Will Get Hurt the Most?

Promotional dealers are feeling the most pain right now. Just a few years ago retailers still sold \$299 sofas. When the pandemic hit, the price went to \$399. Now that there is very little product to be found they can run at \$499. Some companies had entire stores full of \$399 and \$499 sofas. The new starting price point is \$599. Jerry Epperson has been talking for years about the fact that when Jesus was a baby, they were

selling sofas for \$499. That has finally changed. In the bedding sector, reasons given for price increases were the cost of foam, steel, and wood. Get ready for additional increases, this time due to labor costs. Mattress manufacturing is very labor-intensive. Building a mattress is hard work and they're having to pay significantly higher rates to find willing employees.

Did PPP Help?

Most retailers had a free ride with PPP programs. As retailers review their bottom-line profits for 2021, it's easy to forget how much the government paid in wages and overhead in our labor-intensive business. Now is the time to take a closer look at and consider what their true profit picture is. Yes, they did a ton of business, but did they make any money? Then they need to figure out how they are going to make money in 2022.

Is it a Good Time to Expand?

That depends. Big retailers have warehouses full of inventory. Large national chains, like Bob's and Raymour & Flanigan, might not be getting exactly the ideal selection of inventory they wished for, but they're getting plenty of products to sell. Their vendors are taking good care of them. Medium size and smaller retailers aren't being treated as well. They can't get inventory and it's having

significant impact. Everyone knows that many manufacturers just aren't supporting smaller dealers. Large regional and national chains generally get whatever they want even if they weren't customers at the start of the pandemic. So, to answer the question as it relates to growth, large stores are growing because they can.

What About the Container Situation?

The container shipping industry had a record year last year. They made billions

"Reps are getting paid on delivered, but the problem is they're not getting paid on surcharges. I've spoken to reps who feel like manufacturers have found a way to further reduce their commissions while enjoying record margins."



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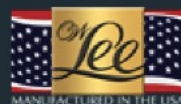
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in profits and are paying cash for new ships. My view is that it's one thing to make massive profits, and another to sabotage the system. It's out of control and something needs to be done. Perhaps there will be a rash of class-action lawsuits representing everyone up and down the supply chain down to consumers. There's a lot of greed right now outside and sometimes inside our industry and consumers will ultimately pay the price.

What If a Slowdown Comes?

One of the things that manufacturers are struggling with is that they don't know what percentage of the gigantic orders

retailers have placed over the past year are real. How much of this was placed by retailers who were hedging their bets? If business slows, it could be like a 600-wagon train. If the first horse on the lead wagon stops, the backup could get ugly.

I know of several manufacturing/importing companies that canceled all of their sold orders then asked retailers to re-submit them so that they could find out how much was real. They assigned priority based on when the original orders were placed and built-in retroactive price increases. This is unprecedented in the furniture business. Of course, retailers couldn't say anything. They were stuck. But many have told me that they are making notes, taking names and when all this is over are planning to be loyal to the people who treated them well. Pretty much everybody I talked to in preparation for this article respects the way HomeStretch Furniture handled product allocations. They set up a system where every retailer could buy in proportion to what they bought pre-pandemic.

Situation With Reps?

Reps are getting paid on delivered, but the problem is, they're not getting

paid on surcharges. So, if a rep sold a \$100 item and \$70 of surcharges are added, they only get paid on the original \$100. It does help to keep prices for retailers lower than if the reps had to be paid on the higher amount, but I've spoken to reps who feel like manufacturers have found a way to further reduce their commissions while enjoying record margins.

What Is on the Horizon for Retailers?

If current trends hold, the supply chain will probably adjust in a positive direction throughout 2022.

- Container prices have stabilized somewhat. Based on my research they are running between \$10,000 and \$17,000, depending on whether they're on spot rates or under contract. Still, at these prices, the cost of a container can be almost as much as the value of the freight that's in that container, which is insane.
- As a reaction to that, we are seeing a big, ongoing shift to production in Mexico. Companies that were already making product there have been pleased with the success

"Big retailers don't need any advice from me. They know what to do. Average medium-sized and small retailers are a different kind of animal."



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WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2022?

they've had.

- Chinese rolling power outages are not a problem like they were, but raw materials shortages in China, Malaysia and Vietnam are. Production is running 60 to 90 days longer than projected.
- Based on reports from everyone I've spoken to, California's ports are picking up a little bit. Warehouse space has become a big problem. Although retail showroom locations are still plentiful for retailers who want to convert or open new furniture stores, there will be a continued shortage of warehouse space in 2022. Even warehouses that have been empty for years are all full of product because all types of com-

panies are stocking up as a hedge against further supply chain disruptions.

- Consumers are even more demanding and there are lots of "Karens" out there. I hope this won't continue but fear it will. It's just one more factor in a long list that will make retailing less enjoyable in 2022.

Checkbook Issues

Big retailers don't need advice from me. They know what to do. Average medium-sized and small retailers are a different kind of animal. In those stores, the owner is the buyer, the merchandiser, the person who sets up the sales floor, dusts and pushes furniture around. Owners don't have HR departments to make sure that the people they hire aren't engaged in bullying or sexual harassment. They manage social media and try to keep Google ratings high. They are the head of everything in their stores, mediating arguments between salespeople and making decisions related to what to do with the employee that's come down with COVID. It goes

on and on. There aren't enough hours in a day for them to run their businesses successfully. So, while it's easy for me to say that they need to get control of the financial side of their business, I don't know how they have time to think about it. Many retailers I speak to are working themselves to death, especially with as much business as they have right now.

The fact is that in 2022 many independent retailers need to manage their finances better to survive. A retailer's P&L is just a snapshot in time. Like anything else, junk in, junk out. Many retailers supply their accountants with sales and incoming inventory numbers but don't have control of their inventory. We recently completed a forensic inventory for a store that had \$1,650,000 on their books and found it was half of the amount. Inventory discrepancies are not uncommon.

Cash management is often limited to retailers looking at their checkbook balance every day, and many don't listen to their accountant's advice. These are symptoms that can, and do, result in poor decision-making, which can't continue if they want to ensure their success in 2022.

"Consumers are even more demanding and there are lots of 'Karens' out there. It's just one more factor in a long list that will make retailing less enjoyable in 2022."





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DESIGNING it Right

INTERVIEW WITH PATTI CARPENTER

by Russell Bienenstock

Product developer and trend analyst Patti Carpenter provides insight into color and retail trends. She also explores ways retailers can better connect to the value systems of consumers.

The daughter of a graphic designer and a writer, Patti Carpenter is a self-proclaimed non-linear thinker and artist. The well-known founder of carpenter + company/Trendscope, she is sought after for her expertise as a trend consultant and creative director in the globally sourced home décor, personal accessories, fragrance and gift industries.

Carpenter's passion for taking a trend or theme and making it right for consumers has led her to collaborations with top brands including Bloomingdale's, SFERRA, Neiman Marcus, Crate & Barrel, The Phillips Collection, abc carpet and home, Urban Zen and Ralph Lauren.

Her Career in Fashion

Growing up in Washington, D.C., she studied fine art then earned degrees in fashion design and fashion illustration from the Fashion Institute of Technology. "FIT brought me to New York where I made a decision to go into fashion design. Following graduation I spent 27 years moving up through the ranks working with wonderful people like Ralph Lauren, Oscar De La Renta, Bill Blass and Adrian Vittadini. Also, with retailers like Timberland and The Limited Corporation."

In 2000, as a VP at Ralph Lauren, Carpenter decided to change her career direction. "I could see," she recalled, "that the industry had taken a turn toward fast fashion, becoming more about the numbers than about design."

"I spent a lot of time in Asia opening and working with factories doing product development. As a creative person, I could see that it wasn't something I was going to enjoy going forward. Instead of showing up at meetings with swatches of fabulous fabrics or inspiring observations about a great art show, we spoke about margins."

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As the orange family of colors heats up and merges with the warm neutrals that have been on the rise, they collide in Caliente Cayenne. This scorching hot hue speaks of the passion that we are all feeling as we re-emerge and reconnect for a brighter future.

This lovely midtone sits beautifully balanced between red and blue. As lavender is used to calm us, this colorful hue invites us to breathe and begin again. Pretty Periwinkle's bluer cast resonates with all the positive attributes of that shade while transforming us to prepare for the newness that lies ahead.



color trend: pretty periwinkle



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color trend: caliente cayenne

Passion for Artisan Development

From 1995 through 2000, Carpenter volunteered to be part of the Designer Round Table at Aid to Artisans, one of the first nonprofits to work with artisan development around the globe. "In 2000, Aid to Artisans offered me the right of first refusal to head up a three-year project in Mali. It required me to spend time in northwestern Africa working to develop products for export. I worked with individuals, families and whole villages to understand costing and pricing, raw material procurement, lead times and even weather patterns that might affect production. Here at home, the focus was on collaboration with importers to develop products based on color and trend themes, artisan capabilities and production capacity.

"I left my full-time job at Ralph Lauren

and never looked back. It's been 20 years since starting my own business doing artisan development. Twenty-five years later I'm still working with Aid to Artisans, other NGOs and nonprofits in the state department, USAID.

"Working on these types of projects resonates with my artisan heart and soul. Our modern world becomes better when there is a balance of home furnishings made by modern technology and by artisans. Without that balance, we will continue to lose cultural diversity. This is the story I've heard everywhere from Africa to South America. Young people will work at a Hilton rather than learning how to weave beautiful sustainable items, blow glass or carve wood like their grandmoms did if they can't make a decent living."

Carpenter lamented that the loss of artisan skills mirrors what's happening

in the broader furniture industry as well as in nature. "If we don't support these people, artisan culture will be lost in a generation. Their current situation is part of the whole sustainability crisis but on a human level."

"Topics like respect for the planet and support for artisans in the retail conversation hit touchpoints that bring customers into stores and keep them coming back."



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*Source: TD Customer Experience. September 2021 Survey. A major purchase is defined as spending \$500 or more on a single product.

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Yellows continue as we seek that Sunny Outlook. This toasted tone has a hint of nostalgia and when used on accent pieces offers up a sense of optimism and conviviality. Use this warmed yellow to let the sunshine in!

color trend:
sunny outlook



Patti Carpenter has worked with top brands including Bloomingdale's, SFERRA, Neiman Marcus, Crate & Barrel, The Phillips Collection, abc carpet and home, Urban Zen and Ralph Lauren. Photo by Marlon Cantillan.

Images and text above excerpted from Patti Carpenter's Maison & Objet Color & Trend Report © carpenter + company 2021.

Segueing to more practical considerations for Furniture World readers she offered her view that "Seeking out, supporting and merchandising items sourced from artisans is a wonderful way for furniture retailers to tell stories that connect with their customers. It's an especially effective path to take because it connects in multiple ways with today's consumers who are focused on doing business with companies that are in line with their value systems. Topics like respect for the planet and support for artisans in the retail conversation his touchpoints that bring customers into stores and keep them coming back."

Data & Design Together

Furniture World asked Carpenter if her product development and consulting work starts with an analysis of demographic, economic, political and lifestyle

trends.

"Data has become a driving force in business," she replied. "However, my approach is more creative. I'm experienced enough to walk a trade show or retail sales floor and pick up on the connectors pointing to something that is going to be or already is a trend. It's this ability that was responsible for propelling me forward in the fashion industry. I've been told that I have a great eye for color. And, I've always been able to speak the language of color in a way that people who might not have a creative bent can understand and become engaged.

"But what I really like to do is compare and contrast what's happening on the business side with the creative side then bring those two elements together. Design and merchandising cannot exist in isolation. On the creative side I also walk the line between what we see

coming and what's selling now," she observed. "Part of my job is to find a way to develop choices that nudge cus-

"People have been at home a long time and are thinking more critically about everything they bring into their homes. They've discarded a throwaway fast fashion mentality in favor of quality manufacturing, materials and textures."

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"Becoming unique

allows home furnishings retailers to bring more to the table. When they figure this out, they can initiate a dialogue about what the products they sell are really worth."

tomers forward. That's something I focus on in my color and trend reports."

2022: Retail Planning

When asked what areas home furnishing brands and retailers should focus on in 2022, Carpenter suggested that "They need to focus more on listening to and understanding how their customers use the items they sell. That includes finding out why customers need an item, what they will do with it, who will be living with

it and why."

She explained that the need for this heightened attention results from changes in consumer purchase motivations. "There was a time when consumers bought just about everything. That period was followed by a period of experiential buying. Now we're entering a phase where emotional engagement is important," she observed. "People have been at home a long time and are thinking more critically about everything they bring into their homes. They've discarded

a throwaway fast fashion mentality in favor of quality manufacturing, materials and textures. If you think back just a couple of years, millennials had no use for anything vintage or antique. Now they are driving that bus. They have a whole new appreciation for quality and longevity. It's something that furniture retailers can tap into.

"Luxury brands, in particular, have had trouble adjusting the new focus on emotional engagement that replaced a desire to possess luxury goods or live a



color trend: herbal remedies

As we re-emerge into the world, we take with us the herbal greens that recall nature's healing properties. Whether we think of them as earthy and elemental or as new sprouts of optimism and bone, they lift our spirits and ground us in the comfort of Mother Nature offering us an herbal remedy.

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trend: fine fiber lighting



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Pictured are artisans and products from Patti Carpenter's GuaDecor collection entirely hand-made by 6,000 indigenous women and local designers in Guatemala.

artisan products: guatemala

luxury lifestyle. That's not enough now. Even people who can afford such a lifestyle want to find objects that resonate with them personally. Everything we as an industry sell sparks an emotional connection in our customers. This connection can result from an object's aesthetic, the experience it promises or the way it functions. Understanding how company values align with customers' values is becoming much more important."

2022: Market Differentiation

Continuing with the subject of topics Furniture World readers might address in 2022, Carpenter brought up issues related to competitive advantage. "Retailers need to revisit what sets them apart from competitors and ask the question, 'why would shoppers come to us versus another retailer?'"

"To do this, they must create their own stories, step into their authenticity, understand who they are as a company and where the points of differentiation lie.

"Second, they must establish the foun-

dation of everything they do going forward. Only after they plant this flag, can they define their business universe and pinpoint the heart of what they do well.

"With this knowledge, they can ask what their product selection should look like. The Pottery Barn consumer is not the West Elm consumer. CB2 is not the same as Crate & Barrel. Each of these retailers has a unique reason for being and is successful." Carpenter said that examining points of differentiation is not just a useful exercise for top-100 retailers. "The opportunity for differentiation is that any retailer can become a unique destination," she advised. "Customers won't only show up to replace a worn sofa, but also to find something new and exciting. It's a similar situation to what happened in the clothing industry. The big department stores consolidated then struggled because they all started to look the same. When retailers all start looking the same it becomes a race to the bottom. Becoming unique allows home furnishings retailers to bring more to the table. When they figure this out, they can initiate a dialogue about what

the products they sell are really worth."

Be on the Lookout for These 2022 Retail Trends

"Across the board trends that were on the cusp of happening were accelerated

"We've been talking about cottagecore since 2017. Since then, because of COVID, this aesthetic that reflects a kinder, gentler life, baking, riding bikes, planting, freeform and freestyle, has become more important."

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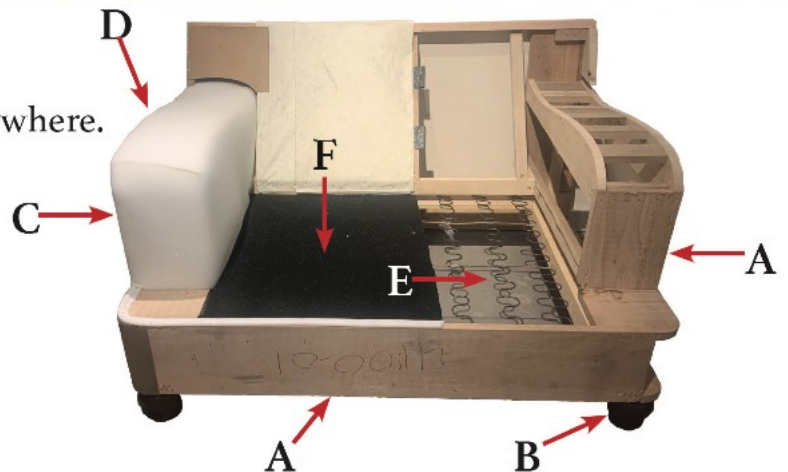
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"We moved on from

white, black and grey marbles to brown a few seasons ago. Stone has shifted now to all levels of green."

by the pandemic," Patti Carpenter told Furniture World.

1. "We've seen cozy materials, more curvilinear furniture that's comforting and gives people a hug. There have been more rounded edges, arches, capsule shapes, circles and spheres as well as curvaceous sofas and seating."

2. "There's the trend toward grand-millennial style that uses older things as well as cottagecore style. We've been talking about cottagecore since 2017. Since then, because of COVID, this aesthetic that reflects a kinder, gentler life, baking, riding bikes, plant-

ing, free form and freestyle, has become more important. It's a bit nostalgic and informal. More like a meadow than a formal English garden."

3. "The demand for larger scale seating and sectionals has increased so that people can sit farther apart. This trend first appeared in the hospitality sector, but has now expanded into residential."

4. "There is a focus on wood in its natural state with the grain showing through in a mid-range of colors; walnut or cherry finishes at the dark end as well as lighter woods in natural finishes.

Wood stories have become more important. Is it recycled, reclaimed, upcycled or sustainably harvested? Sustainability continues to be important. Greenwashing is still with us. It's sad that when a consumer sees the word sustainable, green or eco, it often doesn't mean very much, but organizations like the Sustainable Furnishings Council are working on that issue."

5. "Stone used in home furnishings has become more colorful. We moved on from white, black and grey marbles to brown a few seasons ago. Stone has shifted now to all levels of green. Green as a family of color is prob-



artisan products: guatemala & vietnam

Carpenter consulted with Casa Sagrada to envision the use of artisan-made Mayan textiles. Traditionally worn by indigenous women in Guatemala, these textiles are incorporated into carpets and seating.

Pictured at left are artisan silk, ceramic creations and cotton jacquard pillows from Patti Carpenter's Vietnam collaborations.





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artisan products: south africa

Pictured are items from Carpenter's most recent collaboration with the women of the Ndebele in South Africa. "Working on these types of projects," she said, "resonates with my artisan heart and soul."



"If we don't support these people, artisan culture will be lost in a generation. Their current situation is part of the whole sustainability crisis but on a human level."

ably the most important color right now."

6. "Look for rough-hewn and rustic weaves in natural materials with a handwoven, tactile effect."

7. "We are seeing spots on ceramics that look handmade so that no two feel like they're the same. Enameled accessories, metal and mixed materials are important. Alabaster is a big trend as is the continued popularity of raw edges."

8. "Japandi is trending with its mixture of Scandinavian and Japanese for a minimalist and serene effect. This is in reaction to years of extraneous, unnecessary products just piled on for maximalist effect. It's now really cleaning up, with a trend toward items with an aesthetic that can be simple, beautiful,

useful and mobile to reconfigure when necessary."

9. "We're certainly seeing beautiful trends in lighting. LEDs have expanded lighting's design possibilities. The category has become much more interesting and artful. Retailers should be looking at a new generation of LED lighting innovations especially if they have an industrial feel."

10. "Bringing the outside in has never been a stronger trend. In the 70s many people owned indoor trees such as a Ficus. Now we are seeing the move from smaller plants in the window to larger scale, decor-inspired planters with large trees for the inside. Additionally, there are many products and objects in the marketplace that are inspired by nature, but not necessarily

constructed in the same materials as the original inspiration. These include prints and patterns on furniture and functional accessories in the shapes and silhouettes of plants, leaves, and flowers."

11. Multi-generational spaces are on the rise in the U.S. During COVID we've seen the idea of multi-sharing spaces and a corresponding need for spaces and furniture that are multi-functional."

"Japandi is trending with its mixture of Scandinavian and Japanese for a minimalist and serene effect."

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RETAIL FUNNEL & PATH METRICS

by David McMahon

Metrics that can be used to track and improve the effectiveness of systems tasked with moving customers from an initial inquiry to a repeat purchase.

In the November/December 2021 edition of Furniture World we took a close look at the four “funnels” customers pass through during their purchase experience (see www.furninfo.com/furniture-world-articles/3962). They often start in the first of these funnels, the virtual funnel where they reach out before visiting a physical store. Once they arrive at a brick-and-mortar location, they enter the physical funnel. Provided a sale is made there, they enter the open sales funnel where they can remain for a short or (now during the pandemic) a long time. Following a successful delivery or pick-up, customers proceed to the post-sale funnel. The purpose of the post-sale funnel is to invite customers to enter back into the virtual and physical lead funnels where repeat business can be generated.

In this article, I will discuss metrics that can be used to track and improve effectiveness when customers enter each of the four funnels.

Virtual Lead Funnel Metrics

Lead source. This simple metric tracks the ways customers make pre-sales inquiries. It measures the percentage of

telephone, chat, text, email, webform, appointment request, social media and lead gen CTA (call-to-action) quizzes.

Conversion rate. Calculated by measuring the number of sales made virtually divided by the number of leads, conversion rate provides a measure of how well retail teams perform when selling remotely.

Average sale of virtual leads. This is a measurement of the typical value of converting a prospect online. Typically, average e-commerce sales are lower than the in-person average sales..

“Improving the experiences of customers who are waiting for products to be delivered is important for most furniture retailers in the current business environment.”

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FUNNEL & PATH METRICS

Number of appointments made from virtual leads. A critical number to track since appointment sales are proven to yield better close rates and higher average tickets. Appointments present retailers with opportunities to deliver superior customer experiences, in part because preparation is possible.

Conversion rate inclusive of appointments made. This metric considers appointments made and virtual sales, together. It's an indicator of the success rate when customers move from the first to the second funnel, calculated as the sum of the number of sales made virtually and sales made by appointment, divided by the number of leads.

Physical Lead Funnel Metrics

Physical lead funnel metrics are the most common sales metrics tracked by furniture retailers. I suggest that these metrics be adapted to track leads received from at least three sources: appointments, repeat customers and new customers.

Close rate by appointments from virtual leads. This close rate equals the number of sales from virtual leads closed divided by the number of opportunities times 100. It tracks the average chance

of converting an appointment prospect into a sold customer. It is among the highest close rates for most furniture retailers, comparable to close rates for house calls, typically in the 90-100 percent close-rate range.

Close rate for repeat customers. Provided information on known customers is already available in your CRM system, measuring this close rate allows you to determine how well your store develops long-term relationships. The better your close rate for repeat customers is the less you may need to spend on advertising.

Close rate for new customers. This metric provides a measure of how adept you are at converting on first impressions.

Overall close rate. You will likely find that if you track and improve the number of opportunities from both appointment customers and repeat customers, your overall close rate will also grow.

Average sale. Track average sales from all three sources: virtual leads, repeat customers and new customers. The calculation is sales dollars divided by the number of successful sales. The highest average sale numbers will normally result from appointments and repeat customers.

Sales per guest. Consider appointment customers, repeat customers, and new customers when calculating sales per guest. This will provide further evidence of the power of making connections with people. If you improve systems to maximize flow of virtual leads into the physical lead funnel you will produce more sales volume with less customer traffic.

Sales efficiency rate. This metric is measured by adding your close rate to

"This new metric will help you to get a handle on how much your teams are actually following up. It is calculated as the number of follow-ups (emails, texts, phone calls) divided by total customers with open sales."

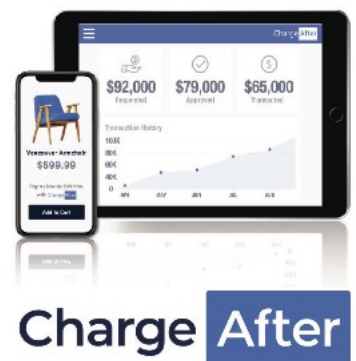


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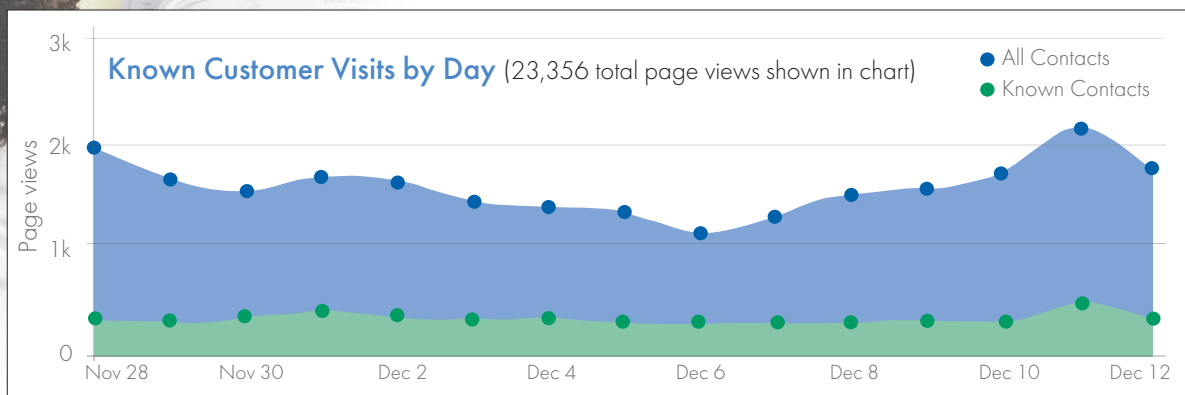
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your no-sale capture rate for follow-up. Here's an example. Let's say your store greets 10 shoppers. If three buy, four give you their contact information for follow-up and the remaining three leave without providing any contact information, your efficiency rate is 70 percent.

Open Sales Funnel Metrics

The open sales funnel has ballooned in the past two years due to supply chain disruptions. It is, therefore, very important to manage and track customers who enter this funnel. Improving the experiences of customers who are waiting for products to be delivered is important for most furniture retailers in the current business environment.

Cancellation rate. This is the number of sales that exit the open sales funnel in the wrong direction. Follow this metric by measuring the number of cancellations divided by the number of sales written over a period of time. Presently, retailers are reporting this number to be one percent at the low end to ten percent or more at the high end of the spectrum. I've mentioned in many Furniture World articles, and I will say it again: "If it is worth improving, start by tracking."

Number of follow-ups per open sales.

This new metric will help you to get a handle on how much your teams are following up. It is calculated as the number of follow-ups (emails, texts, phone calls) divided by total customers with open sales. Remember that proactive, routine follow-up on open sales, even if there is nothing new to report, delivers a better customer experience. With the large number of customers requiring follow-up right now, and many salespeople to manage, good systems can help to facilitate appropriate follow-up scheduling. These systems should notify salespeople or order management personnel when a customer needs to be contacted by text, email or phone.

Delivery failure rate. This metric tracks how many customers are dissatisfied. Dissatisfied customers often enter a different type of funnel—the open service funnel. These customers may become brand detractors if not handled correctly. Collecting metrics on why failures happen helps retail organizations improve customer experiences.

Net Promoter Score (NPS). NPS is a popular way of surveying customer satisfaction. Measured on a scale of 1-10, it measures whether a customer is

likely to be a promoter of your business or a detractor. An example of a common NPS question asked is, "How likely is it that you would recommend us to a friend or family member from 1-10, and why?" Asking these types of questions just after delivery yields useful information and actionable insight into the quality of your sales cycle.

Post-Delivery Funnel Metrics

Past purchase engagement rate. If you schedule past purchase follow-up, via email, for example, you can track the resulting opens and click-through rates of your campaigns.

Next purchase engagement rate. Retailers that collect information on the timing of customers' likely next projects can send out emails that include a link to a digital appointment calendar. As with past purchase follow-up emails, opens and clicks should be observed.

Known customer website visits. It's useful to measure known contacts that are visiting your website. These include customers who have shopped with you before and left behind a digital email tracking signature. If a known contact

"It's useful to measure

known contacts that are visiting your website. These include customers who have shopped with you before and left behind a digital email tracking signature."

visits your site, you can alert the salesperson they worked with previously to follow up. Regardless of how you use this info, you want to grow total website visitors as well as the proportion of known contacts to all contacts. See the chart on the previous page where blue depicts "all contacts" and the green depicts "known contacts."

Repeat customer leads. Whether they are virtual or physical, when a past purchaser or shopper who left without buying reaches out to you again, they leave the post-delivery funnel and re-enter either the virtual or physical lead funnel. The percentage of these shoppers is a good measure of your customer experience and re-marketing performance.

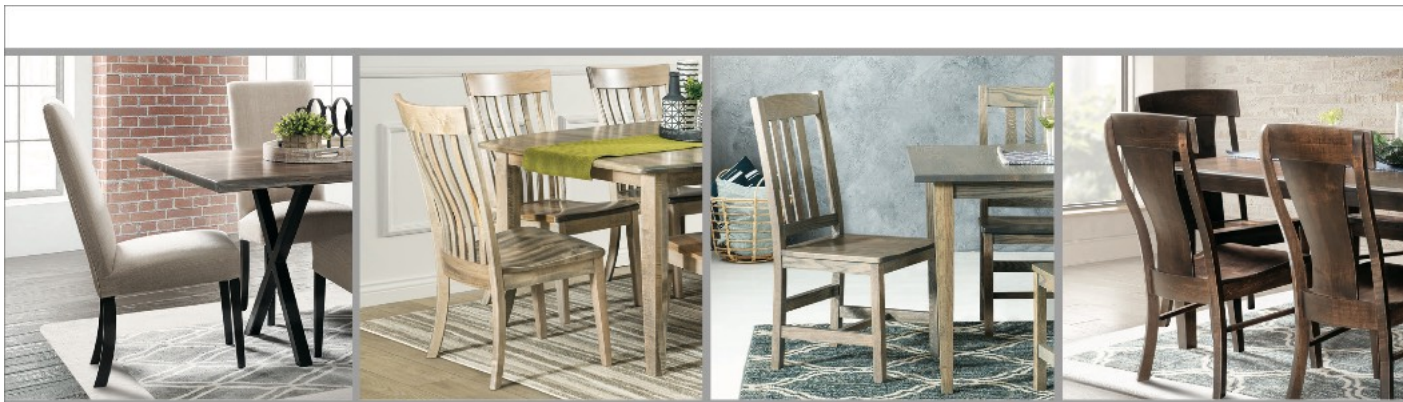
The Future of Furniture Retail

Using customer engagement tools such as funnels combined with automation is the future of furniture retail for those businesses who want to get ahead of their competitors. We live in a time when, for the majority of furniture retailers, there is a problem with a lack of human resources.

The solution to better manage the retail customer experience is technology. In the next issue of Furniture World, we will show how retailers can use automation to connect with all their contacts

(prospects, customers, vendors, new hire candidates, and employees) so that more can be accomplished with fewer resources.

About David McMahon: David is the founder of PerformNOW Inc. PerformNOW has three main products that help home furnishings businesses improve and innovate: Performance Groups (Owners, Sales managers, Operations), PerformNOW CXM (Customer eXperience Management systems and processes), Furniture business consulting. See all of McMahon's articles at www.furninfo.com/Authors/David_McMahon/6. He can be reached at david@performnow.com.



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TRUST & DELIVERY ACCOUNTABILITY

by William Vanderford

Provide truthful delivery time estimates by keeping your vendors accountable and your sales & delivery personnel informed.

People develop a higher level of appreciation and trust for businesses and individuals that serve them well. Once salespeople earn a shopper's trust, they can begin to build personal relationships. It's something big online retailers can only emulate.

This issue of trust is more important than ever before because of the need for furniture retailers to provide ongoing and truthful communications with clients regarding when their purchases are likely to arrive. However, knowing this and actually doing it well requires intervention at a number of information and accountability levels. Vendors, sales staff and delivery personnel must all be included in this process.

Salesperson Accountability

I have witnessed many instances of salespeople providing false representations about when furniture will be received and delivered to customers. This behavior has accelerated in today's competitive marketplace as people are shopping around for in-stock merchandise in an environment where online retailers often have a competitive advantage.

Large online retailers are shipping product like mad. They have assets and resources far outweighing many brick-and-mortar stores that have spent years fighting for their fair share in their respective market areas.

When retailers are short of best sellers and popular models, salespeople have an incentive to collect money and provide a general low-ball delivery estimate. This is the definition of over promising and under delivering. Once a lie has been told, no matter how hard a retailer works to keep the sale, trust has been sacrificed. Honesty and ethics are

"Once a lie has been told, no matter how hard a retailer works to keep the sale, trust has been sacrificed. Honesty and ethics are more important in today's world than ever before."



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When realistic expectations are set at the onset, most customers will understand. If a client does decide to cancel, however, salespeople should be required to submit a report so management can work with salespeople to make sure that they did everything possible to keep the sale.

Once a sale has been made, additional customer trust problems can be minimized by implementing the following best practices.

Vendor Accountability

It is not enough to just follow up with vendors to check on expected delivery dates and lead-time delays. The single most important thing a retailer can do with information collected from vendors is to inform customers.

If vendors can't keep their promises, neither can you. That's why every furniture retailer must allocate resources

and work hard to keep vendors accountable. The first step is to keep track of promised delivery dates. If vendor promises are not met, make sure that a highly competent and organized person is tasked to follow up. Without accurate information and holding vendors accountable you will spin more wheels than NASCAR!

Attention to vendor accountability allows retailers to provide customers with insight into difficult supply chain issues. Honest conversations minimize calls from upset clients when upfront delivery estimates cannot be kept. We all know that forecasting during a pandemic is near impossible, but updating customers every two weeks, at a minimum, is not. To do this well, your operating processes may need to be adjusted. Make sure that your staff is provided with tools and training that will prompt them to communicate routinely and effectively with customers. The result will be better client retention, fewer refunds and a reduction in negative reviews on social media and

review websites.

Keeping Delivery in the Loop

Even when managers and salespeople are kept well informed about the delays that individual clients experience, most retailers don't bother to keep their back-end employees in the information loop. Do your service and delivery people understand how to interact with customers who are frus-

"Most customers can accept imperfections, but they will never accept an error followed by flawed follow up or follow through."

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"Attention to vendor accountability

allows retailers to provide customers with insight into difficult supply chain issues."

trated or angry?

Most delivery teams are focused on providing seamless home delivery experiences. It can be confusing and off-putting for them when they arrive at a client's home early, unpack, assemble and deliver the goods, clean up and then have to deal with dissatisfied clients due to COVID-related lead-time disruptions. Delivery teams should be fully briefed so they can be prepared to effectively assist clients.

Retailers must add value to ensure a great experience from beginning to end. That's why it helps to think of delivery personnel as facilitators of an extraordinary experience. Provide them with training that includes a script they can fall back on should they need to assure customers that their concerns or complaints will be handled effectively. Customers need to be told that information will be passed on to

managers whose job it is to listen, then do everything possible to make them happy. Just as objections at the point of sale are implied needs that salespeople can use to close sales, delivery problems and errors can be seen as opportunities to gain trust and loyalty. Most customers can accept imperfections, but they will never accept an error followed by flawed follow up or follow through.

Adding Value

Adding value to the client's experience is the best way to under promise and over deliver.

I would like to offer as an example, a small coffee shop I frequent, located in a small town where everyone knows everyone. It's not quite Mayberry, but there is a Barney Fife and a pseudo-Andy Griffith. The loyalty they earn

is derived from a lot of little things they do very well. They know my name, what I want and when I want it. When I pull up to their drive-thru window, any one of their three regular employees

"Even when managers and salespeople are kept well informed about the delays that clients experience, most retailers don't bother to keep their back-end employees in the information loop."

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TRUST AND DELIVERY ACCOUNTABILITY

greet me by saying, “Good Morning William, Cuban with light milk?” There have been occasions that my coffee is waiting at the window when I arrive at 6:15 am. Selling furniture is not so different. Furniture shoppers have become more particular. They demand service with their product. Providing the highest level of service includes, knowing their names, keeping track of their personal preferences and realizing that what they desire is exactly what they deserve. Going above and beyond is remembering where they earn a living, what their rooms need, what other rooms they have yet to furnish and details about their individual style preferences. Just doing that is a lot of work, but it’s only the beginning.

You want to WOW your clients, not just close transactions. If the average furniture and accessory purchases over a single client’s lifetime is valued

\$80,000, it’s a mistake to be pleased with making one \$5,000 sale. That’s why you must turn customers into raving fans and believers.

Have your sales staff follow up after the sale to check in with their customers. Remember, it’s the little things that make a big difference. You do not automatically deserve to be in business, you have to earn that right every day no matter your brand name or market share. This industry is at war and you must provide your clients with an unsurpassed home furnishings shopping experience, or you can watch others do it gracefully. The choice is yours.

About William Vanderford: William Vanderford is an operations manager at Red Knight Distribution Center located in Clarksville, Tenn. He has worked in this industry as a warehouse

manager, service manager, service technician, delivery driver, as well as a warehouse associate. William believes that leadership and attention to goals can make today better than yesterday. At Knight Distribution Center he has helped to implement standards, policies, and procedures in efforts to build structure and consistency allowing for operational savings and increased profits.

He attended Mississippi College and was an all-state football player in High School, where he learned the foundation of his work ethic, as well as the value of accountability. William uses metrics to validate successes and highlight areas that need attention.

Questions about this Furniture World article or any warehouse or service-related topic can be directed to William Vanderford, care of editor@furninfo.com.

“We all know

that forecasting during a pandemic is near impossible, but updating customers every two weeks, at a minimum, is not.”



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Focus on DESIGN

Capel Rugs

The Criss-Cross area rug from Genevieve Gorder in graphite has a style adapted from ancient basket patterns. Neutral and soothing, it is made from 100% undyed wool, hand tufted with a high-low construction.

Contact information on page 100.



Pelican Reef

The Venice woven outdoor Daybed consists of commercial grade extruded aluminum framing with HDPE synthetic woven fiber in a natural two-toned textured fiber. The large-scale design allows for easy placement poolside or on a balcony. The off-white outdoor cushions are standard, and can be upgraded with 30 different Sunbrella fabrics.

Contact information on page 100.



Simply Amish

This double pedestal table from the Montgomery Collection adapts to any lifestyle. It is available in dimensions that range from 38" x 60" to 48" x 96" and in eight wood species. Includes options for 12" leaves, solid wood tops or an 18" butterfly leaf on each end.

Contact information on page 100.

Moe's

Built from solid mango wood, the Nels end table puts its materials front and center, serving as a natural showcase for the woodgrain. Its tastefully sculpted form features a broad base, a simple round tabletop and a pedestal for a perfectly simple take on contemporary design.

Contact information on page 100.



OW Lee

It's a Modern-Americana design with a distinctly rustic appeal.

OW Lee's new Cibolo collection is an 18" round stool/ottoman and 36" round ottoman. The Cibolo collection offers the relaxed summer comfort of an Adirondack chair with the turn-of-the-century sophistication inspired by Gustav Stickley.

Contact information on page 100.



Magnolia Upholstery Designs

One of six groups, this sofa is made by Amish craftsmen in the USA. It features solid wood feet, padded sides and backs, 2.0 HR 30 lb. foam seating and a limited ten-year warranty.

Contact information on page 100.

Focus on DESIGN



Country View Woodworking

A popular choice from CWV's Premier Express Ship Program. This 38" x 54" single-leaf counter leg table is shown in Brown Maple. With two different chair options, the program offers five table and two leg styles in counter height along with countless species and finishes.

Contact information on page 100.

HTD

Inspired by 19th-century industrial steam-powered machinery, the Steampunk desk is part of a collection that features an eclectic mix of reclaimed materials and cast metals.

Contact information on page 100.



Muniz

The 18" tall HOPE Sculpture shown in Red is available in a variety of colors with clear, crafted from, one continuous panel of thick polished acrylic it is ideal for placement on a dining table, coffee table or console when less height and more width is important to the interior design.

Contact information on page 100.

Norwalk

With its fun shape and outstanding seating comfort Lowell has an arch shaped back rail, rounded back pillow and oval ottoman.

Contact information on page 100.



Omnia Leather

The hair-on-hide upholstered back on the Paloma chair is eye-catching on its own or in conversation groupings. The look can be customized by mixing and matching sumptuous leather, embossed leather and bold fabrics.

Contact information on page 100.

Chromcraft

McKenzie & Company, a new Chromcraft division, produces fashionable modular seating and occasional tables. Features include Comfort Flexx and Chrome Soft Seating. Units with multiple arm and back choices can be arranged in unlimited configurations.

Contact information on page 100.



Focus on DESIGN

Bivona

The Pirate Ship Loft promotes imaginative play. Kids will sail the high seas within the footprint of a standard twin bed. Below deck, voyagers host sleep overs with fellow buccaneers. When they outgrow this adventure, the facade can easily be removed to reveal a modern twin size loft bed.

Contact information on page 100.



Craftmaster

A new style from the Paula Deen Home collection by Craftmaster blends modern track arms with a classic curved wing. It is shown in a supple powder blue chenille and accented with wide jacquard stripe toss pillows. Available in hundreds of fabrics and made in America.

Contact information on page 100.

Furniture of America

A stylish combination of different materials, the two-tone Kloten sofa group brings a variety of textures and visual appeal. With angled legs and wide arms, the vertical profile is kept low for a sleek and modern silhouette.

Contact information on page 100.



Nourison

With its nebulous design, this abstract rug from the Prismatic Collection has layers of soft grey highlighted by swirls of carved golden yellow accents that add a striking level of dimension. It is handmade from a blend of fine New Zealand wool and shimmering, silk-like Luxcelle™ for lasting comfort and exquisite style.

Contact information on page 100.



Whittier Wood

The Addi Chair is crafted from beautiful mixed materials enhanced by a fluid, contemporary, comfortable shape. The exposed tenon seat design adds to the crafted look. Shown with the Addi 38" diameter table, the group is made from certified, sustainable American Alder and Black Walnut hardwoods.

Contact information on page 100.



Legends

The Graceland 86" Fireplace Console has a cultured, chic look. This two-toned unit with slatted doors, holds up to a 98" TV and has plenty of storage for media gear. The house warming 42" fireplace insert has clear crystals and traditional log set with embers to keep your customers toasty while binge watching their favorite TV show or movie.

Contact information on page 100.



Focus on DESIGN



fiVO Design

The MOD 5, a five-piece table/desk is height adjustable and assembles or disassembles in less than one minute without tools or hardware. Multiple MOD 5's can be joined together using a patent pending Infiniti Joinery System. Customers can add extension leaves for additional work space at the same or different height.

Contact information on page 100.



Kaleen

The Chancellor Collection pulls inspiration for its highly detailed patterns from the aristocratic fashion of the French baroque period. These hand-tufted rugs are produced using space-dyed 100% imported wool spun into a premium yarn.

Contact information on page 100.

Stressless

Emily features an adjustable headrest. The collection is available in a large selection of high-quality leather and fabrics, plus a choice of three different armrests.

Contact information on page 100.





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COMMON SENSE APPROACHES FOR EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE

by Peter Schlosser

Remove six major roadblocks to providing great customer service that exist in the vast majority of retail furniture stores.

Is there any other term in our industry that rings more hollow than “customer service?” Think back to any time that you’ve had to call a company’s customer service department. Were you excited? Hopeful? If you’re like me, you probably rehearsed your conversation a dozen times, carefully picking out all the sticking points and counter-arguments they might come up with, making it airtight. Bulletproof.

Brick by Brick

Most furniture customers approach customer service in the same way. With trembling hand, they dial the numbers. This is going to work, they convince themselves. I’m in the right and did nothing wrong! Then, just like Pink Floyd’s watershed album, the wall begins to build. Brick by brick customers encounter a wall of e-directs, callbacks, management involvement and promises of return calls.

They commiserate with anyone who will listen. “This is ridiculous,” they argue. “I sat on the sofa you delivered and I heard a crack. Should sofa frames just crack?” As each day passes, they get more angry, more dug in, ready to fight the good fight. “Social media! That’ll

make them listen,” they fantasize. When all else fails, they pen an angry complaint to the Better Business Bureau, the final repository for all poorly handled customer service issues.

And then maybe they will get a reply from the store saying, “We give in. We’ll replace your sofa.” There! Was that so hard?

Service Problems

Too many furniture store owners and operations managers assume that if they don’t hear from angry customers directly, they don’t have customer service problems. They are under the impression that it’s going OK because customers who

“Brick by brick customers encounter a wall of e-directs, callbacks, management involvement and promises of return calls.”

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"Bringing damaged goods back

for repair eliminates two revenue-producing stops plus the added costs of shop time and materials. Replacing an item, in my opinion is even worse."

are truly angry are able to go right to the top!

I guarantee that they are wrong. My experience has shown that the vast majority of managers who are responsible for customer service haven't set aside enough time to sit down and dissect the problems and roadblocks that almost certainly exist in their customer service departments.

Roadblocks

Let's cast a little light on the most likely roadblocks to great customer service:

- **Poor Software.** *The retail furniture industry does not have a lot to choose from if they're looking for robust, integrated, intuitive customer service operating system software. In fact, programmers seem to be somewhat in denial, because furniture is inherently in need of customer service.*
- **No direction.** *One of the reasons people don't want to work in customer service is because it is a lot like being the target on a firing range, and these front line employees can't duck. The complaints they hear are part truth, part lies. Often, CSRs have to figure it out for themselves.*

- **No clear rules.** *CSRs are given lots of rules, only to watch them rolled back when complaints are escalated. Some of these are absolutely insane, putting CSRs in unenviable and illogical positions.*

- **No options.** *Many CSRs are told, for example, that if a customer reports a small rub on the back of a delivered sofa, the only remedies are a service call or to bring it back for repair.*

- **Lack of technicians.** *It's often impossible for CSRs to get service backlogs resolved due to a lack of service techs who can actually do the work.*

- **Lack of training.** *I've been in furniture operations on the service, repair and delivery side for almost 30 years and am willing to bet that your CSRs probably can't explain what lacquer or a barrel nut is. If that's the case in your stores, it's a problem.*

Improve Software

Operating systems that handle customer service are usually written by people who are good with numbers, data and code, but not necessarily with people. Until recently, I had only once seen a truly great customer service program,

used by Boyles Furniture in Hickory, in the 1990s. It was a powerful program written by John McCloskey and Dave Hess, who took the time to say, "what if?" It wasn't a typical pre-packaged lackluster subroutine. Instead it was integrated with sales and delivery in real time. Tickets were easy to open, track and close, with triggers helping CSRs stay on top of commitments. Managers were able to easily keep up to date. Involving others in the decision-making process was simple.

Recently, I met with Amitesh Sinha, the CIO of iConnect Group. His customer service module is easily as intuitive and robust as Boyles'. And it comes with the option to integrate essential third-party programs like door counters and dis-

"No matter what program you end up using to help handle customer service, take the time to pay close attention to how it can enhance the customer service your stores provide."



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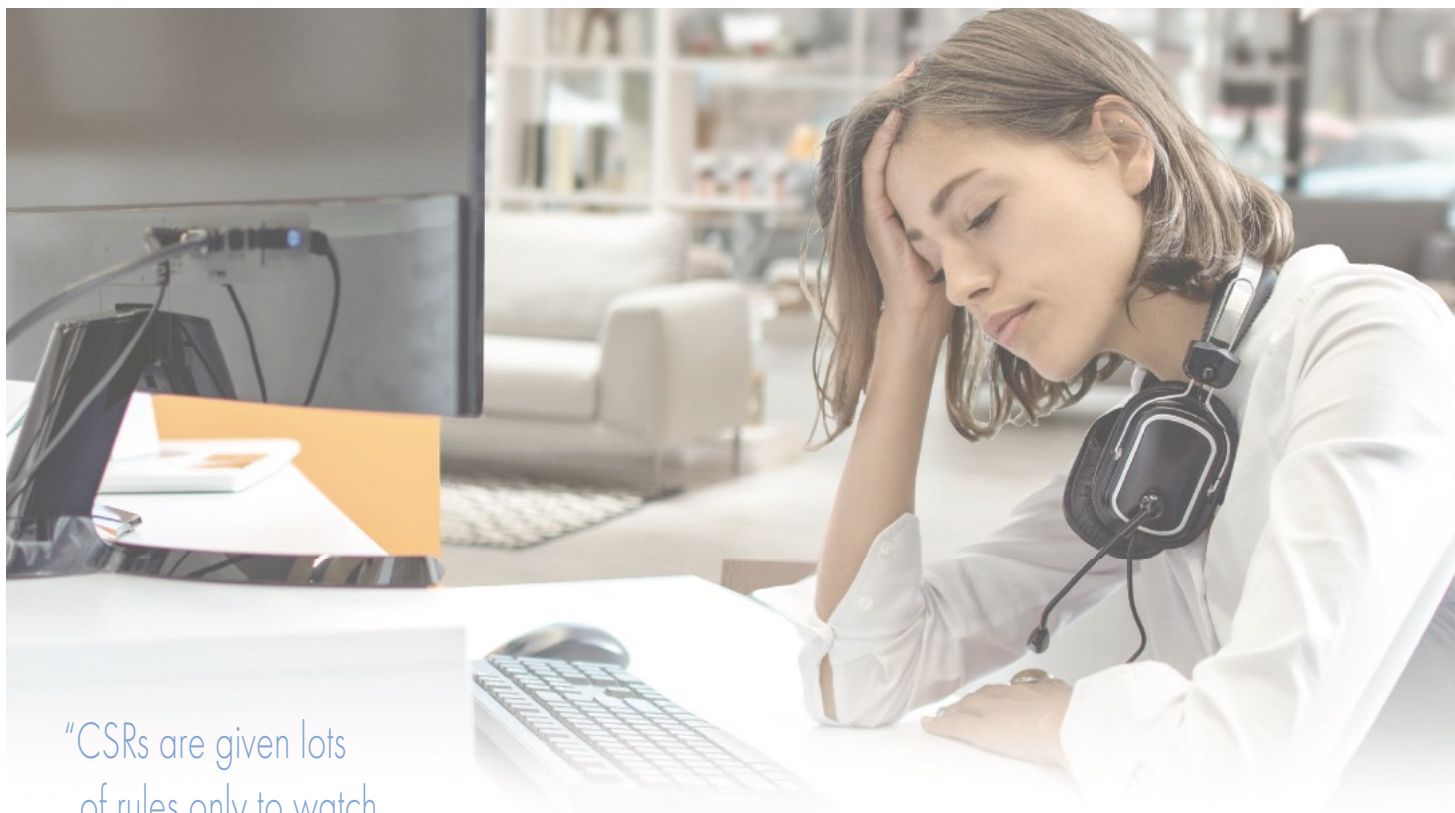
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"CSRs are given lots of rules only to watch them rolled back when complaints are escalated. Some of these are absolutely insane, putting CSRs in unenviable and illogical positions."

patching. There may be others that are similarly good, but no matter what program you end up using to help handle customer service, take the time to pay close attention to how it can enhance the customer service your stores provide.

Importance of Clear Rules

CSRs are natural problem solvers. So, when there is a leadership void, they can become incredibly frustrated. It's a combination of them not being high up the organizational chart, but at the same

time being tasked with making difficult decisions (interpreting store policy and manufacturer's warranties, for example).

In many retail operations the most frustrating part of a CSR's job is having to cobble solutions together on the fly in the absence of clear rules to follow. This is magnified when management is purposefully vague about how to handle service issues. When I was a QC manager I recall how difficult it was to reconcile customer complaints regarding goods from many different manufacturers—each with their own rules and warranties—with store policies.

Think Outside the Box

Thinking outside the box is important. For example, a lot of furniture retailers simply say that "The company reserves the right to repair or replace at their discretion." But, they haven't considered simple solutions like giving a little money off. I understand why retailers don't want to consider this option. Giving money back erodes margins, but so do the less tangible but very real costs of providing

service. A service call can cost \$200 or more depending on the time involved, the distance traveled, and materials needed. Bringing damaged goods back for repair eliminates two revenue-producing stops plus the added costs of shop time and materials. Replacing an item, in my opinion is even worse, wasting a revenue-producing stop and bringing back a product that still has to be repaired. If you don't have the replacement item in stock, then by the time the damaged item is picked up, it may smell like smoke, have pet hair on it, or be worn. That's why offering some money off or giving a gift card can be an efficient solution and is often what the customer wanted all along.

An alternative to the money-off solution is to develop the capability to send out technicians on 911 calls. That means freeing up a tech to literally jump into a Sprinter, make a quick house call, then take care of the problem. Or, as in the case of Ashley, a replacement part (if applicable) can be sent directly to the customer's home. Ashley has made that exceedingly easy to do.



AS WE PREPARE FOR THE 2022 SPRING OHIO HARDWOOD FURNITURE MARKET, HERE'S A LOOK AT SOME OF THE TRENDS SHAPING OUR INDUSTRY.

ADAPTABILITY KEY TO MANAGING SUPPLY CHAIN UNCERTAINTY

Furniture builders are still responding to a backlog of orders and relief could be months away.

Rob Haines is purchasing manager for Distributor Services Inc., a wholesaler of professional woodworking supplies and Hardwood Furniture Guild member. He says many consumers didn't balk at long lead times stemming from unprecedented demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, furniture builders are still catching up even though manufacturing operations have largely rebounded.

Haines estimates that even with no new sales, it may be 3-6 months into 2022 before builders fully respond to existing orders. Even then, demand is likely to remain strong as lead times may have led some shoppers to simply delay their purchases. "These are certainly unprecedented times," said Mark Rambach, Distributor Services Inc. sales manager. Rambach notes that furniture builders are also being hit with significantly higher material costs due to labor and logistics issues. The bottom line for furniture retailers: do not expect a return to pre-COVID pricing.

Haines and Rambach offer a few suggestions for retailers:

- **Remain Adaptable:** Ultimately, consumers may favor availability over other purchasing considerations. Being flexible in your product line can prevent them from shopping elsewhere.
- **Strengthen Your Supplier Base:** Expand your network of builders and build redundancies to mitigate supply risks.
- **Plan Ahead:** More than ever, it's important to plan as far in advance as possible to manage uncertainties in the marketplace.

MOST SAY THEY WANT AMERICAN MADE FURNITURE. HERE'S WHY.

Supporting small businesses is the top reason that a majority of consumers say they prefer American-made furniture, according to a survey by business services firm CGS.

IN A POLL OF 1,000 AMERICANS

54%

Were motivated by supporting the local economy.

43%

Were concerned about materials used in foreign manufacturing.

32%

Felt it was more cost effective.

13%

Cited the availability of unique/individual options as a reason to buy American.

Overall, respondents stated a desire to shop locally for a variety of products.

Source: CGS 2021 State of the U.S. eCommerce Consumer Survey

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DEMAND REMAINS STRONG FOR ECO-FRIENDLY FURNITURE

Eco-friendly furniture continues to be seen as a significant trend for 2022 and beyond. The global eco-friendly furniture market is estimated to achieve a compound annual growth rate of 5.6 percent over the next several years, according to Research and Markets. The U.S. market for eco-friendly furniture stands at \$9.3 billion.

Source: Research And Markets: Eco-Friendly Furniture - Global Market Trajectory & Analytics

GOODBYE TO GRAY AND OTHER DESIGN TRENDS

Gray stains are fading in favor as consumers look to bring warmer tones into their homes. Interior designer Sadie Beachy of S. Flynn Designs in Millersburg, Ohio, says the trend is moving toward subtler finishes that showcase natural wood tones.

For Beachy, dining room tables remain a feature item that her clients consider very early in the design process and are willing to invest in. Consumers are still seeking a wide variety of styles, but are more willing to mix and match seating. With more people working from home, demand remains strong for home office furniture. However, gone are the days of bulky desks and storage. According to Beachy, modern technology means homeowners may only require a simple desktop and base cabinet to create a functional office space.

sflynn designs.com

WAGES INCREASING FOR RETAIL WORKERS

In 2022, wages are projected to increase by 3.1 percent for non-exempt retail and customer service employees, according to the compensation management company Payscale.

More than half of companies surveyed said their 2022 salary increase budget is expected to be higher than 2021, pointing to improved economic conditions and competition for labor as the top reasons. Payscale stated that companies "must balance attracting new employees and retaining current ones, as tight labor market conditions and rising inflationary pressures cause employees to re-evaluate their current compensation packages."

Source: Payscale 2021-2022 Salary Budget Survey

IN THEIR WORDS

"3D is going to be everywhere in five years, and in 10 years you won't know how you lived your life without it."

- Seek CEO Jon Cheney quoted in a Sourcing Journal article discussing how augmented reality is changing the home industry by allowing shoppers to envision products in their space before buying.

"A tree that could have been just 300 miles away could travel 30,000 miles before reaching a customer as a piece of furniture."

- Mark Samsonovich, owner of the furniture company Head of Marble, in a Fast Company article describing the logistical and environmental challenges of a supply chain that relies on foreign manufacturing.

| INVESTING IN CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Wayfair recently announced a video platform that will add “entertainment, ideas, and inspiration to the brand’s seamless mobile shopping experience.” This follows Ikea’s launch of an advanced augmented reality room visualizer earlier this year. Both examples show how retailers are prioritizing the digital shopping experience, a trend which will continue to have ripple effects for retailers of all sizes.

Deloitte’s annual CMO survey showed that B2C companies ranked product quality as their customers’ top priority. However, customer experience was tied with low price for the second spot on the list.

According to Cassel Bear, the marketing partner of the Ohio Hardwood Furniture Market, projected strong demand for hardwood furniture makes this a good time to invest in customers’ digital buying experience. For smaller retailers, this may include high-quality product photography, modern web design, content marketing and e-commerce tools.

So how much should you invest? Deloitte reports that B2C companies spend 13.7 percent of their revenue on marketing and that digital marketing accounts for 58 percent of marketing budgets. As a comparison, the U.S. Small Business Administrations suggests that businesses with less than \$5 million in sales allocate 7-8 percent of their revenue to marketing.

Source: Deloitte - The CMO Survey 2021



| DID YOU KNOW?

The United States has 728 million acres of forests and annual net growth exceeds harvesting by 31 percent. The number of trees in the Appalachian hardwood region has been increasing for more than 50 years.

Source: Appalachian Hardwood Manufacturers

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"An alternative

to the money-off solution is to develop the capability to send out technicians on 911 calls. That means freeing up a tech to literally jump into a Sprinter, make a quick house call, and take care of the problem."

The Right Repair Techs

Naturally, if you are short on repair technicians, your whole service operation will grind to a halt. I maintain that it is much cheaper, and sometimes preferable, to train people to be technicians in-house rather than hiring someone who is already trained. Training your own techs means that you can standardize training, teach them what they really need to know and keep them on task. From a financial standpoint, a fully-trained technician can make several hundred dollars a day on their own versus \$15 an hour working a job, so they'll demand more money. If there's no need for their skills, you're better off training someone who will simply be removing damaged parts and installing new parts.

Sort of like someone who is qualified to tune-up a Lamborghini but works in a garage that only fixes Hondas. A newbie might only cost you \$12 an hour, but depending on your operational needs you won't be paying for a lot of skill you'll probably never need.

Upgrade CSR Training

Finally, train your CSRs to understand what they need to know to do their jobs well. If they don't understand how a sofa is put together or how a finish is built, how can they intelligently help customers with their complaints, or adequately process their tickets? Your shop and customer service department should work in harmony, integrating their efforts

to supply customers with quick, efficient resolutions. The same relationship should exist between your warehouse staff and salespeople. Arbitrary divisions found at retail between departments that should be working closely together is often counterproductive.

Conclusion

When starting to think about how your company handles post-delivery customer service, put yourself in your customer's shoes and remember the last time you had to call a company for service. I guarantee that those same thoughts and strategies play out in the minds of your customers every day.

Your goal should be to make their experiences as easy and fast as possible, while still protecting your bottom line with common-sense approaches that deal with the issues that arise within our industry.

About Peter Schlosser: Peter Schlosser is a back-end furniture consultant based in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. His focus is repair, quality control, exceptional customer service, and all things operational. He is a contributing editor to *Furniture World*. Questions on any aspect of this article or furniture repair can be directed to Peter Schlosser at pschlosser@furninfo.com.

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DOES SALES TRAINING MATTER?

by David Benbow

Furniture World recently sent out a survey to find out if the average retail store owner thinks that sales training is worth the trouble and expense.

I didn't start out in life wanting to be a mattress salesman. Even when I became one, I thought it was just a job to pay the bills until something better came along. Like many of you who are reading this article, I got over it when I finally realized the potential of my new job.

I suspect that hardly any of the people Furniture World readers employ to be mattress salespeople intended the job to become a career when they separated themselves from high school or college. Now they are selling mattresses and perhaps furniture. But are they prepared?

Training

Furniture World recently sent out a survey to subscribers to find out if the average retail store owner or manager thinks that sales training is worth the trouble and expense. The results were not surprising; and they weren't encouraging. I won't talk specifically about any of the responses, but it pretty much confirmed what I already suspected.

It reminded me of a conversation I had with a retail salesperson several years ago when I gave him a copy of my newly published book, thinking that he might show it to his store's sales manager. He said, "Yeah, we would all like better training, but the store won't pay

for it."

I understand the store's predicament. They would like to have better salespeople, but personnel turnover is high and training costs time and money. Often this investment is wasted. The worst part about sales training, however, is the unfortunate fact that it rarely sticks. It often goes in one ear and out the other.

What Is Sales Training, Anyway?

Sales training can be broken down into two broad categories—technical knowledge and sales skills.

By technical knowledge I mean John Lawhon's Five Groups of Knowledge:

- Knowledge of products
- Knowledge of policies
- Knowledge of advertising
- Knowledge of financing
- Knowledge of inventory

Plus, there are two more; knowing the competition and knowing the industry. Bear in mind that someone can have a virtual Ph.D. in technical knowledge and still be an ineffective salesperson.

Sales skills are a measure of how capable salespeople are at handling customers. Do they control the sale from start to finish? Do they lead customers to

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-Montgomery's Furniture

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a smart buying decision and then close the sale? Do customers exit the store happy and satisfied? And, do they do this consistently?

Salespeople can not be effective without a thorough grasp of technical knowledge. Somebody may know how to sell, but if they don't know about the products they sell, they will not be able to apply their selling skills. For example, I wrote a book on how to sell, but if you set me down in an unfamiliar showroom, I will be as useless as the worst rookie.

A good training program covers both

categories, but training should start with the technical information needed to prevent new salespeople from making errors that could cost a store money or put it in legal jeopardy. If someone hasn't yet picked up the basics of selling, they may be able to overcome a rookie mistake by turning the customer over to someone with more experience.

Learning how to sell is usually a more deliberate, drawn-out process. My rule of thumb is that it takes at least 90 days on the floor to be even minimally competent to handle the sales process. The real pros never quit learning, and continue with a regimen of self-analysis and self-training.

Practice Makes Perfect

Salespeople can thrive when they have access to good materials as well as competent coaching and mentoring. Practicing while paying attention is important, and some natural talent doesn't hurt. Stores can offer guidance, training materials and tutorials. Sales professionals are made, not born. And by made, I mean self-made.

Your salespeople might complain if your store does not have a decent training program, but in most retail organizations, the burden to learn sits squarely

on their shoulders. The internet is loaded with good information. There are plenty of Furniture World sales education articles to read on www.furninfo.com. In the realm of bedding sales skills my book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual" should be considered a must-read.

Like any other endeavor, practice makes perfect. Your store entrusts its RSAs with its most precious commodity—shoppers. You've invested thousands of dollars to bring them in. After that, RSAs are mostly on their own, responsible for serving thousands of ups each year. If they are good, they will think of each customer engagement as a unique laboratory experiment; a complete unknown to be probed, informed, tested and closed.

Competing With Online Sellers

Is there anyone with a pulse that doesn't know that internet sellers have captured a large chunk of the nation's mattress market? Up until recently, these companies did not employ even one capable retail salesperson. Instead, they did their selling with internet scripts and persuasive television commercials. Lately they have begun placing their products in well-known showroom settings. Certain

"Sales professionals are made, not born. And by made, I mean self-made. The store can offer guidance, training materials, tutorials, etc., but they will only be as good as the effort they put into it."

"Anyone who has been in retail

for more than two weeks has perhaps noticed that there is a lot of down time, especially on weekdays. We should replace the term down time with available time or useful time."

retailers can take advantage of the name recognition these DTC companies built. For more on this I suggest reading an interesting article called "Next Level Training" in the November/December 2021 issue of Furniture World. Scott Morris stresses the need for retailers to use their websites to educate customers with factual and useful information to bring customers into stores. He acknowledges that many shoppers are wary of RSAs. So care must be taken once they

enter the store to have salespeople who are capable and professional.

What Does All This Mean to the Average RSA?

Most of this article might not mean much to your average RSA. It's those salespeople who desire to be exceptional who will benefit. Real pros should know everything that can be found in any internet article or on any TV info-

mercial, and much more. Let me give an example of why this is important. A lot of our higher-level learning institutions have shifted classes to online formats. But anybody who has gone to college knows that online learning is neither as effective nor engaging as being present in a classroom with a knowledgeable, personable professor. There isn't a substitute for *quality* personal interactions in school or on the sales floor.

We all know that a high percentage of

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DOES SALES TRAINING MATTER?

customer/RSA interactions are not quality personal interactions. Sales beginners as well as professionals should take this observation to heart. Moving from average to exceptional takes practice. Your salespeople have an advantage over online DTC companies because they have products to demonstrate. But to present products properly, professional RSAs must have a deep reservoir of knowledge.

How Do They Get Started?

Anyone who has been in retail for more than two weeks has noticed that there is a lot of down time, especially on weekdays. We should replace the term down time with available time or useful-time. Then, plant the idea in the heads of our sales teams that it's a smart idea not to waste it.

Daily planning is not easy for people who work in retail. Salespeople hope to

be busy with buyers all day long. Since that hope is not always realized, salespeople who want to become exceptional should show up at work with an outline of what they want to learn or review for the day. A weekly plan is better.

Ideas for Using Available Time

Day 1: Review product knowledge for all bedding (or furniture) products. Salespeople should know the complete names, floor locations, specifications, backup availability, delivery times and stock availability. All this information should be memorized. If they are with a customer and must look up this information, time will be wasted and they will appear unprofessional.

Day 2: Available-time should be used to review websites of as many mattress manufacturers as possible. Included should be websites of manufacturers whose products are sold in your store as well as those brands sold by competitors or direct to consumers. Taking notes to improve memory retention and prompt additional questions and ideas is always a good idea.

Day 3: Visit competitors' websites periodically and take notes. Salespeople should not forget that their customers are checking out competitive stores' websites as well as their own.

One more thing; salespeople should review their store's website at least once a week.

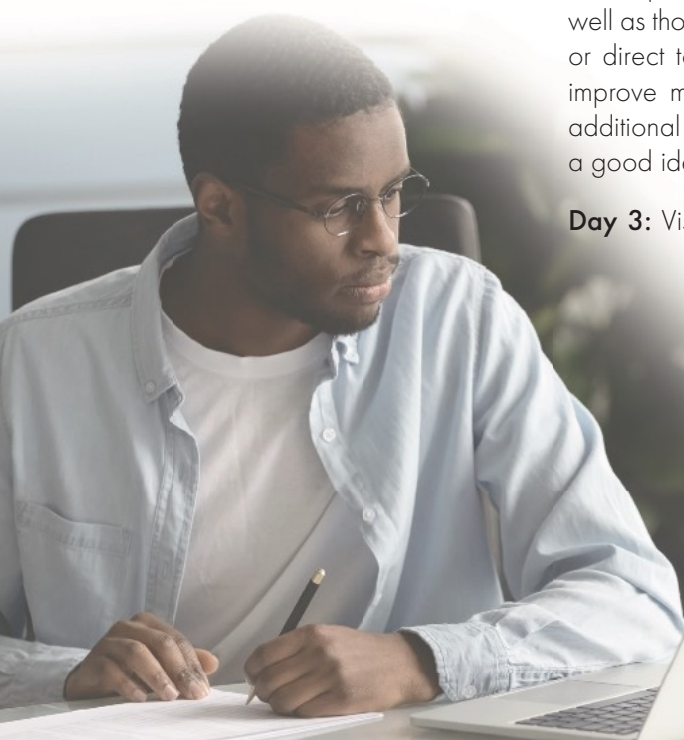
Day 4: Time to read. There are lots of books on selling. Read as many as possible and read the best ones over and over. I have read John F. Lawhon's "Selling Retail" at least eight times. A colleague of mine claims he has read it 23 times. Every time RSAs read a serious book on selling, they will pick up and remember something new, especially if they take notes. And, if they don't like to read, there are plenty of good YouTube videos available.

Day 5: Point them to Furniture World articles in the sales education article archives at <http://www.furninfo.com/furniture-industry-sales-education-articles/4/25>. they will never have enough available time to absorb all the information there.

More Ideas for Salespeople

1. After finishing with an "up," whether a sale was made or not, keep notes on how the sale progressed. Ask themselves: Was I strong or weak? Was I able to control the sale? Why did I

"Salespeople should not forget that their customers are checking out competitive stores' websites as well as their own."



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"Most of this article

might not mean much to your average RSA. It's those salespeople who desire to be exceptional who will benefit."

make or not close the sale? Self-analysis is one of the best learning exercises.

2. Organize a group of fellow salespeople to discuss sales ideas and techniques. A group can be as small as two people. Serious sales discussions can be a great source of new ideas.

3. Review all the technical information the store provides. Review product knowledge, but also:

- What finance options does the store offer?
- What are company policies on comfort exchanges, warranty replacement, deliveries, ethics, etc.?
- Advertising the store places as well as that of its competitors. Always assume that customers have seen the competitions ads.
- Review store inventory. Do you know every close-out hiding in the back corner of the off-site warehouse? That item might just be the one that closes a tough sale.

4. If you sell furniture in addition to bedding, learn everything you can about design. By this I mean room design, wall design, outdoor living space design. The most successful furniture sales professionals develop long-term clients. If your clients have confidence in you and your design talent they will return to you every time they need new furniture or decorating advice.

5. Repeat all of the aforementioned exercises periodically. Repetition is the secret to learning. There are a million other ideas on how to use your available time. Whatever you do, don't waste it, because wasted time never pays off.

Final Thoughts

So, does sales training matter? Of course it matters. It not only matters, but it means everything in the mattress and furniture sales business. You might ask, "But, isn't everything eventually going to be sold online?" Some things probably will

be, like soap and paper towels. When it comes to durable goods like furniture, mattresses, refrigerators, washers and dryers, customers still like to see, feel and better understand what they are buying. That happens only on a showroom floor, hopefully with a skilled, honest professional retail sales associate leading them every step of the way.

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

David is the author of the recently published book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual", a complete text book for mattress and bedding retail sales associates, beginner and experienced professional alike. The book can be purchased at www.bedsellersmanual.com. David Benbow 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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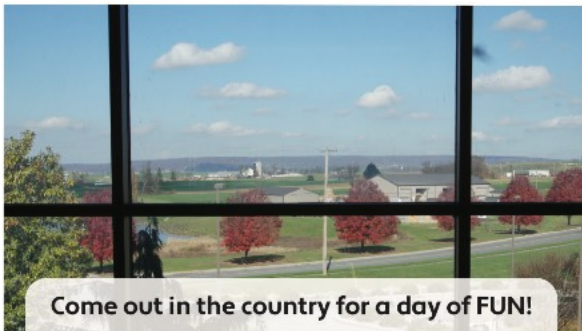


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Martha: Hi Brian, did you go to the Fall Lancaster Expo?

Brian: No. I saw it advertised, but just didn't have the time to attend.

Martha: Well, you really missed out. It was a fun Expo. Free food - their chicken was simply Yummy! It was fun to go to Lancaster County & enjoy the country for a couple of days. I'm certainly going to the Spring Expo in March.

Brian: I definitely was intrigued by their advertising. Seems like they are growing, improving, and adding more services.

Martha: Right now they are a small regional show. I mostly went for the fun, and to meet the manufacturers, and to get inspiration. They do have a vision. Moving to Houston Run has already made a difference. I'm planning on seeing how far they go.

Brian: Okay. You convinced me. Sign me up!



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OFFER NEW EMPLOYEES A 20 PERCENT PAY INCREASE

by Gordon Hecht

Considerations that just may help you to find your next \$500,000 to \$1 million dollar closer, organize your business and keep fully staffed in this tight job market.

Our retail world faces a lot of COVID related challenges right now. You certainly don't need me to rehash them here. Before the latest variant hit, some experts said that most of these might clear up by the end of 2023. There is one challenge among many that stands out and is unlikely to go away any time soon. It's not a WHAT, but rather a WHO!

Who will you get to work in your stores in the next five days or five years? Recruiting used to be an overlooked "I'll get to it tomorrow" problem in retail.

Even if you are fully staffed now, with low unemployment due to many COVID and systemic factors (see Furniture World's recent "Turnover Tsunami" article at www.furninfo.com/furniture-world-articles/3948), many companies are getting more aggressive with pay and benefits. They are out to steal your best people. Think how much better you would feel if you had a folder with 10 great people you could hire right now.

That's why it's necessary to think outside the box when searching for yet-to-be-discovered retail talent. If you don't have a \$500K or \$1MM writer on your sales team now, that means they are working for someone else, or are not even in the work force right now. Be

different, look for hidden gems where no one else even thinks to look, and with a little polish a diamond in the rough may become your shining jewel.

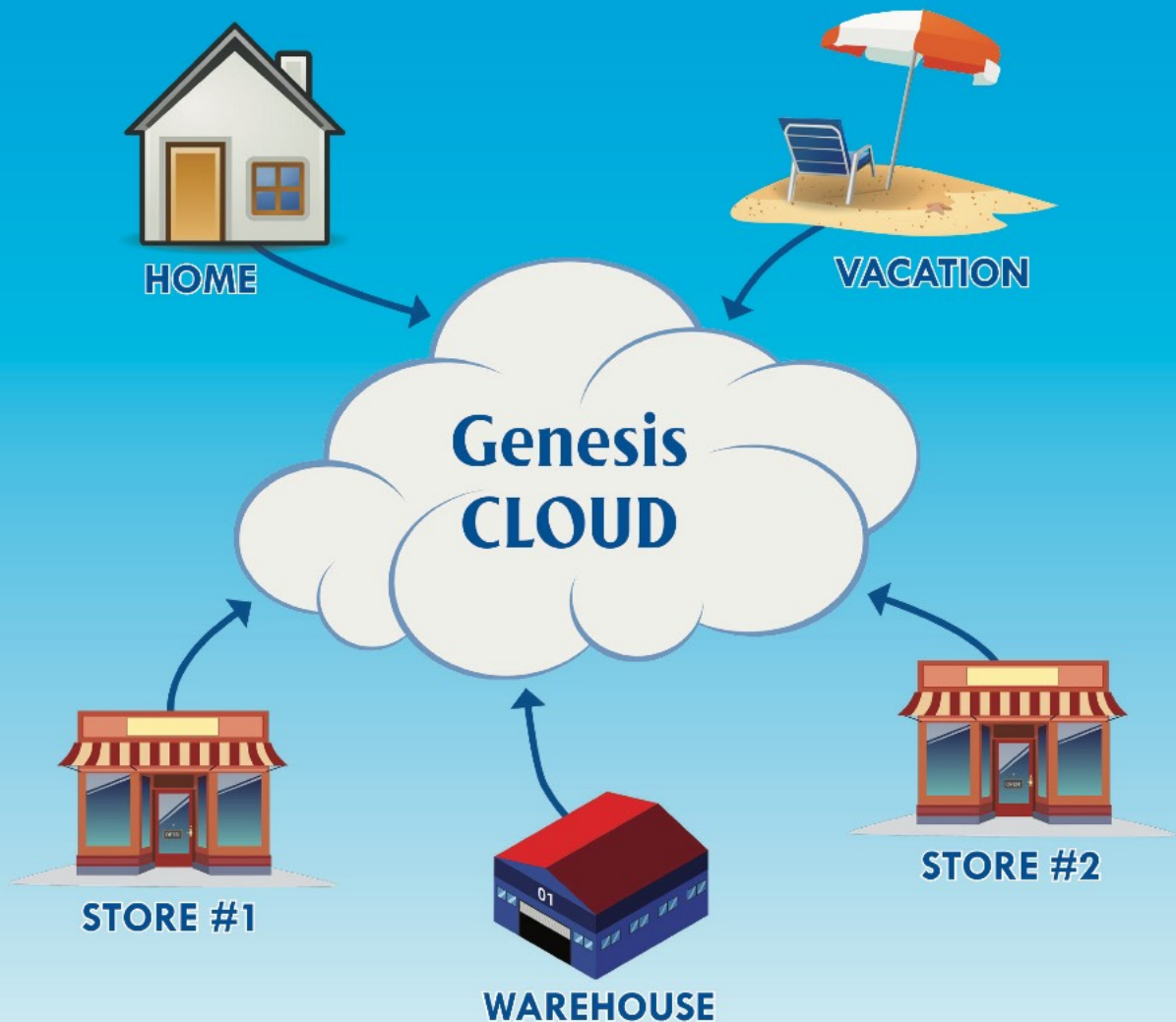
Check out the following ideas that may just help you to find your next \$1MM closer.

Clothing Stores: While I never purchased anything for myself there, I did accompany my everlovin' bride while shopping at women's clothing stores like Dress Barn. Sadly, that chain closed its stores in 2019, but in general their salespeople were knowledgeable, assertive, and customer-focused. They knew how to add-on, use credit to build tickets, and CLOSE! Women's clothing stores share the same customer base as your store and their salespeople resemble your customers. They are used to retail hours and know how to maintain a clean store.

If these sound like the kind of employees that you are looking for, you need to aggressively pursue them. Understand how they are paid and how you can meet or exceed that.

Consider Offering Mommy Hours: I recently read about a small clothing store chain that was struggling to fill open positions. They created a schedule specifically aimed at moms whose

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"You may not be able to attract

a recent Harvard or Princeton grad, and even lowering your sights to a Michigan Wolverine or UNLV Rebel may not pan out."

children were in school from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Friday. They were able to attract and retain a solid base of employees just because they offered this scheduling option.

You may think that your current staff will object to part-timers infringing on the schedule. You may even hear that you are cutting the customer "pie" into smaller slices. The fact is that Monday to Friday from 9-3 are some of the slower traffic hours in mattress and furniture stores. Your professional sharks can relax knowing that they will still have control of the waters when most shoppers swim in. And, remember that the sales pie isn't finite. It expands with the addition of talented people.

Graduation Month: May and June mean graduation in most communities. You may not be able to attract a recent Harvard or Princeton grad, and even lowering your sights to a Michigan Wolverine or UNLV Rebel may not pan out.

Concentrate on the thousands or tens of thousands of high school graduates in your area. Don't give me that malarkey about them being unwilling to work or too young to sell. Many of these grads will not go to college and are too talented to flip burgers or work in the local vape store.

The younger set is easy to teach, much more so than a 45-year pro who has one year of experience repeated 25 times. They know how to use social

media and are familiar with current technology.

Everyone Starts Somewhere!

While I'm writing about fresh-faced kids right out of school, it's important to remember that working a job and getting a first paycheck doesn't reflect the true compensation a new college or high school graduate receives.

Think about your first real job at retail, the one where you got a paycheck with taxes deducted. You probably earned minimum wage or close to it, or commissions if you worked in sales. Back then, from the perspective of your employer, there were added costs in the form of payroll taxes, possibly a health insurance contribution and other benefits such as paid vacation or tuition reimbursement. As an employee, you had to bear employment costs such as an investment in work clothes. And, you probably had to make a difficult investment in working nights, holidays, and weekends at retail.

But, the greatest non-cash value that new employees receive from working at retail is the education they get from the experience. They gain transferable skills and knowledge that last a lifetime. It's my opinion that the value added is worth at least 20 percent more than the actual pay rate. These skills include:

- *How to dress appropriately for work.*
- *How to show up on time and*

clock out at day's end.

- *How to greet people or answer a phone correctly.*
- *The value of showing respect for your customers, supervisors and co-workers.*
- *The hard lesson that a half-hour lunch means 30 minutes.*
- *Strategies for prioritizing and organizing workdays.*
- *Understanding the value of labor, the rewards it brings, and how not to waste those rewards.*

Amazingly, someone PAID you to learn all of these life lessons once upon a time. It's a lesson that some people who spend over \$200,000 (not including room and board) to get a Harvard education may never receive.

Other Candidates to Consider

In this tight labor market, you'll want to dispel the idea that experience in the specific job role is a requirement. Sure, you'd love to hire Suzy Super Sales for your showroom, or a delivery person with 10 years of final mile experience. But, you may find transferable skills from outside our industry in your next candidate.

Former Police: Selling and customer service skills come from asking good questions. And no one knows how to ask questions better than a former police

Retail Performance Tip #9

From David McMahon at PerformNOW

“My resolution for 2022 is to help furniture retailers to adapt new automated workflow technologies to improve communications with their prospects, customers, employees, vendors and new-hire candidates. Those retailers who communicate in a strategic, relevant and timely fashion, provide excellent experiences to all stakeholders and achieve superior business performance.”

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officer. They ask logical questions and seek “real” answers. Officers tend to retire from the force with many more working years left and can be an asset to your team.

Former or Current Teachers: The greatest part of selling is teaching. That’s why

hiring former or current teachers is a good idea. You’ll give them greater earning potential with far less paperwork. For the most part, our front-line educators are underpaid, and because their job comes with ample time off, you may find that they are able to fill in part-time weekend hours for you.

Former Department Store Employees: Department stores have closed all around the country. For the most part, it’s not because they had bad employees. You will find good customer skills and people who know how to sell credit when you hire a former Macy’s or JC Penney’s clerk. Just understand that they’re used to hourly wages instead of commission-based pay.

Retired Military: If you want to organize your company, look no further than retired or former military members. Skill, determination, respect forward and backward, and responsibility made them successful in the service and they will serve you well too.

High School or College Athletes: We all must start somewhere. High School graduates and college students who participated in sports or other clubs learn teamwork and leadership skills that can help them become productive in your company right from the start.

Teach People Knowledge

If you provide this 20 percent “learning bonus value” to the people you hire, you’ll reduce turnover and create an atmosphere that promotes and encourages skill development. And as you look to build your team, know that people knowledge is more important than product knowledge. Hire for attitude, you can teach the aptitude.

About Gordon Hecht: *Gordon Hecht is a business growth and development consultant to the retail home furnishings industry. You can reach him at Gordon.hecht@aol.com.*

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NEXT LEVEL TRAINING

Part 3— by Scott Morris

Sales training during the onboarding process often focuses on what's important to stores. Ongoing training needs to refocus sales presentations towards what's important to customers.

Early in my career at a major retail furniture chain, I overheard four new retail salespeople voice their opinions about the usefulness of a training program they had just completed. It wasn't a complaint session, but rather an honest exchange about their common thoughts and frustrations. They said that the training part of their onboarding process was boring. It didn't help them to feel comfortable talking about furniture. And, it didn't help them to use the information presented about store products and policies to connect with customers.

After hearing their comments, I made it my habit to ask the hundreds of new hires I worked with throughout my retail career to share their thoughts about improving the orientation training they had received.

In most retail furniture stores, orientation training is the only formal store training sales associates ever receive. Even when RSAs are found to be under-performing, there are rarely training protocols in place to help them improve.

We all know that there are many reasons for high salesperson turnover in retail. These include long retail hours, weekends on the job and weak compensation structures. And right now, getting paid on delivery-delayed goods doesn't help the situation. But, it's my view that sure fire ways to lose the

most important employees in any retail organization are to provide inadequate orientation training, non-existent remedial training and no advanced training. Retailers who fail to focus on education and salesperson retention are doomed to onboard a never-ending stream of new hires. Worse still, they incur huge costs from allowing salespeople on their sales floors who don't have the skills to succeed.

Albert Einstein is often quoted as saying, 'Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.'

That's why I find it hard to under-

"Some salespeople will just hand them their card, some might explain the merchandise a little more, and others might even try to discover a hidden objection and overcome it. That's not nearly enough."



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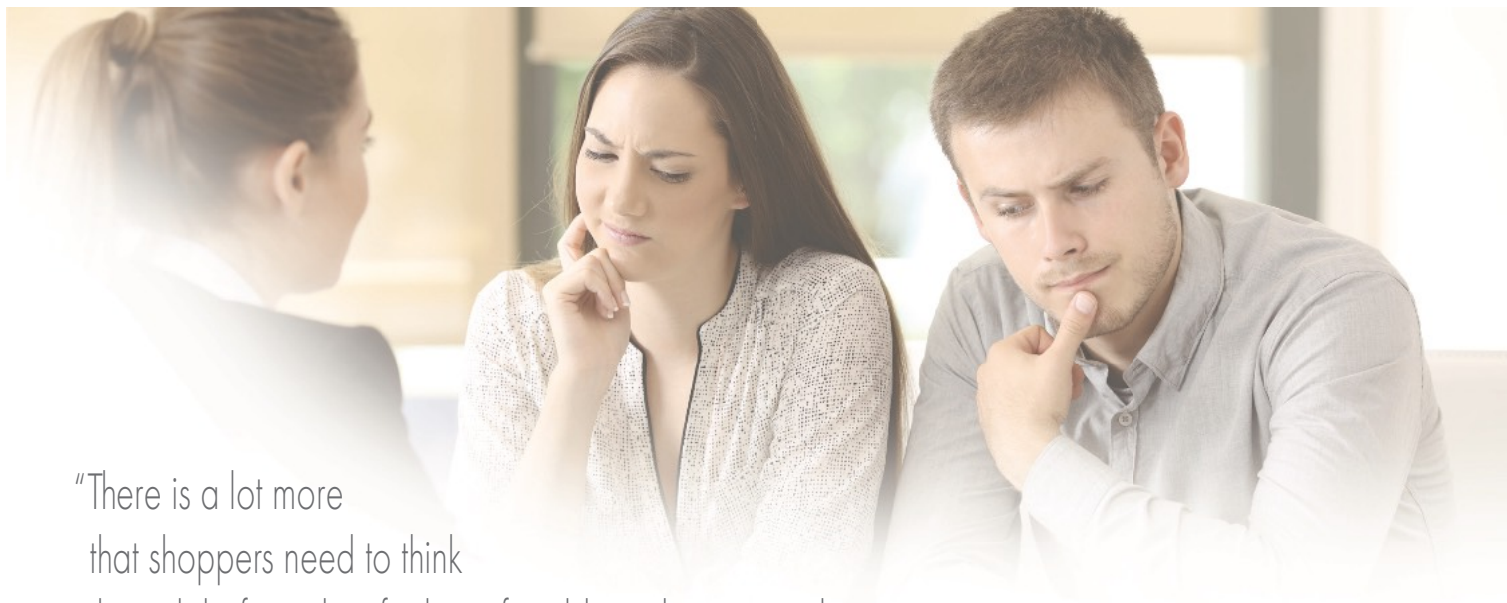
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"There is a lot more that shoppers need to think through before they feel comfortable making a purchase. Being sold on the furniture is just half of the equation."

stand why many furniture retailers are resistant to providing supplemental and advanced training.

Mindsets That Prevent Progress

Stores need to supplement orientation training with appropriate next level training. This article will delve into what next level training should look like, but first let's touch on mindsets that can prevent progress.

Furniture World's long time editorial contributor Joe Capillo wrote that "nothing fails like success." By this he meant that when business is good, furniture store owners may feel like they don't need to focus on continuous improvement. Perhaps their store locations already drive a lot of traffic and sales. Maybe pent-up demand from the pandemic coupled with huge sold order delivery delays have made it difficult to process current business. Or, the power of their store brands have always been sufficient to keep powering them to success.

However, the internet's ongoing sales expansion and the younger generations increasing proclivity to have lower regard for in-store experiences are two tidal waves that every brick-and-mortar furniture organization must address.

There was a time when Sears was invulnerable. The same for K-Mart. Back in the day no one in their right mind would even dare think that either one of these powerhouse operations could possibly lose their footing and collapse. The chief lesson is that retailers must always let insecurity about the future drive them to improve.

Limits of Orientation Training

Before we discuss solutions, let's first view orientation training in its proper perspective. Orientation training is almost always about the store. It addresses the store's furniture, accessories, protection plans, credit options, sales processing, delivery procedures, warranties, return policies, rules and regulations.

If you are like most retailers, you presently train employees to handle everything that's really important to you and your store. But most salespeople are not given training on what's vitally important to their customers. Here's one example of what I mean. You will often hear customers say, "Got a card? I really have to go home and think about it." Some salespeople will just hand them their card, some might explain the merchandise a little more, and others might even try to discover a hidden objection and overcome it. That's not nearly enough.

The truth is that well over 75 percent of most stores' customers leave without buying. That's because there is a lot more that shoppers need to think through before they feel comfortable making a purchase. Being sold on the furniture is just half of the equation.

They may also need to consider a host of decorating decisions before they furnish their rooms. Do they want to paint the walls or re-carpet before they buy new furniture and accessories? If they

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"How many experienced salespeople

even know or care about the decisions their customers face beyond the choice of furniture?"

do, how will this affect their color choices for fabrics, rugs and accessories? What furniture pieces do they plan to keep in their rooms and who will take away their old furniture? Should they consider buying new tables to go with the sofa they like? How much will all this cost and should they pay cash or consider credit? Is it time for new lamps, or is it better to just keep the old accessories for now?

Given all these decisions it's not hard to imagine why so many shoppers say, "Gotta card?"

How many experienced salespeople even know or care about the decisions their customers face beyond their choice of furniture? My view is that highly trained salespeople make it their business to find out all these potential roadblocks to making a sale early on, and then help guide customers through

this confusing maze.

Connect With Customer Needs

Another very important skill that holds back even experienced salespeople from connecting with customers and their particular needs is asking important questions specific to each room. The 10 insightful questions you should be asking everyone about home office (see inset) are certainly different from the 10 you need to ask them about dining. There are also specific room considerations to address such as:

- What will the focal point be?
- Do you prefer a minimalist or a fuller decorator look?
- Every room has a personality, what

would you like this room to say to others?

Conclusion

The benefit of providing advanced level training is that most furniture salespeople can improve their sales performance by learning how to better connect with their customers. It's a transformation that begins with teaching salespeople to ask the right questions, then continues with providing information shoppers can use to make all the decisions they need to make beyond just the choice of furniture items.

Truly effective training programs also explain how to win customers over for life, present the furniture in light of customers' unique needs and present a basic understanding of key decorating principles. Happy Selling!

About Scott Morris: Scott worked for the four largest furniture retail chains in America, in various positions. He is the owner of HSM Publishing. His mission is to stop the high sales associate "turnover rate" within the industry. He has written and published six books; plus produced the helpful "Sales Questions" Laminates, and publishes the advanced level sales training course titled, "The Best Furniture Sales Training Course Ever!" He also produces a package of "12 Insightful Customer Handouts," to aid the in-store selling process, plus to give to the 75 percent of shoppers who leave without buying. He may be reached at: hsm7777@att.net.

Ask These 10 Helpful Home Office Questions

- 1 Will you need a desk with storage?
- 2 Does everything need to go along one or two walls?
- 3 Will you need more "work surface" than 1 desk provides?
- 4 Do you need a place for your printer or fax machine?
- 5 Would a bookcase or two help you organize better?
- 6 How many hours a week will you be using this room?
- 7 Would a really comfortable swivel chair on rollers help?
- 8 Will clients or family need seating too?
- 9 Do you have sufficient task and ambient lighting?
- 10 Would a nice area rug add some warmth, and floor protection?

Questions excerpted from "Great Customer Questions For Each Room," published in 2020. Part of Scott Morris' course: "The Best Furniture Sales Training Ever!!!" All rights reserved.



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Sleepless Nights

Mark Schumacher, CEO, Home Furnishings Association



What is keeping HFA members up at night? Hint: It's not the supply chain.

I recently moderated a panel discussion with several CEOs from our industry. Each was asked what is the main business issue that keeps them up at night? After the last 19 months, we might suspect that supply chain worries are making these CEOs restless, or perhaps the continued threat of inflation.

Instead, they collectively and independently pointed to one word as their sleep-sapper: "labor." Perhaps the biggest issue coming out of 2021 and, therefore, the biggest challenge of 2022 is how to manage retailers' needs when hiring their sales staff, warehouse workers, and delivery crews. There are consistent issues in each of those areas.

Let me clarify one thing. Yes, stimulus funds from 2020 and into early 2021 kept a lot of potential employees at home and off the job. However, let us be honest with ourselves. Our industry has had a tough time presenting itself as a career rather than a job for years. Home furnishings came into this pandemic battling that perception.

The Sales Floor

When it comes to the sales floor, many retailers are finding it more difficult

to entice people to take commission-oriented jobs. Many job seekers have concerns about how quickly they can become proficient at creating a pipeline. Others worry about adapting to the uncertainties of commission sales and its hunter-gatherer approach. The panel of CEOs discussed strategies they've taken to help interviewees to become more comfortable with the idea. Some have gone to a model where they provide an upfront draw against commissions to transition new team members into commission sales. Others start salespeople out on salary and then transition to commissions. Some retailers have even switched over to paying hourly wages. It is hard to say which one of these options works the best. The point is, creativity is at a premium right now when it comes to luring and keeping retail sales associates. As we all know, it's much more expensive to replace people than to retain them. One top-100 retailer told me they evaluate if new salespeople are keepers within the first 90 days of employment. He said, "We realize that you can't put a square peg into a round hole, so if someone is just not going to be comfortable and not a good fit for commission sales, we need to make the change sooner than later."

The Warehouse

On the warehouse side, it's become a battle of hourly wages. Many HFA members have boosted their base pay rates dramatically over the last 12 months. It's all been about keeping up with Amazon or other large distributors down the street that will bump wages fifty cents an hour to have an advantage. How can home furnishings retailers compete? Many are doing their best to make sure work environments are more friendly and attractive. Wages are a major consideration for job seekers, but when similar wages are offered by competing companies, working environments and company culture can tip the scale. One CEO told me he focuses on open communications to help warehouse and delivery people feel like part of the overall team.

What are you doing to find, hire and keep great people in 2022? Addressing that question and finding a successful answer for your organization will positively impact your business and just might improve your night's sleep.

For more information on what HFA is doing to empower furniture retailers for continued success, join the community at www.myhfa.org.

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A review of national and local legislative and regulatory activity initiated on behalf of home furnishings retailers.

Congress

The end of the 2021 calendar year acted as a deadline for congressional members to advance priority issues and 'clear the deck' for the new year. That led Congress to temporarily extend funding for the federal government (through February 18, 2022) and lift the debt ceiling through the 2022 midterm elections. At the end of last year, Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which has a 60-year history of annual passage.

work through various issues related to immigration, paid family leave, corporate taxes, and climate change. The Senate passage of the Build Back Better Act is likely to occur in early 2022 – but there are practical issues related to tax policy changes given high priority issues like the Child Tax Credit. Democrats hope to avoid tax filing season confusion by passing a new tax policy around the time Americans begin filing their taxes.

ing furniture retailers are complex, and OSRA is one of the leading, bipartisan legislative solutions to strengthen the position of American companies.

This legislation will help with the current supply chain issues and ensure these same disruptions don't occur in the future. In addition to the growing

Budget Reconciliation

Democratic congressional leaders continue to work closely with the Biden Administration on the Build Back Better Act (budget reconciliation) in hopes of passage. Following House passage in mid-November, Senate leaders are working with the Senate Parliamentarian and moderate Democratic Senators to

Supply Chain

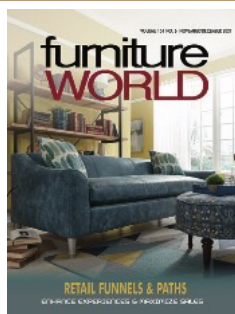
HFA has been working with various industry stakeholders to support the Ocean Shipping Reform Act (OSRA), which would provide more tools to the Federal Maritime Commission (FMC) to ensure compliance with detention and demurrage charges. It also includes transparent minimum service standards between ocean carriers and importers. The myriad of supply chain issues fac-

"The 'Stop Tip-overs of Unstable, Risky Dressers on Youth (STURDY) Act' has recently been reintroduced with changes supported by Ikea, Crate & Barrel, Williams Sonoma, and Room & Board."

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GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

list of congressional co-sponsors, the Biden Administration has supported this legislation.

STURDY Act

Furniture industry stakeholders have worked with consumer and parent advocacy groups on furniture stability. The 'Stop Tip-overs of Unstable, Risky Dressers on Youth (STURDY) Act' has recently been reintroduced with changes supported by Ikea, Crate & Barrel, Williams Sonoma, and Room & Board. The legislation would allow the

Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to develop a mandatory furniture tip-over standard through an accelerated rule-making process. The CPSC has released a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPR) that sets out a complicated list of test methods that only ONE clothing storage unit currently on the market could meet (according to the CPSC analysis in their NPR).

HFA and its members have supported a mandatory furniture tip-over standard based on the existing voluntary standard. We are actively working with stakeholders to find a legislative compromise that advances safety for manufacturers,

retailers, and consumers.

The HFA Government Relations Action Team (GRAT) worked with the Administration and members of Congress throughout 2021. This effort will continue in 2022, and we look forward to advocating for our industry's priorities.

For more HFA advocacy information, visit myhfa.org/policy-matters.

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"HFA has been working with various industry stakeholders to support the Ocean Shipping Reform Act (OSRA), which would provide more tools to the Federal Maritime Commission (FMC) to ensure compliance with detention and demurrage charges."

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