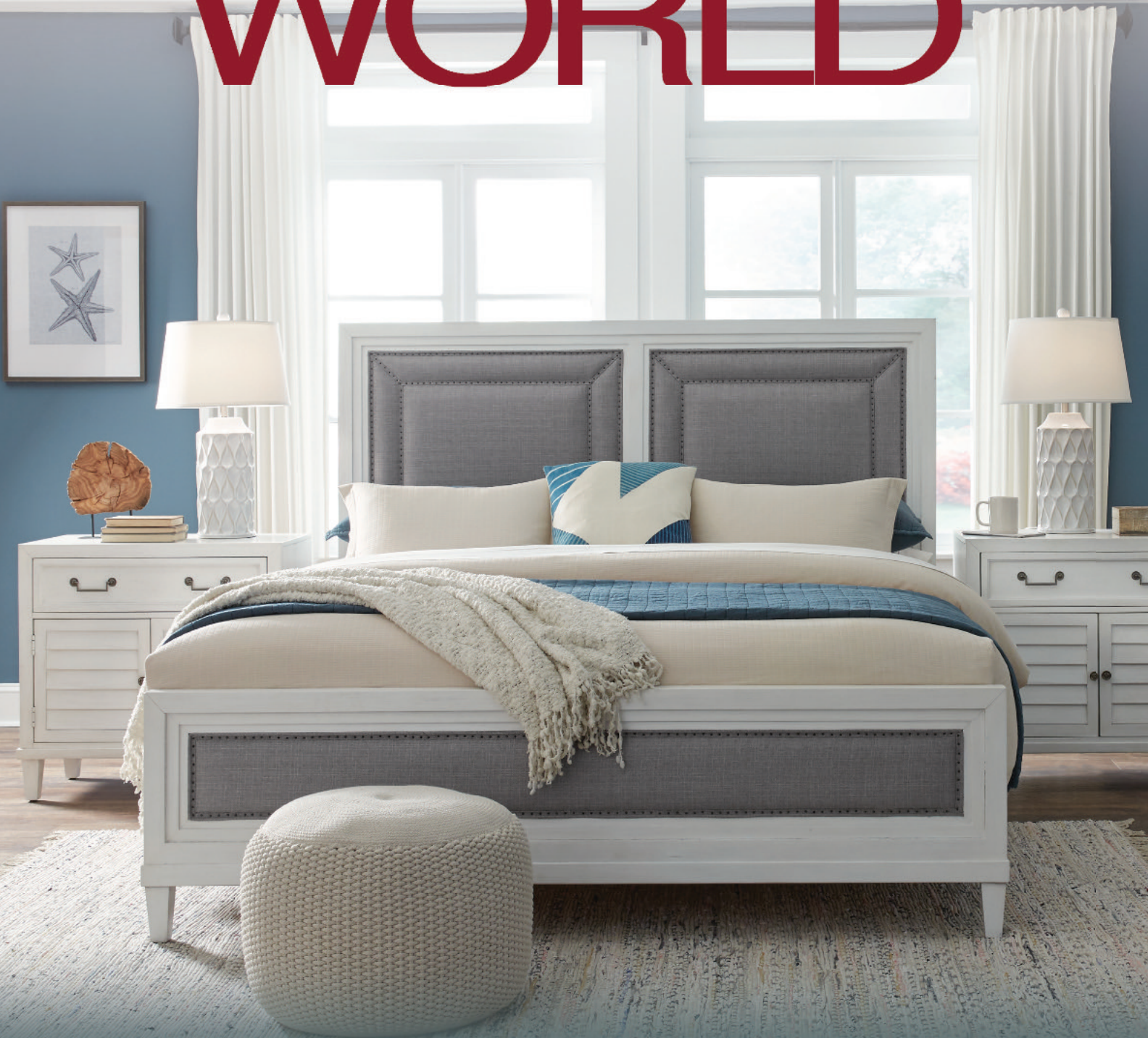


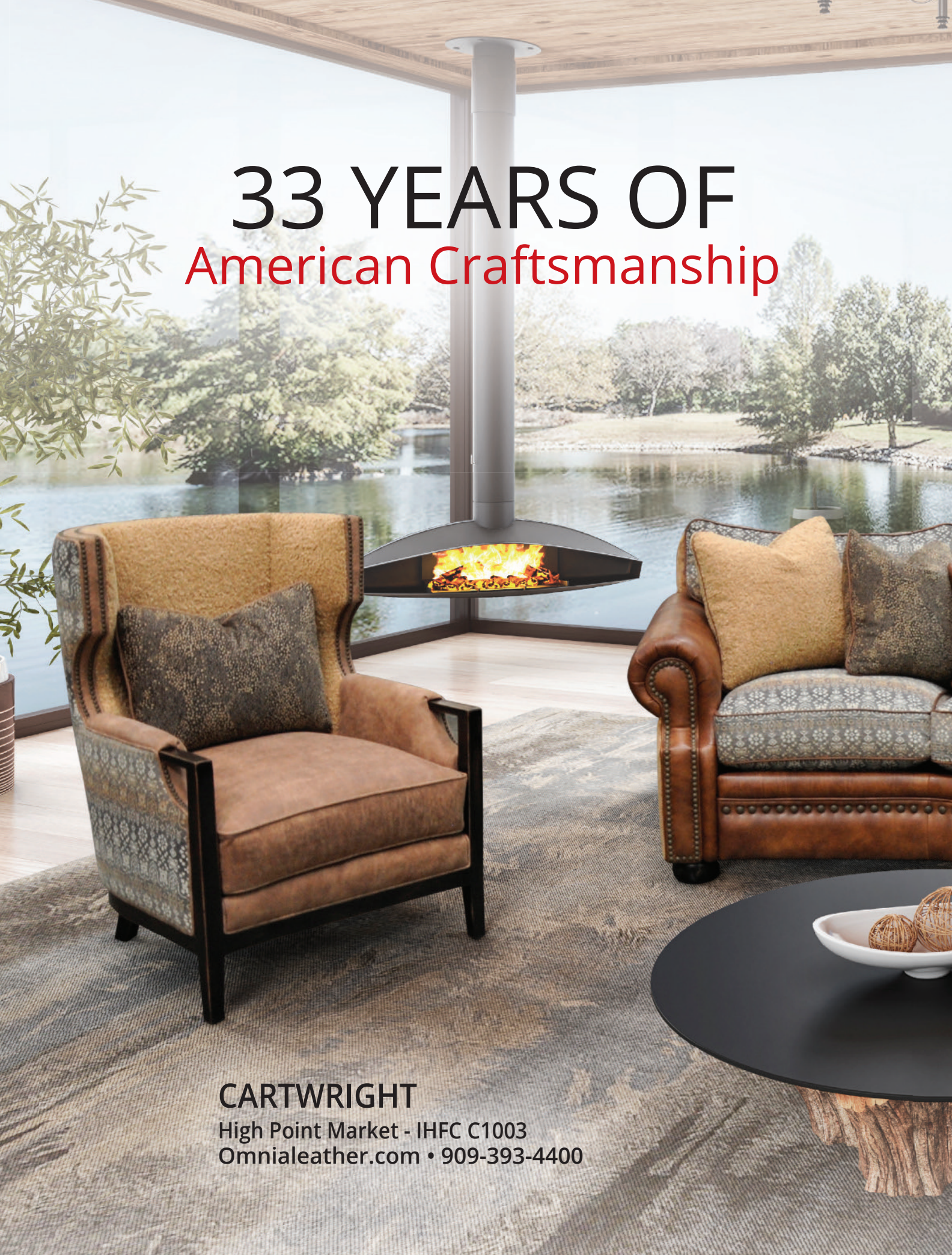
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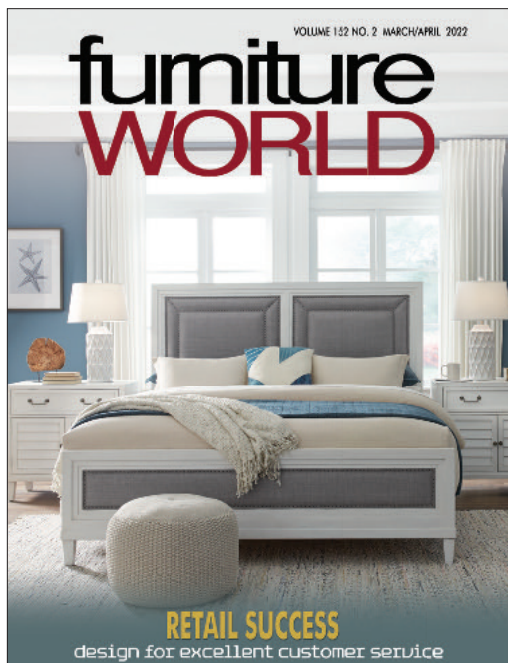
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COVER: The Cottage retreat style goes cleaner, sleeker and younger with the new Dunescape Bedroom Collection from American Woodcrafters. From urban loft to hipster farmhouse, Dunescape offers updated design options for the master bedroom. It is crafted of Mahogany with a white finish that allows the natural wood grain to show. Design details include small tack nail-head trim and a louver motif. For more information see page 35 in this issue or visit www.american-woodcrafters.com.

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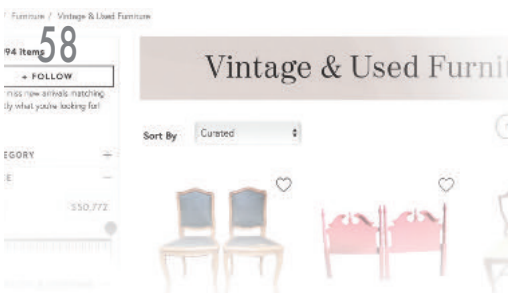
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Nothing New Under The Sun

In recent years the furniture industry has seen many ideas and styles recycled. We've witnessed a resurgence of Mid-century modern and more recently, a trend toward a floral, country-influenced aesthetic now known as cottagecore. Design maximalism and minimalism are trending at the same time. And, traditional-influenced furniture styles are coming back in a strong way. People have gone back to adopting their grandparents' hand-me-down furniture as home decorating gems instead of putting them on the curb. What's old has been made new again—often with a new twist.

Much like recovering grandma's vintage sofa in a cool, new fabric, our industry continues to expand the time-tested retail ideal of providing good, old-fashioned customer service. Now it's been re-branded and updated under the heading of "customer experience management." Spurred on by the likes of Amazon, new ideas about store design and technological advances allow furniture stores to compete by looking at new ways to keep customers engaged and happy, removing obstacles to better sales and growth.

Furniture World readers who are interested in further improving how customers experience their stores will find the March/April 2022 issue to be an excellent resource.

Jennifer Magee's article, "Design For Customer Service," looks at different ways retailers can use store design and technology to help customers feel comfortable and cared for as soon as they enter in-store environments. Innovative store design is one of the best ways to reduce the anxiety and frustration encountered in many shopping experiences.

David McMahon explains how retail automation for pre-sales and open sales opportunities can make purchasing home furnishings easier for shoppers and trigger a variety of follow-up strategies to make sure that questions and inquiries don't fall through the cracks. Automation can also enhance customer access to information from first contact to the post-sale service experience.

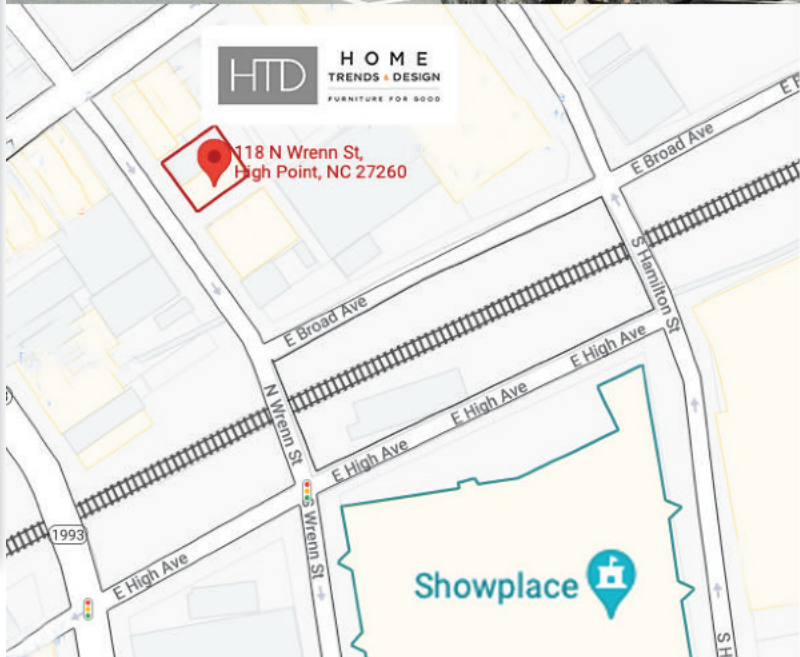
For this issue, we interviewed Brian Morgan, a founding partner of Texas-based retailer Couch Potatoes, who explained why a cold beer goes a long way toward setting the stage for a good customer experience. The Couch Potatoes store is a case study in how cultivating a store-wide attitude of caring for people can make a big difference in people's lives and their experience of a store's brand.

Finally, sales educator Scott Morris' article, "Closing Moxie" provides perspective on the skill of closing. Some sales techniques have come to be viewed as manipulative. But, when used correctly, these tools enhance the customer experience by breaking down the anxiety and indecision customers bring with them into stores and help customers make the best possible buying decision.

Good Retailing

Russell Bienenstock
Editorial Director/CEO
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Design For In-Store Customer Service

by Jennifer Magee

How to
re-imagine
customer
service
areas to give
shoppers the very
best in-store
experiences.

As online shopping continues to grow, furniture retailers need to do more to set their store experiences apart. Customer service must be at the heart of this effort. To succeed, stores must embrace new technologies, improve customer service amenities and reconfigure customer service areas to create a more seamless experience.

The Purpose of Customer Service

Retailers that provide superb customer service know what their customers want and use that knowledge to help their businesses grow. Fundamentally, it has to do with the way they interact with customers. Positive customer service builds relationships, creates rapport, and shows they care.

This applies to all aspects of their businesses, from customers' personal interactions with salespeople to how well they deliver on their promises. Nothing is more important than building trust. Issues can come up that may tarnish a relationship, but in the end, retail operations are judged based on how well bumps in the road are handled and resolved. A focus on transparent, appropriate communication with customers is critically important.

Therefore, customer service should be a key part of your brand identity

and a core tenet of your retail strategy. It should guide your business decisions and be integral to the way you train salespeople to be accessible, communicative, respectful, and non-discriminatory.

Online versus Offline

Platforms like Yelp, Google, Facebook and others give customers the chance to leave negative reviews. That's just one of many compelling reasons for retailers to prioritize customer service and make sure they continually invest in all channels of customer interaction.

Effectively engaging with customers online requires an easy-to-navigate website and the communication of brand values through visual and written language. Providing quick responses and expediting purchases are additional baseline requirements.

A major drawback for consumers who use websites to connect with stores is that it is usually less personal than an in-store visit. With online chat, customers usually get answers from an automated bot. If they send an email, they don't know how long they'll have to wait for a response.

The good news for brick and mortar furniture retailers is that this lack of personalization and direct interaction

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What Does Designer Gary Inman...

say about High Point's Bienenstock Furniture Library?



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BOULEVARD HOME

The design of Boulevard Home's Customer Service area (above) at the center of their new Mesquite, Nevada, store will serve multiple purposes and be a hub of activity.

TEPPERMAN'S

With the shift of Customer Service from a transactional to a relational experience, new types of amenities are emerging, such as this Information desk near the entrance of a Tepperman's store.

drives customers into stores where they expect to have a better, more personal experience and get immediate feedback. This is a key point of differentiation.

Well-imagined in-store customer service areas give brick and mortar retailers an advantage. They increase the ways customers can find and speak with experts to feel comfortable, engaged and ready to buy.

Evolving Areas

The ideal of excellent customer service has changed from being transactional to relational. Customers do not want to feel like they are going to a payment station or a bank teller. They do not want to walk to the back of the store to get help or arrange for payments. They do

not want to sit down with a manager or other staff in an office. They do not want to see any back-of-house spaces like break rooms or training rooms. They do want their experience to be friendly, relaxed, and easy.

Location: Furniture retailers are now moving customer service areas from the back of stores to more central locations. These are being placed in accessible spots that customers can view from everywhere in stores. Ideally, multiple circulation paths lead to these areas, forming hub-and-spoke layouts.

They are now typically centered on main entrances so salespeople can see customers as they enter. However, they should not be placed too close, since it can be intimidating. Clear and visible signage is important. Round shapes

have become popular because they allow access from all sides, giving them

"The ideal of excellent customer service has changed from being transactional to relational. Customers do not want to feel like they are going to a payment station or a bank teller."



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"Customer service areas

are now typically centered on the main entrance so salespeople have a line of sight to the front door and can see customers as they enter."

a friendly and non-hierarchical feeling.

Amenities: Customers should be able to use service areas to make payments, ask questions, seek help or just chill out. Consider installing a comfortable lounge area with TV. A cafe or refreshment station can be integrated into the design or located in an adjacent space so customers can get food, drink and take breaks from shopping.

Financing: These areas can include designated places for customers to sit while filling out credit applications and waiting for processing.

Instead of standing in front of a counter to check out, customers are more

comfortable sitting nearby or in a cafe where payments can be processed by salespeople using iPads. This helps keep the process from feeling transactional and encourages relationship-building.

Storytelling: Customer service areas are excellent places to tell stories about brand value and company history with photos or timelines. This helps customers feel connected.

Kids Zones & Design Centers: Retailers have installed Kids Zones near customer service areas so children are entertained while their parents shop.

Design Centers: Some retailers locate a Design Center nearby to increase

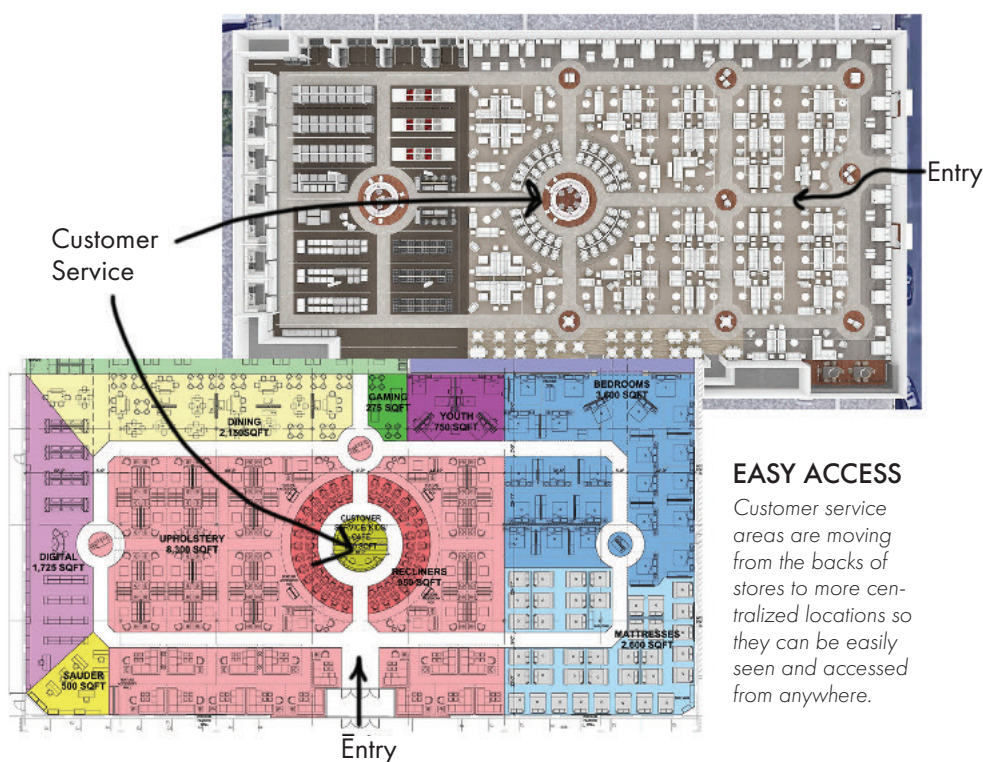
exposure to customers who are milling around. Doing that often leads to questions being asked about customized products and design services. Recliner, massage chair and mattress departments have proven to perform well when positioned next to customer service areas.

Additional In-Store Ideas

Multiple Areas: Some furniture retailers have installed multiple customer service areas throughout their stores. A small welcome desk positioned near the front entrance can work in concert with a series of checkouts in various departments. These checkouts often are just kiosks where customers sit in adjacent room sets to get checked out. The welcome desk at the front of the store can then serve as the place where customers seek help and ask questions. Retailers are also adding Wondersigns, large-scale interactive screens that showcase a retailer's entire product selection.

Separate areas for specialty destination departments such as rugs, mattresses, appliances, and outlet can be useful as well. Mattress departments with their own sleep specialists can have their own refreshment areas, seating pods, and checkout stations to serve customers.

Appliance departments benefit from providing specialty customer service amenities. Appliance salespeople need areas where they can comfortably sit with clients to review kitchen plans and



EASY ACCESS

Customer service areas are moving from the backs of stores to more centralized locations so they can be easily seen and accessed from anywhere.

CHAPIN FURNITURE

Round, floating Customer Service desks like this one at Chapin Furniture are gaining popularity because they allow staff to keep an eye on all corners of the store and allow customers to approach from any side.

REFRESHING LOUNGES

Furniture retailers are adding lounges and refreshment stations while also offering specialty food & drinks to enhance the shopping experience.

URNER'S

Urner's new store in Bakersfield, California, will feature a Customer Service area designed just for builders and contractors in the community.



layouts. Live demo kitchens have gained popularity to host culinary events and cooking demonstrations. Some retailers have been successful with customer service areas to cater to the needs of building contractors, for customized service and quick checkout.

Greeters: Concierges or greeters, typically located next to the front door, are becoming more common. Their purpose is to welcome customers without any sales expectations attached. It's an ideal place to offer a beverage, a wheelchair or a motorized scooter. Some furniture retailers employ greeting areas to learn more about shoppers so they can be better matched to a salesperson. This area is all about creating a higher level of personalized experience. The greeter is also there to thank customers on the

way out, creating a positive last impression.

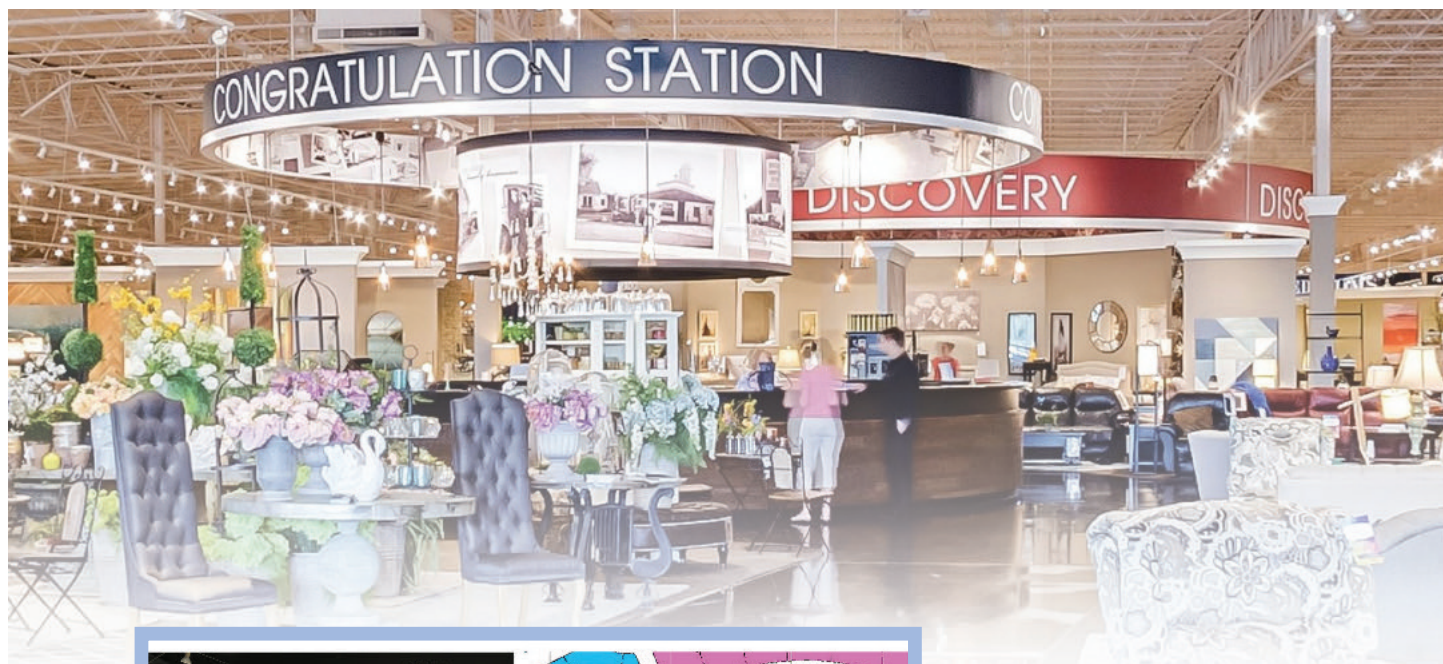
Customer Pick-up: Customer pick-up areas are another important part of the customer service experience. These areas should be well-signed so customers can easily drive around to find them. They should have a designated place to wait, complete with instructions on how to find someone to help them with their order. The pick-up experience must be as seamless as the in-store experience.

New Name for Service

The name "customer service" has an old and tired association with telephone companies. After the introduction of toll-free numbers, service agents were

employed to up-sell additional products or services. The result was often disap-

"Concierges or greeters, typically located next to the front door, are also gaining popularity. Their purpose is to welcome customers without any sales expectations attached."



FURNITURE MALL OF KANSAS

Furniture Mall of Kansas shares the history of their company at the "Congratulation Station," a personalized name for their customer service area.

JOHNNY JANOSIK

Retailers like Johnny Janosik have integrated their Design Center within customer service, making it a focal point of the overall space and increasing sales of customized furniture.

pointed customers who interacted with bad service agents, experienced long wait times, untrained staff, and more.

That is just one reason why it's time to give the in-store customer service experience a new name. A number of furniture retailers are experimenting with new names that have more positive connotations. "Guest Services" is quickly becoming the favorite as it speaks to a broader range of services and has associations with hotels and spas. The name suggests a place that welcomes customers and

services their needs.

Other retailers are developing branded names to replace the generic customer service designation. The Furniture Mall of Texas, for example, refers to their area simply as Congrats Y'all. The Furniture Mall of Kansas uses Congratulation Station. Both of these celebrate the customer's purchase. Others have added signs that read How Can We Help?, Information, Courtesy Desk, Customer Success, Service Station, Customer Experience and similar phrases.

The Future of Checkout

A 2019 survey by Capgemini found that 60 percent of consumers felt that the checkout process is the most painful part of the physical store experience. It is the last interaction customers have with your brand in-store, so it is worth the effort to make it a positive experience.

Apple was a leader in streamlining their checkout experience with a mobile checkout system that allowed the store associate who first helped a customer to take payment. Furniture retailers have largely adopted this approach, allowing sales associates to complete their sales and coordinate delivery. That way they become their customer's point-of-contact

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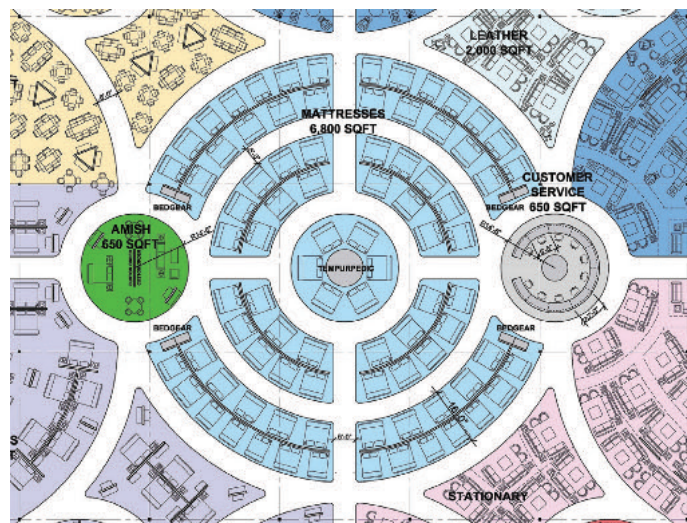


KIDS & KIOSKS

Kids Zones are being added next to customer service areas so parents can focus on shopping.

Kiosks distributed around stores can now serve as checkout stations, thanks to mobile POS technology.

Wondersign interactive screens are gaining popularity as they allow customers to shop digitally in-store.



FURNITURE MALL OF TEXAS

Furniture Mall of Texas has strategically placed their main customer service desk (image above) within their Mattress Department, making a positive impact on bedding sales.

"As online brands like Wayfair and Casper have ventured into offline, they've prioritized keeping sales areas minimal, customer friendly and well-branded."

throughout the experience.

Other retail sectors, particular grocery and convenience, are moving towards contactless and cashless systems. AmazonGo touts technology that eliminates the checkout process altogether, although it is more appropriate for retail stores where speed and convenience are key. Even so, technologies like Stripe, Square and Shopify along with "contactless cards" have changed checkout, allowing easy payments anywhere there is an iPad and an internet connection. Using systems like these enhances the experience by being fast, easy and convenient.

As online furniture and mattress brands like Wayfair and Casper have ventured into offline retailing, they've prioritized keeping sales areas minimal, customer-friendly, tidy, and well-branded. Other retailers are experimenting with

"digital" seating areas where customers can browse their full catalog online, order directly through a website or do self-checkout.

The physical customer service experience, therefore, is evolving to be less about the checkout process and more about creating a place for conversation and relaxed decision-making. This is the more comfortable, fluid, seamless, easy and digital-focused approach to buying furniture. It's something that furniture and bedding retailers should consider.

About Jennifer Magee: Magee is an architect and designer who has over 15 years of experience in the home furnishings industry. She has designed over three million square feet of retail space. Working almost exclusively with furniture and mattress retailers, Magee has an in-depth knowledge of how to

lay out stores to create better customer flow, improve the way he merchandise is presented and increase sales.

She is the founder and owner of Retail in the City, a boutique design firm offering a full range of retail design services from storefront design to interior design, branding, space planning, visual merchandising, signage, new store concepts and more. Her talented team of architects, interior designers and renderers creates exterior and interior design packages so retailers can become more competitive in their home market or expand into new markets.

Questions about this or other Furniture World articles on store planning by Jennifer Magee (found at www.furninfo.com/Authors/Jennifer_Magee/86) can be directed to her at 917-533-4372 or send her an email at jennifer@retailinthecity.com.

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A Very Short History of Customer Service

1880s Department Stores: The modern idea of customer service began with the Industrial Revolution when mass-produced goods moved shopping away from local stores. In the mid 1800s, large department stores emerged, influencing what people bought and how they shopped. Stores like Sears and Macy's first developed the concept of in-store customer service. Areas for returns and the repair of washing machines, blenders, and more, became common.

Sales Counters: The invention of the cash register in 1883 allowed retailers to quickly ring up sales and record transactions. Cash registers needed a home, so sales counters and cash wraps were created.

Credit Cards 1920s: Once credit cards came onto the

scene in the 1920s, they became a preferred method of payment. Furniture retailers took advantage of this shift in purchasing habits by providing their own credit lines to customers. At that point, in-store customer service desks were created to meet a utilitarian need for writing up purchase orders, processing payments, and completing paperwork. That need largely disappeared since new forms of technology have allowed the checkout process to be completely seamless and paperless.

2022: Today, customers are looking for a place to go for expertise and to interact with a human being. The goal for the in-store design of customer service areas is now to create a personalized experience for customers and help them to navigate the decision-making process.



WAYFAIR & CASPER

Online brands that have gone offline like Wayfair and Casper keep their Customer Service areas simple, clean & well-branded.



DIGITAL SEATING AREAS

Digital seating areas and check-out bars may become the new norm, giving customers the chance to shop a retailer's catalog online yet within a comfortable store environment.



MATHIS BROTHERS

Mathis Brothers locates their "Reception" area just to the left of the main entrance so they can welcome customers & easily answer questions.





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ROOMS for Their Lives

INTERVIEW WITH YOUNG HUH

by Russell Bienenstock

Interior designer Young Huh talks about current trends and how to engage with clients on an emotional level to give them the best experience of their new home furnishings.

Furniture World interviewed Young Huh, an interior designer known for her warm, colorful and inviting interiors. Huh has been included on Elle Decor's A-List and was named one of Vogue's five interior designers on the rise. Her work has been featured in publications such as Architectural Digest, Domino, Elle Decor, House Beautiful, Interior Design, Luxe, The New York Times, Real Simple and The Wall Street Journal. Huh supports the local and global design community, participating in speaking engagements and charitable events that include the Kips Bay Decorator Show House and the annual Bienenstock Future Designers Summit in High Point, NC.

Her company, Young Huh Interior Design (YHID), is a full-service design firm specializing in residential and commercial interiors. She has a growing line of licensed collections and is on design councils/advisory boards with Benjamin Moore, Cosentino, The Rug Company, and Kravet.

Design Solutions

Furniture World asked Young Huh how she engages with clients to find the best interior design solutions for them. Also, how her approach might benefit Furniture World's retail furniture store

readers.

She suggested that a critical step in working with clients is to figure out how they want to experience their new or redesigned rooms. It's similar to what design associates might do in furniture stores. "We do that," she explained, "by asking questions, then having them react to images. People have a hard time describing styles, but when they see an image, it becomes obvious.

"When a designer or furniture retailer takes the time to tell a story about the items their clients are thinking of acquiring, people feel that they aren't just buying a chair. They are bonding with a piece of history or connecting with a culture of makers."

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Michael Schwartz

"I once did some design work for a couple who told me that they wanted their house in the Hamptons to have a country farmhouse feel. But, they were super glamorous people who didn't seem to be country farmhouse types. So I showed them country farmhouse imagery which turned out to not be at all what they had in mind. Their idea of country farmhouse was sleek wood furniture with fine finishes.

"Providing lots of different visual images is an efficient way to find out if customers prefer traditional, modern traditional or more contemporary-leaning design. It's also an excellent strategy for getting a head start choosing colors and patterns."

Working With Emotions

"One thing that most people don't

realize about interior design is that it's very much about emotion. There are all sorts of different feelings people want to experience from their newly designed spaces. We make sure to uncover this information before any design process begins. Do they want a room to feel contemplative, peaceful, enlivened or sexy? When they see a photo they might say, 'I love that room' or 'That grey-blue color makes me feel like I'm in heaven.'

"These client conversations lead to an understanding of what may bring our clients joy. For one person it's color. For another it's surrounding themselves with photos of their children or showing off a collection of plates passed down from their grandmother.

"Even though I'm known for room designs that incorporate bright colors and patterns, we have clients who prefer to use neutrals. Whatever they want, we

approach every project with passion."

Creating Beautiful Homes

Huh said that common ground that interior designers have with home furnishings retailers is that both strive to help their customers create beautiful rooms. "Retailers, however," she observed, "must anticipate what shoppers want

"People have a hard time describing styles, but when they see what they want, it becomes obvious."



Young Huh is known for her colorful room designs and patterns but always starts with each client's unique point of view. All rooms pictured in this article were created by Young Huh Interior Design (YHID).

and make sure that they have products available to purchase off the floor or be custom ordered from a limited number of suppliers. A big part of their job is to create an online or in-store environment that causes shoppers to think, 'How did they know what I'm looking for?'

"We are living through unusual times. We all need to take a deep breath and give retail a chance to figure out the new normal.

"Longer term, I believe that the Instagram model will become even more important." The downside for customers, she noted, is that when they try to source things online, it's not possible to get a sense of scale, proportion, craftsmanship or comfort. That's why shows like High Point are becoming much more important to the design community."

Design Inspiration

Aside from visiting High Point, Huh said she gets ideas from street artists, museums and design books. "I get lots of inspiration from handicrafts as well.

She recently was the keynote speaker at the 2021 Bienenstock Future Designers Summit where creative minds in college and university design programs are introduced to the people, brands, and processes that are creating tomorrow's homes. "They had to drag me out of the Bienenstock Furniture Library," Huh recalled. With over 5,000 amazing volumes on furniture and design, the Bienenstock Library is full of inspiration for new design ideas that build on what came before."

Her Escape From the Law

Young Huh has a personal story that her admirers and clients can relate to.

Her family moved from Seoul, Korea to Michigan when she was three years old. Her parents collected Korean art and furnishings, so growing up she traveled to auctions where she met collectors and sellers.

Huh described her upbringing as typically American with added pressure to be an academic superstar on a career

path to becoming a medical doctor or attorney. She attended Smith College. Following graduation with a degree in English literature she attended law school.

"By the end of my first week of Fordham Law," she recalled, "I realized it just wasn't for me. Somehow, I managed to get through and please my parents

"One thing that most people don't realize about interior design is that it's very much about emotion. There are all sorts of different feelings people would like to experience from newly designed spaces."



"Everyone has been talking about multipurpose spaces, but I think that is going to trend down. People have gone back to wanting single-purpose rooms for sleeping, eating and working."

by passing the Bar and clerking for the New York Supreme Court. After that, I thought, 'That's it. I'm done!'"

Huh's husband suggested that she think outside the box to find a new career path. He advised, "don't let your education be a burden to you."

"I took personality tests that pointed me toward a creative career incorporating social interaction and elements of structured thinking."

Her "Ah-Ha" career moment occurred when she met an interior designer at a cocktail party who spoke in glowing terms about his profession. "I hounded him until he agreed to give me an internship," she recalled.

Huh enrolled in classes at Parsons School of Design, then worked in the industry for a couple of years before starting her New York City-based design firm in 2007.

Storytelling

Furniture World asked her to comment on the importance of storytelling in the home furnishings industry.

"When companies have a story to tell," she explained, "they engage their customers in a conversation about the culture of their brand and the brands that they sell. When a designer or furniture retailer takes the time to tell a story about

the items clients are thinking of acquiring, the whole process becomes much less superficial. People feel that they aren't just buying a chair. They are bonding with a piece of history or connecting with a culture of makers. It makes the process more meaningful to customers who know, for example, that they've purchased a piece of furniture made by craftsmen who have worked for a North Carolina furniture manufacturer for generations."

Trends in Room Use & Design

Trend toward personal spaces: "The pandemic has changed how peo-

ROOM FEELINGS: contemplative



Photo Credit John Bessler



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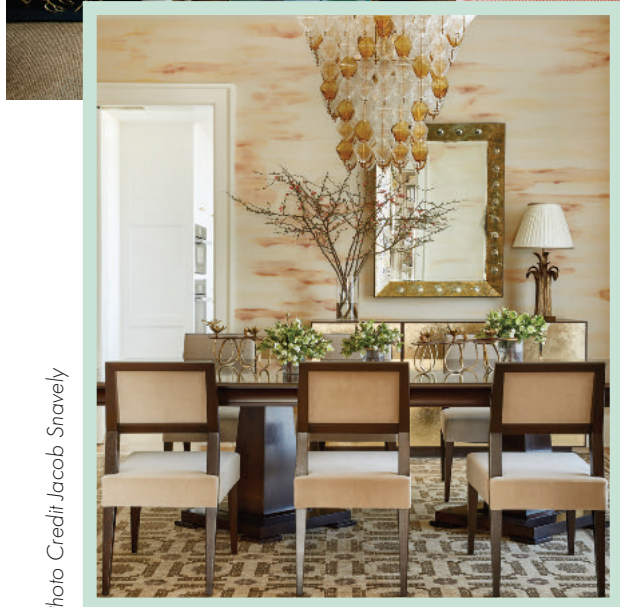
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Young Huh was the keynote speaker at the 2021 Bienenstock Future Designers Summit (above) where creative minds in college and university design programs are introduced to the people, brands, and processes that are creating tomorrow's homes.

ple want to live in their homes. Before COVID, open plan living, dining and kitchen areas were the norm. Now that our clients have spent so much time at home working, eating and studying, they are looking for separate dining rooms, family rooms and home offices. Room delineation has become a predominant trend in home design today.

"Everyone has been talking about multipurpose spaces, but I think that is going to trend down. It will remain important in vacation homes where families come together to socialize. For day-to-day living, however, people have

gone back to wanting single-purpose rooms for sleeping, eating and working."

Dining Areas: "Formal dining rooms are back with a vengeance. Millennials are entertaining at home. They've come to believe that it doesn't take so much effort to serve take-out pizza on pretty dishes in a dining room that seats lots of people. It's much more fun than entertaining in a family room kitchen combo that can seat maybe six people max."

Bedrooms: "There's a desire for bedrooms to become more peaceful spaces. Pre-Covid, people tended to design and

"Formal dining rooms are back with a vengeance. It's much more fun than entertaining in a family room kitchen combo."

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"People are enamored

with West African patterns, Russian designs, native motifs, Chinese flowers, English chintz, Mexican handicrafts and Indian prints of all kinds. It's a global world in terms of design."

use their bedrooms like hotel rooms. Now they want a place to get away from the kids, do some office work or Zoom quietly. Private spaces have become more important. People are spending more time decorating them, not to mention creating backgrounds for Zoom calls."

Style Trends: "At present, we see two extremes in furniture design. There's a surge of interest in heavy brown English furniture as well as demand for lines like CB2 that have light, very modern shapes that are playful, organic and sculptural. At YHID we love to mix English antiques with Vladimir Kagin type sofas. It's a really interesting mix supported by a trend

toward people holding on to their old items as they collect new ones."

Furniture Word asked Young Huh if this ties in with the grandmillennial trend. "The resurgence of traditional design," she replied, "had been going on for some time before the term grandmillennial was coined. Cottagecore is a related trend that's also popular with younger people who have discovered the joys of Laura Ashley. Designs include diminutive items and accessories that are considered adorable, feel innocent and sweet. I believe that this feminine trend reflects a longing for simpler, sweeter, prettier times. Tween girls seem to be really into

cottagecore, while many members of the millennial and younger demographic groups appreciate grandmillennial.

"In this age of individualism, multiple style trends are going on at once. On the one hand, there's maximalism which is pattern on pattern—more is more. On the other side, there's a minimal organic, natural trend that includes warm earthy woods, lots of texture, lightness and simplicity."

Color Trends: "I don't know what makes a certain color the color of the year. But, I've always liked the color of the year. Rich, earthy tones like ocher, orange, rust and oxblood are back in vogue. We're



TRENDS: Rustic & texture



Photo Credits Jacob Snaveley



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TRENDS: Orange, rust, creams and oxblood



Photo Credit Francesco Lagnese



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Outdoor spaces
will remain strong

"There's a surge of interest in heavy brown English furniture as well as lines like CB2 that have light, very modern shapes that are playful, organic and sculptural."

also using colors like oatmeal, creams and every variety of taupe. Wood colors including white and grey oaks are trending."

Pattern Trends: "Traditional French patterns are running very high. Also popular are patterns that harken back to original cultures. People are enamored with West African patterns, Russian designs, native motifs, Chinese flowers, English chintz, Mexican handicrafts and Indian

prints of all kinds. It's a global world in terms of design that we combine in a beautiful way."

Trends in Texture: "There's been some real movement toward the use of jacquard wovens. The trend is toward incorporating rustic designs with more texture and authenticity by including some imperfections. There's a lot of recycled work out there now that people love."

Design Technology: "One of the biggest trends in home furnishings technology is biophilic lighting. It's lighting that changes color according to the time of day. It helps people feel more connected with nature and may lessen seasonal affective disorder. Yellow-colored light in the brightness of day and blue light during the evening hours can be depressing. This new technology allows LED lights to change color temperature

over time.

"Biophilic bulbs are expensive now, but that will change. Then we will be able to use an app to switch from morning, afternoon and evening light. I believe it's going to be the next big thing in home lighting."

Outdoor Spaces: "The trend toward creating outdoor living rooms will remain strong. It is being pushed forward with advances in outdoor fabrics, rugs, sofas, bar carts and outdoor kitchens. These amazing products will continue to change home owners' relationships with the outdoors."

In closing, Young Huh shared why she loves the home furnishings industry. "We work in a wonderful industry that's made getting better by the camaraderie and cross-pollination of ideas."

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DEEPER PURPOSE AT RETAIL

Couch Potatoes and The Furniture Mall

by Russell Bienenstock

An unlikely story of grit, faith, and a belief that there is nothing—people or furniture—that cannot be loved or repaired.

The story of Couch Potatoes is an inspiring study about the power of trust. Talented partners Brian Morgan, Dan Anthony and Travis Morgan built a unique retail and manufacturing operation based on faith in their abilities, faith in people and a belief that there is nothing—people or furniture—that cannot be loved or repaired.

A Unique Beginning

Before Brian Morgan co-founded Austin's Couch Potatoes with his best friend Dan Anthony and brother Travis, and way before they partnered with Jeff and Jamie Winter from the Furniture Mall of Kansas, Brian and Travis were kids from a rough and gang-violent area of Austin, Texas.

"My brother Travis and I had always been scrappy because we grew up in a rough part of town," recalled Brian. "I think that became our superpower. We had nothing. We had to work hard and be creative."

Brian got his formal education in business while studying to become a minister. "I landed a job working for a couple of salvage guys/liquidators who wanted to sell the salvaged stuff they bought online. They also hired my friend Dan who

worked alongside me to run the internet portion of the business.

"That's how we obtained behind-the-scenes knowledge of how big-box retailers bought, sold, moved and returned products in the early 2000s.

"We were able to make a lot of margin by putting everything on eBay. From there we built tons of eBay stores. In the product mix were furniture returns from Macy's and Bloomingdales. Back then it was hard to ship large pieces. So, we set up a small retail store in Lynchburg, Virginia. We also bought trailer loads of leather furniture and case goods from Macy's reclamation center, marked it up a few points and resold it to furniture retailers without ever touching the prod-

"People came in after hours to shop at our obscure, abandoned warehouse. We used flashlights and wore headlamps to show them around."

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Most people make a baked potato by adding butter and maybe bacon bits. Dan, Travis and Brian (l-r above) are known for building the world's largest potato with an added sofa (34x22 feet). A new wild and weird character will be added, joining the sofa for the Weirdest City in America (Austin, TX) to enjoy.



ucts. This was our entry point into the furniture business.

"By the time we were 20 years old we had sold over a million items on eBay and were known as the 'eBay guys.' We sold some unusual items including a ton of women's plus-size lingerie. I laugh about that all the time because I was putting myself through Bible college selling women's plus-size lingerie on eBay."

Brian and Dan loved to identify niches and pick best-sellers. "We got in on the ground floor of e-commerce but I decided to return to my philosophical roots, left the business with Dan and went to India to work with orphans, then moved to New York City to join the Bowery Mission, the oldest Christian rescue mission in New York City serving homeless people. I also helped found The Lower Manhattan Community Church.

"The biggest thing I learned through that adventure was to never give up on people. And that's the core value and mission of Austin's Couch Potatoes."

When family health issues took Brian back to Texas, Brian and Dan's eBay business folded. They weighed their options. "We had experience buying and selling truckloads of scratch and dent groceries on eBay," noted Brian. "So," we thought, "how much work will it take to make four hundred bucks selling cans of peas versus selling a sofa? With that in mind," he recalled, "we opened an online Craigslist-only appointment-style furniture store in Austin."

But when their first truckload of damaged furniture arrived, the partners wished that they had bought a truckload of peas. "The truck was packed to the gills," said Brian. "After unloading, we felt like we were about to die. We had rented a 5,000-square-foot abandoned bathtub manufacturing facility on the outskirts of town for \$400 a month. No power, electricity, heat or running water. We thought, 'Perfect, let's do it.' Since we didn't have the funds to rent an apartment we lived there as well."

The partners learned how to fix all the broken furniture they purchased by watching YouTube videos. "We hired a leather repairman who coached us. We also advertised on Craigslist to bring in traffic. People came in after hours to shop at our obscure, abandoned warehouse. We used flashlights and wore headlamps to show them around. We

"We hired a pretty rough gang, some with tattoos on their faces. There were felons of the worst kind, former drug addicts and repeat offenders."

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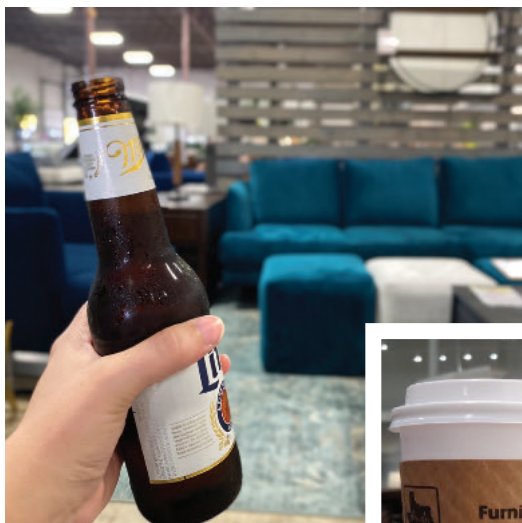


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In-store smiles

Pictured are happy guests sitting in a big green chair and on a tricycle (adult and kid sizes available) at the newest Furniture Mall Store. Beer and other beverages are offered to Couch Potatoes customers.



told them, 'Here is the damage we tried to repair. Can you live with it? If not, find something else.' Purchases were delivered in a 1985 Volvo hitched up to a trailer borrowed from a friend who used it during the day to move equipment for his gardening business.

"People always ask how we got our name. Our dad was a Vietnam vet, the son of a ranch hand. And when, as kids, we weren't out working around the house on Saturdays, he would call us couch potatoes. It had become kind of a joke, so Travis and I put the name 'Austin's Couch Potatoes' at the bottom of our Craigslist listing. The name stuck.

"By this time Dan had finished college and could not find a job in finance. Travis and I had started the business, but we felt that Dan would know how to make the business grow. He would be our secret sauce. Before Dan joined the company, if people needed a sofa and were short

on cash, we might give it to them for free because that's just the way we're wired. He helped us build a business."

In 2012, the trio moved the business into a 12,000-square-foot metal barn off a nearby highway. "The access road to the building wasn't great, it didn't have air-conditioning, but we were happy to have a toilet and electricity," Brian recalled. "Just imagine selling furniture in 110-degree weather inside of a giant metal building."

They had some bad luck in the first month doing business there due to a 70 percent drop in their supply of scratch and dent furniture. "Fortunately, a Coaster rep told us about this thing called a furniture market," Brian recalled. "At that time, we had never heard of High Point or the Vegas market." The trio couldn't scrape together the funds to all go together so Travis was chosen to make the trip. "He didn't know what

to expect," said Brian. "Imagine a surfer-looking dude with long hair and sandals strolling into the Las Vegas Market courtyard. Security pounced on Travis thinking he was a homeless guy. He did manage to tour the Ashley space with supervision. Luckily, an Ashley rep, Gay Hines, helped him out. She's still one of our best friends. That's how we started selling Ashley.

"As time passed, our Ashley reps loved us because we were selling so much. But we wondered why we were selling so much Ashley and had so little to show for it. It was David McMahon, the founder of PerformNow, who pointed out that furniture retailers can't survive with margins in the low 30s.

"McMahon said, 'you're doing a really good job. People love the experience they have here. I don't know why because it's 110 degrees in your store. Nothing about what you're doing makes

"We still offer beer

to every guest to break the ice, as well as sodas, juice and wine. Instead of asking, 'what are you looking for today?' It's 'can I get you a drink?'"

sense. But it's working. Your best seller is Ashley's 452 sectional, selling for \$699. Everybody else in town has it marked at \$999 to \$1299. What do you think about raising the price by \$100 dollars?' And I replied, 'Are you kidding me, David? You're going to kill our business.' But his observation was the best advice I got that whole year. We learned that people are willing to pay for what they want."

Staying Alive

In 2018, Austin recovered from the

great recession. Samsung, Dell and Apple had moved into town, taxes increased, and five mom and pop furniture stores that had operated for generations closed their doors.

"Store owners gave up because they were all doing the same thing—fighting over dollars, price shopping, competing with each other and doing private label. We realized that we had to do something to differentiate ourselves or we would become a statistic as well.

"Dan had been on a few factory tours, so after much thought, he decided to make the furniture we sold. He

ordered a sewing machine and I said, 'Are you kidding me?' He replied, 'I'll figure it out.' Dan went home, took apart a sectional and learned how to build upholstery. He taught himself the basics of sewing and how to make frame templates from chipboard. Voilà, we were in the upholstery manufacturing business."

At this point Couch Potatoes started looking for people who knew how to sew a straight line, source materials, make frames faster and design furniture. "We couldn't find any seamstresses in this market. We had no idea how to get parts."

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"Imagine a surfer-looking dude

with long hair and sandals strolling into the Las Vegas Market courtyard.

Security pounced on Travis thinking he was a homeless guy."

"Then we met a guy at a sandwich shop who said he was from New Tazewell, Tennessee, and had worked at La-Z-Boy building furniture. He stayed on for a while and taught us how to build frames. Then we finally found a lady who could sew a straight line.

"You might think we were lucky to bump into skilled people when we needed them, but it's my view that it was like God was saying, 'Yeah. You're supposed to do this.'

"We started to connect all the dots and scale-up. Our bank turned us down for a small loan. They looked at us like we had three eyes. So, we went to a another local bank, Southside Bank, who gave us the loan in 20 minutes over the phone. I urge all furniture retailers to

develop strong relationships with local banks.

"We placed an order for a CNC machine we didn't know how to use. Then took out another loan to purchase a \$130,000 cutting table.

"Help wanted ads were placed to try to find someone who could run the equipment. We didn't get any response for weeks. Then, the week we started to install this big, expensive equipment, we got a call from a woman who was looking for a job for her father who was at that time working for a company delivering beverages. It turns out he had been the lead sewer at Jonathan Louis. We love J.L. by the way. Amazing people!

"We were in the middle of moving our factory and desperate for workers. Travis heard that it might be possible to hire workers who were recently released from a nearby prison. When he visited the facility, he found about 300 men and many women looking for work. That was the start of a beautiful relationship between Austin's Couch Potatoes and The Austin Transitional Center.

"Luckily for us, inmates in the state can get certified to make upholstery.

"Brian posted job offers to help with the warehouse move. Prison officials wanted to make sure that we were comfortable hiring ex-offenders, so I took some time to watch other companies as they interviewed people at the Center. It didn't take long to realize that people who were being interviewed for jobs were already defeated. Some employ-

ers couldn't hire them because they were felons. They couldn't find housing, they didn't have ID, a bank account, transportation or a place to live. They were at risk to fall back into crime because no one would give them a chance to become law-abiding citizens. The odds were stacked against these people, in massive ways."

Brian found that instilling trust at that interview table changed everything. "There's no greater joy," he said, "than seeing a man who's been told he's not good enough by his family, his state, and his employers turn things around. All we said was, 'If you can show up on time and do the job, we will teach you, walk alongside you and mentor you.' We hired a pretty rough gang, some with tattoos on their faces. There were felons of the worst kind, former drug addicts and repeat offenders."

Brian explained to Furniture World that at Austin's Couch Potatoes, they used to buy damaged furniture considered undesirable. "With a little bit of attention that furniture became beautiful again. Our passion changes lives. We just happen to sell furniture as well."

A Transformative Experience

"The Furniture First buying group welcomed us in 2016. It was a transformative experience.

"It was there that we met the owners of The Furniture Mall of Kansas. They are engineers, thought leaders and our

"We wondered why we were selling so much Ashley and had so little to show for it. It was David McMahon, the founder of PerformNow, who pointed out that furniture retailers can't survive with margins in the low 30s."

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THE COUCH POTATOES STORY

mentors. We were able to join a performance group with them and became great friends."

Brian told Furniture World that a drawback of the Couch Potato model is that with a name like that, designers didn't take them seriously.

"We thought that it would be good to develop a classier store, so we asked Jeff and Jaime Winter to partner with us to create a Furniture Mall of Texas store. Before they agreed, we took a leap of faith, found a suitable property. Finally, they agreed to do something crazy with rookies who didn't know much about selling higher-end furniture and had never done anything by the book. We opened our first store in Texas together, The Furniture Mall of Texas, in March of 2021, during the pandemic. They sacrificed so much to open the store with us. I cannot imagine a better partnership. It's been a great experience."

Working with Customers

"Back in the early days of selling furniture out of our big metal barn, customer service was easy. It was, 'what you see is what you get.' When we started to migrate to better goods, offering fabric options and brands like Jonathan Louis and Southern Motion, we realized that we had to do a better job to be able to sell custom furniture in 120-degree weather. So, we investigated installing air conditioning in our rented building. It was \$130,000 just for the AC, not including installation. And we just could not bite that off.

"We had to do something in that hot barn, so instead of the HVAC system, we set up a bar in the store (please don't tell my mom). We noticed that when buyers go to the High Point and Vegas markets, their favorite spots are the spaces that have the best food and drink! So, we started offering customers a nice

cold beer, knowing that they wouldn't leave until they finished it—and it worked. Serving cold beer might sound tacky to some in the industry but it's right for Couch Potatoes. We still offer local beer to every guest to break the ice, as well as sodas, juice and wine. Instead of asking 'what are you looking for today?' It's 'can I get you a drink?' People are just caught off guard. It's as if they are walking into our Couch Potatoes home as a

"We went from being a misfit gang of mask makers to supplying the entire city of Austin and 13 other counties with all their PPE."



When masks were scarce, the partners were summoned to meet with Homeland Security, part of an emergency task force. Couch Potatoes gave out over a million masks free of charge. Pictured above is Dan's mask design created from polypropylene and rubber bands.

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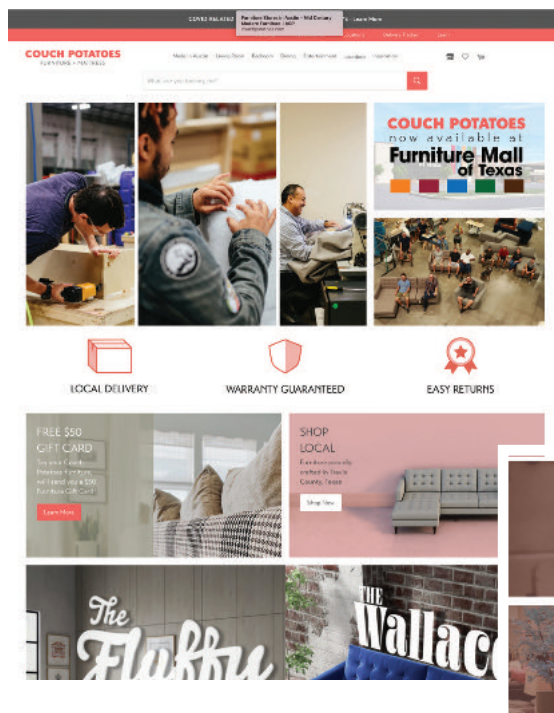
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The Couch Potatoes website www.couchpotatoes.com touts its two dedicated locations in Austin and a third at their first Furniture Mall of Texas location. The stores feature a shop local message, no haggle pricing that's fair, easy returns and a no pressure sales staff that's "there to help you day or night." Plans are under way to roll out stores nationally.

"We started offering customers a nice cold beer, knowing that they wouldn't leave until they finished it—and it worked."

guest. And, in Texas, because we offer it to everyone of legal age, customers don't have to show an ID or license."

Mask Initiative

"At the start of the pandemic," Brian continued, "health professionals, as well as other folks in Texas had trouble getting masks and PPE. So, Travis, who has the biggest heart in the world suggested that we make some to give away."

"Dan, being Mr. Engineer took up Travis' challenge. He found all the materials he needed in the factory except for elastic. So he used rubber bands to tie the masks on."

"We posted online to try to give them away. In just a few hours we had 50 requests. Dan did his nerd math and figured we could make 100,000 masks with materials we had on hand."

"Since Austin's Couch Potatoes stores were forced to shut down, we ran with a skeleton crew consisting of our management team and one or two people working online chat," recalled Brian. We didn't know if we could sell or deliver. Most of our people had been sent home. So, we called them to see if they wanted to volunteer.

"People we recently hired, who were just released from prison showed up to help their community. It was probably the greatest church service I'd ever attended in my life. They are heroes in my book."

"We sewed like crazy people. Then, we received a call from the Department of Homeland Security. The voice on the other end of the line said, 'I need you to come to my office.'"

"I immediately called my wife, Dan and Travis, to let them know that we were probably going to jail."

"When we arrived at the Homeland

Security Office, we were 'wanded' by commandos and the doors locked behind us. We met with an emergency task force made up of medical professionals including the heads of EMS and hospitals in town.

"It's a long story but we went from being a misfit gang of mask makers to supplying the entire city of Austin and 13 other counties with all their PPE. Our friends at Podium set us up with an account to enlist volunteers to register to be drivers. The Austin Stone Community Church and The Disaster Relief Network helped us coordinate nearly 250 volunteers to sew mask kits at home. We gave out over a million masks free of charge. The City of Austin bought PPE gowns from us, which kept all of our people employed."

Whatever It Takes

Couch Potatoes has an everyday lowest prices model. "We don't care if it's Black Friday or President's Day, it's the same price. This policy came about because we got tired of changing tags."

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We then found out that it made life so much easier because we didn't have to play the price game with customers. And, you know what? Our margins landed where we needed them to be, and our customers appreciated the honesty.

"I can tell you story after story about people who have fallen in love with us because of the way we do business. We do whatever it takes to make customers feel happy and become part of our family. We do what we can to help, for example, giving away furniture to folks who've had challenges or experienced disasters.

"It's a culture of giving back company-wide. Every month, we give a paid company day of service so our people have an opportunity to be agents of good and model that behavior to their families. "We now measure and set

goals for giving as business metrics. How many lives have we impacted this year? Can we impact 50,000 lives in a positive way this quarter?"

The Future

Brian, Dan and Travis plan to roll out the Couch Potatoes brand nationwide. Brian told Furniture World, "we will open more Furniture Mall stores in Texas and throughout the country with our partners at Furniture Mall of Kansas."

"The Winter family focuses on three things. Happy family, happy guests and happy business, in that order. The idea is that if your people know that you love them, appreciate them and serve them, they will be happy and your business will be healthy.

"We refer to Furniture Mall of Texas' customers as happy guests and work to provide over-the-top service. As in the Winters' Furniture Mall of Kansas store,

homemade cookies and custard are served. Tricycles are available for customers to ride around in the store. It's our belief that if our industry wants people to come into the brick-and-mortar stores, the experience has to be lively and exciting. And nobody does that better than Jeff Winter, Jamie Winter and family. It's just crazy, fun."

"We didn't have to play the price game with customers. And, you know what? Our margins landed where we needed them to be, and our customers appreciated the honesty."

The five partners at the Furniture Mall of Texas Grand Opening in 2021 (Dan Anthony, Travis Morgan, Jeff Winter, Jamie Winter and Brian Morgan) all sitting on the signature scooters customers use to ride around the store.



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FUTURE HOME IN HIGH POINT

RETAIL AUTOMATION

Pulling the trigger on pre-sales and open sales opportunities

by David McMahon

Whatever your business model, automation is needed to accomplish more with less time and give your precious human talent to focus on what they do best.

Every furniture retailer knows how challenging it is to find and retain long-term, career-minded, employees. Along with this talent challenge, wage inflation has made it a requirement to offer more competitive compensation to attract and retain top talent.

It's a difficult situation. On one hand, retailers need to hire and develop good people. On the other, they must control wage costs to produce a respectable level of profitability.

Despite these pressures, most store owners continue to operate their businesses the same way they always have. The result is often overworked team members, stressful work environments and reduced employee performance. Ultimately businesses, employees, and customer experiences suffer. It's become a chronic problem.

The solution is to implement systems and processes that provide better results using fewer resources. Doing so enables retailers to employ a reduced number of good people to handle daily workloads, resulting in more growth, happier employees, and satisfied customers.

Fortunately, many tasks can now be "triggered" by software that enables one or more actions to be executed automatically. These actions include retail workflows, processes, reminders,

transactions and communications.

The process is similar to the way a mousetrap works. The mousetrap is the technology, the removal of the cheese is the trigger, and the springing of the trap is the action.

With automation, the only limitations are creativity, desire, and the technology that's deployed.

Pre-Sales Automation

1. Web-CTA (Call-to-action): A CTA is a piece of code on a website that facilitates sending a digital lead. This engagement-ware code typically asks website visitors for information in exchange for personal information. The information request can be a simple item inquiry, a newsletter sign-up, a sleep profile quiz or a style assessment. The CTA either launches when a website visitor clicks on a link, or an auto-launched pop-up can appear after a set time of browsing. Once web visitors type in the requested information, they typically receive a message notifying them about next steps to take, or the results of a quiz they've taken are revealed. The CTA process provides retailers with the ability to follow up with web visitors.

Trigger: Visiting an area on a website.

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RETAIL AUTOMATION

Auto-Action(s): Information requested, results returned, lead opportunity generated, follow-up person notified.

2. Chat-bots: When you visit most websites these days, at the bottom right corner you will likely see a small person with a cartoon chat bubble. If you click on this chat-bot icon you will often be asked for basic information such as your mobile number or email and name. From there, chat-bots differ from CTAs in that chat-bots engage website visitors in a real-time conversation. In doing so, data is automatically collected about potential customers and their needs. Good automation continues after chats are completed. This may include sending thank-you emails/texts as well as auto-assigning follow-up communications to lead managers, departments or individuals as appropriate.

Trigger: Clicking on the bot and typing in contact information.

Auto-Action(s): Conversation initiated, data collected, thank you sent, opportunity follow-up assigned.

3. Appointments: Calendars save everyone time, qualify serious shoppers, and promote the professionalism of sales teams. Links to one or

more digital calendars on retail websites show the availability for VIP consultations. Calendars can be used to promote and schedule in-home appointments, in-store concierge services or sleep profiling, for example. Customers can use them for self-scheduling. Lead managers can use them for converting digital to in-person opportunities and sales managers for monitoring and booking salespeople's time. After an appointment is scheduled, it can be auto tagged as a 'hot' opportunity that can be tracked. A salesperson can be assigned, then appointment preparation and reminder messages sent from the salesperson to the prospect automatically. Auto-emails that, for example, ask for pictures of a room or for current likes and dislikes in advance, can increase the likelihood of sales and save time.

Trigger: Booking a date and time on the digital calendar.

Auto-Action(s): Confirmations and information requests sent from salespeople. Reminders sent to salesperson. Lead defined and tracked as "hot."

4. Physical to digital automation: QR codes have become more prevalent in the age of COVID. They serve as an automation bridge between

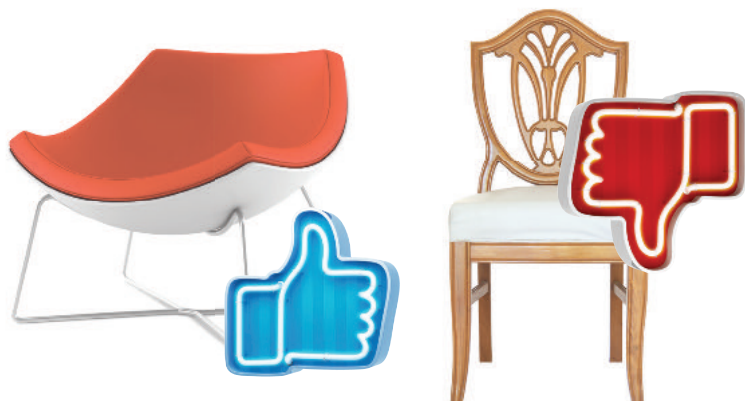
the physical and digital worlds. Because of this, businesses can capture more leads from their physical material and better understand what customers are looking at. A QR code when scanned can automatically go to a CTA, a calendar, lead to a drip campaign that targets prospects in a personalized way, send an offer, or provide information.

When scanned, a QR code on a direct mail piece, for example, can connect web users with additional product information. It might also trigger an auto-sent email featuring decorating ideas as well as schedule lead follow-up with a salesperson. Printing a QR on order checkout paperwork can facilitate order status, delivery scheduling and service requests. This can make it easy for customers to get order updates (depending on the technology) or request an order update from their salesperson within a certain time frame.

Trigger: Scanning the QR (and possibly entering information).

Auto-Action(s): Information requested returned to the user. Follow-up assigned to salesperson.

5. Quotes and no sale prospects: When prospects provide their personal information or if they are pre-



"Auto-emails that, for example, ask for pictures of a room or for current likes and dislikes in advance, can increase the likelihood of sales and save time."

“

There's a lot of benefits to being a Nationwide Member, but the best one is that it's a one-stop-shop. They've provided everything — from financing options for our customers and inventory solutions for us to events like PrimeTime, where I can go to network and get to know other business owners. Plus, when I've got a certain category that I can't fill, I have a number of different vendors that I can call on through Nationwide to help fill in the gaps. I've always got someone there to help lend a hand.



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"Uber and Lyft popularized

the automated process of vehicle in-process tracking.

This technological advance can be applied to furniture delivery."

vious customers and they do not buy, it makes sense to follow up. However, in practice, if managers do not inspect to see if follow-up on "hot leads" has been done, there will be multiple dropped balls. It is challenging to keep track of multiple quotes, with multiple salespeople, over time, on an ongoing basis. This is where automation shines. If quotes or non-sale leads are recorded, the next actions can be predetermined. For instance, thank you messages can be auto-sent with a button to schedule an appointment. Reminder nudges can be periodically sent to salespeople on a scheduled frequency until either a sale is made, or the customer chooses not to purchase. Then, a drip campaign can be triggered. In effect, strategic automation enables businesses to cast a wider net, with smaller holes, leading to more fish being caught.

Trigger: Quote or non-sale lead recorded in a system.

Auto-Action(s): Salesperson assigned. Customer sent a thank you note and provided with suggested next steps to take on their buying journey. Salesperson follow-up prompted. Manager notified of unexecuted follow-up and open quotes/sales pending.

Open Sales Automations

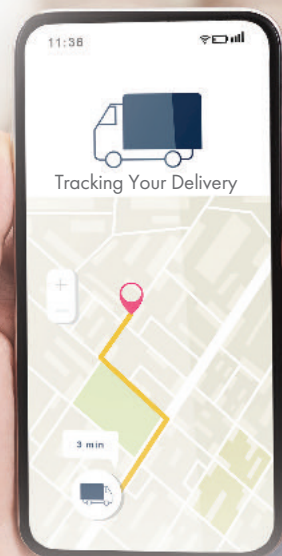
1. Open sales follow-up: I believe that businesses should be fully transparent with their customers regard-

ing the status of their merchandise. If it has been ordered, is on the water or already in the warehouse, they deserve to be in the know. Not everyone in the industry agrees on this point. Some retailers believe they may lose sales, cause confusion, or create partial delivery requests if they are transparent with merchandise status. No matter what your views are, open sales follow-up is more challenging now than ever. Those retailers that use automation to either give customers direct access to their order status (like Amazon) or prompt salespeople to follow up, will provide a superior customer experience.

Trigger: Sale made.

Auto-Action(s): Predesigned and scheduled messages are sent from salespeople to customers. This may include a thank you communication for the purchase, order placed, in-production, order status self-check tracking link or order status request link.

2. Protection reminder: Product protection, accident insurance, extended warranties or benefit packages are the most profitable products customers buy. Not all customers, however, purchase at the point of sale. Sometimes they are not even made aware that these offerings are available. Therefore, it makes sense to send automated messages to customers who did not purchase the protection package. The email can offer an option for customers to request to be contacted with



more information or to be automatically enrolled in the plan. In these and other messages some retailers will use a short video to present the product.

Trigger: Sale made without protection.

Auto-Action(s): Consider sending three campaigns automatically from the salesperson: After the sale, before delivery, last chance day of or after delivery.

3. Payment processing: Collecting payments is time-consuming. Include in your terms that full payment is required on in-stock merchandise. Find a merchant service that enables you to store bank account or credit card information so that you can auto process any amount due.

Trigger: Merchandise arrives in retailer's facility.

Auto-Action(s): Notifications are simultaneously sent to the customer and to your admin notifying them of payment processing.

4. Delivery scheduling: Delivery scheduling gets done by salespeople, customer service reps or dedicated delivery coordinators. This is a time-consuming process with multiple back and forth calls, texts and emails. Process automation provides huge bene-

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"A QR code when scanned can automatically go to a CTA, a calendar, lead to a drip campaign that targets prospects in a personalized way, send an offer, or give some information."



fits. When sales arrive that can be scheduled (either partially or fully depending on the retailer's policy), a message can be automatically triggered to the customer from their salesperson. Date options for delivery can be included or, even better, include a link so customers can self-schedule their own delivery.

Trigger: Sales marked as ready for delivery scheduling.

Auto-Action(s): Pre-designed emails and/or text with links sent to complete the scheduling process.

5. Pick-up scheduling: Some retail furniture operations have up to 30 percent of their sales picked up by customers. It is time-consuming to inform, remind and coordinate customer pick-ups. When customers arrive to get their merchandise, warehouse people must stop doing what they are doing to pull the merchandise while the customer waits. Automating this workflow speeds up the entire process. As with delivery scheduling, an automated message is triggered when the merchandise is in stock. From there, customers are encouraged to select a date and time for which to schedule their pick-up. Reminders are sent automatically from the pick-up calendar. Customers send a text once they arrive, and a return text is sent when

everything is ready.

For customers that do not show up or whose merchandise sits in the warehouse too long, constant reminders can be sent to free up warehouse space.

Trigger: Merchandise ready for pick-up.

Auto-Action(s): Pre-designed emails/texts sent with links to schedule pick up.

6. Day of Delivery: Uber and Lyft popularized the automated process of vehicle in-process tracking. This technological advance can be applied to furniture delivery. On the morning of the delivery, customers can be sent an email and/or a text with instructions to self-track their merchandise. Furniture operations that use this technology find that their retail customers track their deliveries closely. This saves time by reducing delivery status calls and provides a better and more convenient delivery experience.

Trigger: Date of delivery set.

Auto-Action(s): Email and/or text with tracking information sent.

make sure that pre-sale and open-sale automation can be modified to suit your specific needs. For example, a business that does more special orders, design work and house calls, will likely have a greater need for scheduling time and organizing status follow-up. A high volume, stocking retailer, might put extra focus on delivery pick-up scheduling to increase warehouse inventory turns. Whatever your business model, automation is necessary to accomplish more with less time and give your precious human talent more time to focus what they do best.

This article was just a sample of what's possible using automation technology. In the next issue of Furniture World, we will focus on post-delivery, re-engagement, vendor and trade related automation.

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.

Conclusion

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Lock Yourself in the Kitchen

by Peter Schlosser

Idea by way of Jagger and Richards for Furniture World readers to either consider or dismiss.

I have a number of favorite expressions. These include “No good deed goes unpunished.” Love it. Also, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” For the past couple of years, we’ve all had to hike up our britches and deal with supply chain issues, so right now, my favorite expression is “Necessity is the mother of invention.”

That’s why I’ve chosen to advocate in this article for unconventional approaches to keeping furniture flowing onto smaller retailers’ sales floors. Throughout the pandemic, the Top-100 have leveraged their buying clout. Even if they can’t get exactly what they want, they can get all the goods they need. That has left some smaller retailers in tough situations.

One benefit that small footprint entrepreneurial businesses have is flexibility when faced with challenges. It reminds me of a story that seemingly has very little to do with the furniture business.

The manager of the Rolling Stones, Andrew Loog Oldham, was said to have locked Mick Jagger and Keith Richards in a kitchen to force them to write a sad song. “I want a song with brick walls all around it, high windows and no sex,” he said. The working title, according to Wikipedia, was initially “As Time Goes By,” the same as the song Dooley Wilson sang in the film *Casablanca* (see <https://bit.ly/3HMIGZf>). It was

Oldham who replaced the word “Time” with “Tears.”

They came up with the song Marianne Faithfull released in 1964 to great acclaim (see <https://bit.ly/3HzlwEd>).

It sometimes becomes necessary to “lock ourselves in the kitchen,” to focus on an important task. That’s especially true in this extraordinarily bizarre time.

I’m sure that Jagger and Richards came up with some interesting as well as dead-end ideas before settling on their final version. That’s how I came up with the following list of ideas for Furniture World readers to either consider or dismiss. Even if you are a retailer that has your supply chain issues under control by now, some “kitchen” time might lead you to recipes that will add interest to

“One benefit that small footprint entrepreneurial businesses have is flexibility when faced with challenges. This reminds me of a story.”



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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.

"Chairish has published

some astonishing numbers about how many people have purchased vintage products at www.chairish.com."



your marketing and incremental dollars to your bottom line once business gets back to normal.

Pre-Loved Furniture Sales or Consignment

Cars aren't the only items in the "used" category to become more popular and pricier lately. Vintage furniture, especially mid-century items from legacy manufacturers like Dixie, Heritage Henredon and Bassett are wildly popular. Watch any television commercial geared toward the 25-45 age group and I guarantee you'll see a Lane switchboard cocktail table or an Eames chair. If you have a repair shop (you should) you can recondition these pieces. Look on websites such as 1stdibs.com or ebay.com, and you'll quickly see what's selling. Check out kaiyo.com, which promotes real finds on pre-loved furniture made to last. It's a pitch that also appeals to consumers who are looking to save the planet by keeping furniture out of landfills.

Younger people have recently become attracted to vintage furniture. But not just any vintage furniture: it must be chic. In a recent installment of Furniture World's Design & Designer series, Michelle Lamb observed that "Minimalist forms and patterns have been around for so long that it's time for decorative looks to come back. That's happening in a trend called

grandmillennial. This style incorporates furnishings that look like they came from your grandmother's attic, accented with forms that are cleaner and less detailed. These more contemporary accents often lean toward mid-century modern, a millennial favorite for so long that it is now considered a home furnishings basic.

"The grandmillennial trend is all about furnishings that look like or are vintage, but with a twist. For example, an upholstered chair that your grandmother loved in tapestry might be recovered for a 21st-century consumer in an updated color of velvet or an oversized repeat, transforming it into something unique. Or vintage-look furnishings may appear in a room with oversized floral wallpaper. It's an eclectic look and part of a return to a tradition that we've been tracking for more than three years."

"Vintage furniture has been out of fashion for long enough that it now feels fresh. Chairish has published some astonishing numbers about how many people have purchased vintage products at www.chairish.com.

Thrift Stores: You might think I'm reaching here, but thrift stores can be a good place to find this kind of gold. At a thrift store in Virginia Beach, I once found a Hickory Chair silver chest and a Lane cocktail table for \$65 and resold them for \$500. Habitat for Humanity has a strong furniture presence in this category

and often has pieces on their floor in very good condition with plenty of margin left at retail. I bought a Maitland-Smith marble top chest for \$79 in like-new condition. Even Craigslist has a ton of great furniture available. If you search by the legacy names, you'll find it.

Other Ideas

Welding shops. Welders can make amazing things. If you can dream up a design, they can make it a reality. And, selling locally made metal bookcases and tables can give you an interesting story to tell on your next TikTok video.

Cabinet shops. What's the difference

"Look on websites such as 1stdibs.com or ebay.com, and you'll quickly see what's selling. Check out kaiyo.com which promotes real finds on pre-loved furniture made to last."

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"From time to time I run across a cabinet that is begging for a new top, and that's when I reach out to my marble guy here in town."

between furniture and cabinetry? Nothing! Cabinet shops (like mine) can create all sorts of designs for you, right in your neighborhood, and you can control the color, woods, finish, and design. Cabinet shops traditionally focus on boxes, but they can turn posts, build frames, plank tops together, and join wood any way you like.

Upholstery shops. Anyone who can re-upholster can also upholster. If you drift around Market, you'll see hundreds of iterations of the basic sofa. All that's required is a frame and someone who knows what they're doing.

Marble shops. From time to time, I run across a cabinet that is begging for a new top. That's when I reach out to my marble guy here in town. Marble shops have lots of odd cuts sitting out in the yard, and they'll cut them down for you for only a few bucks. I once got a marble slab cut down to my spec for \$50. I made a kitchen island with it and sold the piece for \$1,000.

If you place two unfinished kitchen base cabinets back-to-back, place two wall cabinets of the same height at either end, then add a slab and wheels, you've got a kitchen island.

Final Comments

You might not want to change your business model with any of the ideas listed above, but with a little time in the kitchen, a bit of luck and ingenuity, you may be able to augment your offerings and expand your business!

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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ADVERTISING CAN ONLY TAKE YOU SO FAR

Interview with Joe Walter and Terry Fetterman

Conversations between retailers and ad agencies need to expand beyond questions of creative and media to ensure that messaging aligns with customer perceptions and experiences.

This installment in Furniture World's series on retail advertising features information and advice from Terry Fetterman and Joe Walter of Tango Multimedia. Their ad agency works with independent family-owned stores with sales in the \$3 million to \$20+ million range.

Fetterman spent the first two-thirds of his career working for companies such as Radius Communications, Comcast and Viacom-owned CBS in TV advertising and video production sales, management and direct response.

"Before founding Tango," he recalled, "I also worked for a technology company as director of sales on the operational side of broadcast television and early streaming media services."

Joe Walter met Terry years ago following a disappointing experience with a TV ad buy he made while working at his family's furniture operation, Highland Park Furniture.

"One Black Friday weekend," he recalled, "We invested heavily in TV ads to bring in customers.

"The spots were a complete failure. It was our first substantial investment in television advertising, and we were unable to tie any business directly to the promotion.

"Our print supplier, Banner Marketing, suggested that I speak to Terry before doing more television marketing. Terry

immediately spotted the flaws in our campaign and suggested a thoughtful, well-designed plan. As it turned out, my dad, who owned Highland Park Furniture, said, 'As long as I live, I'll never run another television ad! It doesn't matter how good the plan is. We spent our lifetime supply of TV money on that last campaign.' So, Terry, and I just remained friends. Over a number of years, I developed expertise in digital ad management as an effective means of advertising our stores, which ultimately led me to join Tango as VP of Online Advertising."

New Advertising Conversation

"It's not news to most Furniture World readers that access to data allows retailers to create audiences based on data, track impressions and clicks," explained Fetterman. "Today, they can measure the number of people who were served an ad, walked into a store and purchased.

"These analytics have fundamentally changed the conversation retailers and their ad agencies should be having. Instead of being concerned with just marketing and branding, advertising decision-making is increasingly connected with how retailers buy, merchandise and sell their products.

"Here's an example. We recent-

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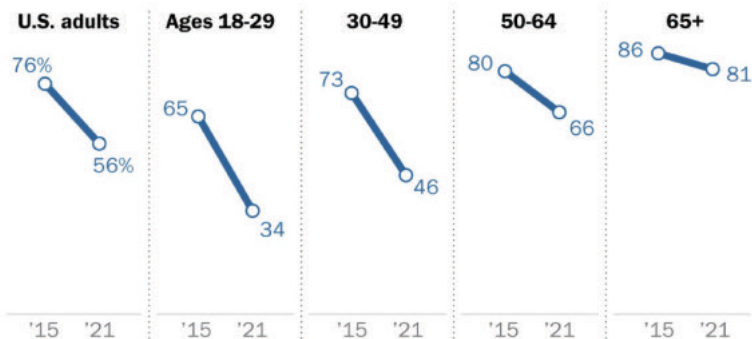


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Share of younger adults receiving TV via cable or satellite has plunged dramatically since 2015

Percent of U.S. adults who say they receive TV via cable or satellite at home



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 25-Feb 8, 2021. PEW Research Center.

ly worked with a large retailer whose brand message emphasized selling products for less than the competition. It was and is a major pillar of their brand.

"When customers were asked to share their impressions about this retailer, they explained that the operation delivered an excellent shopping experience and were impressed with the employees, product quality and selection. All good things.

"This retailer's everyday prices were, in fact, lower than their competitors'. Customers, however, believed the opposite. How was this possible?

"To correct a mismatch like this takes more than just working with an ad agency to place clever ads. The shopping experience needs to be re-aligned. For example, it could be that when shoppers walked into this retailer's stores and turned right, they saw a selection of higher-end items. If a \$12,000 sofa is the first thing shoppers see, it makes an impression. Multiply this by 1,000 and it can become a problem.

"Just moving a display from the front to the back of a store can have a large effect over time," noted Fetterman. "And there are many non-advertising factors like this in retail operations that contribute to a disconnect between a retailer's

advertised brand and the experience people have of that brand. Advertising and marketing have become much more comprehensive and holistic. It needs to be part of any discussion between retailers and their advertising agencies."

Video Shift

On the topic of media choices, Joe Walter noted that "the conversation about television advertising has shifted quite a bit in the past few years due to the importance of reaching people with video."

"That's certainly been the case," agreed Fetterman. Video has become the number one source of information for 66 percent of all adults. The TV budgets we're managing are shrinking as YouTube and Facebook video advertising, OTT, CTV and streaming video have grown.

"Even today, some retailers are handling advertising themselves. They accept the packages offered to them by television, radio and newspaper ad reps. This is not the best way to optimize an advertising budget. What advertising reps say is not always the best advice for home furnishings retailers.

"In 2015," Fetterman continued, "76 percent of adults watched TV from cable or satellite. Today, that number has dropped to 56 percent. While it's still a lot of people, media consumption habits continue to shift.

"Often, furniture stores use broadcast TV—a combination of ABC, NBC, CBS and FOX. In any market, one or two stations dominate the local news and furniture stores choose those stations to carry the majority of their network television placements. Many store owners believe that their customers don't watch

"There are many non-advertising factors like this in retail operations that contribute to a disconnect between a retailer's advertised brand and the experience people have of that brand."



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"People watch CNN,

Fox News and MSNBC. Advertise on those three news channels from six p.m. until midnight. Every single furniture store can afford to do that."

cable TV anymore.

"They place commercials from five in the morning until six at night during the early news, the evening news, occasionally on late-night news and sometimes on entertainment shows like Kimmel and Fallon. Unfortunately, most TV viewership is not during those time slots. It's in prime time."

Fetterman said that local furniture stores typically can't afford prime time, but that isn't a huge problem because they can still reach people before they leave for work, then again when they return home, through local news programming. "On paper, it all sounds good. The problem is that including travel time, most potential customers leave home at 7 a.m. and return at 6 p.m.. Retailers are sometimes well served by reducing their broadcast budget a bit and adding cable TV in primetime when people are watching CNN, Fox News and MSNBC. Advertise on those three news channels from 6 p.m. until midnight. Every single furniture store can afford to do that to better reach folks who work during the day."

Digital Decision Making

Furniture World asked Joe Walter about current best practices for digital

advertising.

About Google: "Google is foundational to any advertising program," he said. "It is the place people go to first when they're looking for furniture. When they're interested in buying, retailers need their website to show up in that moment. It's the modern equivalent of Yellow Pages advertising. Beyond Google, the market a retailer is in, its budget, and goals dictate what needs to happen next in terms of digital advertising."

About Geofencing: "For some retailers, geofencing makes a lot of sense for a similar reason. It's a way to effectively communicate with active shoppers. Even during the pandemic when closing ratios were as high as 50 percent or more, there were still lots of consumers who walked out of stores without buying. So, it makes sense for retailers to direct resources to try to get their shoppers and those consumers who visited competitive stores to come in and complete a purchase."

About Competitors: "It's a mistake to blindly copy competitive stores' advertising choices. For example, it's easy for a retailer to assume that an Ashley Furniture Home Store operating in its market area wouldn't place so much TV advertising if it wasn't working. For a retailer with

a modest advertising budget, however, television is often not the best way to go. It's important to be aware of what competitors are doing in terms of their media choices, but it's impossible to compete simply by copying large competitors."

About Website Development: "Over the past two years, many retailers have been patting themselves on the back for finally paying some attention to their websites. But, there are still a large

"There are so many ways stores can build rapport with customers and provide an alternative to scrolling through sofa images accompanied by boilerplate copy about exemplary customer service and how many years they've been in business."

WHAT'S NEXT?



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ADVERTISING CAN ONLY TAKE YOU SO FAR

number of furniture store websites that underperform.

"Retailers may spend huge sums on rent, salespeople and displays to support physical locations. At the same time, they tend to shortchange their websites. If a shopper's first impression, based on a website experience is poor, she probably won't consider an in-store visit. When that happens, investments in physical locations are wasted."

Content

Walter suggested that Furniture World readers who settle for just uploading information provided by their manufacturers are unlikely to inspire shoppers.

"Over much of the last two years, it's been a sellers' market for a lot of retailers who've been able to cut their ad budgets." Rather than pocketing that savings, he said, they should fund content creation. Whether they hire an influencer, post TikTok videos or photograph

beautiful in-store vignettes to replace cookie-cutter manufacturers' supplied photos, it's worth the effort.

"Smart retailers are creating how-to and design videos. There are many ways stores can build rapport with customers and provide an alternative to scrolling through sofa images and boilerplate copy about great customer service and how many years they've been in business.

"Most retailers know that they need to create better content. Often though, that's where the discussion ends. Store owners hardly have the time to take care of basic things like hiring, payroll and placing orders, much less brainstorming about what kinds of blog posts to write.

"The good news for retailers is that platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat have changed the threshold for what's considered entertainment. Our customers have become used to low-fidelity content, so compelling social media messaging no longer requires fantastic high-resolution images or professional

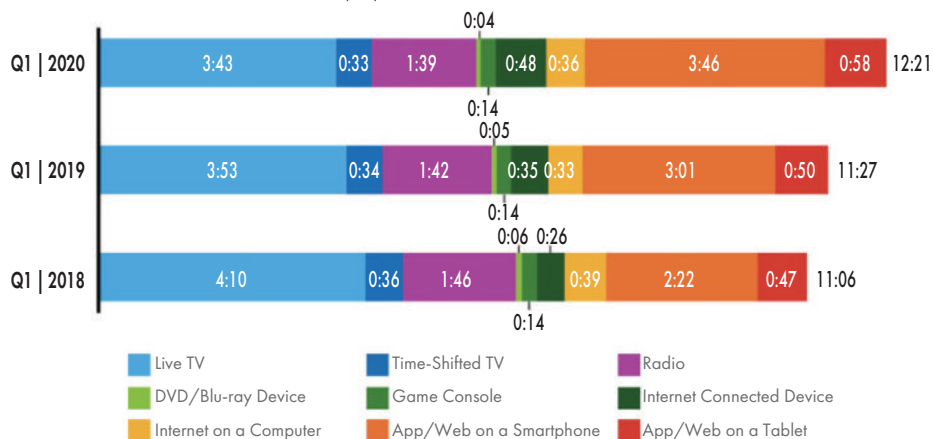
videography."

Retailers who visit TikTok can see thousands of submissions from top-100 to small independent retailers. A quick search for the phrase "furniture store" reveals content that ranges from useful information to playful clips featuring furniture store employees and customers. "Mrs. Jones came in and bought a sleeper sofa. Why? That can be your piece of content," observed Walter. "Or, a salesperson on-camera can talk about how happy a recent customer was when she solved her back problem with an adjustable bed.

"Stories are being continually created inside stores. They are almost like video diaries that don't have to be accompanied by grand explanations or pitch the next big sale event. But not everyone is capable of creating persuasive content. I would caution retailers against choosing the youngest person they know to be their social media and website content person," advised Walter. "Just because an intern or junior employee is using

Average Time Spent Per Adult 18+ Per day

Based on total U.S. population



Source: August 2021 Nielsen Total Audience Report, based on Q1 2021.

"Stories are being continually created inside stores, almost like video diaries that don't have to be accompanied by grand explanations or pitch the next big sale event to be considered great content."



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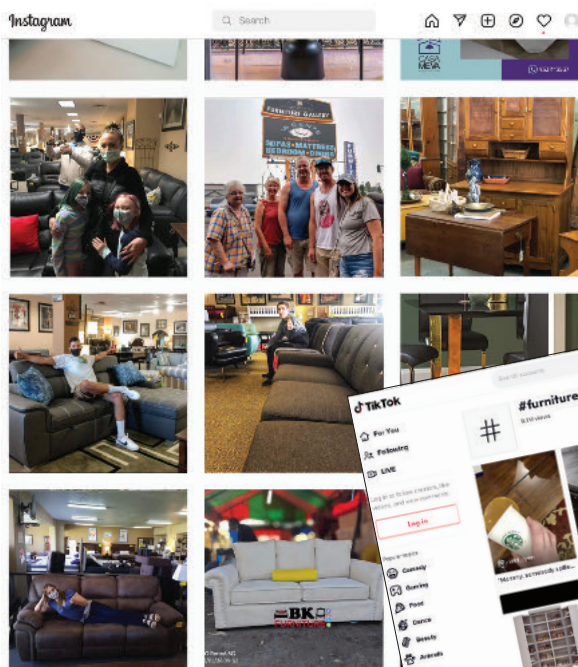
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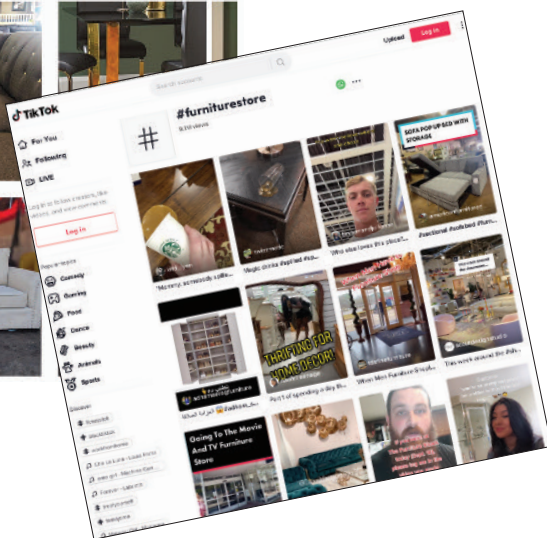
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"The good news for retailers is that platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat have changed the threshold for what's considered entertainment. Our customers are used to low-fidelity content now."



Instagram all the time, it does not mean that they are qualified to control something as important as a retailer's social media communications."

Smart Solutions

Fetterman remarked, "There will always be challenges as well as opportunities for furniture stores. In good times and bad, some retailers find reasons based on current business conditions, the news cycle, or a collective mindset to cut back on advertising."

"Before making big advertising decisions, it's wise to take a step back and ask a few questions. 'How do we improve today so we can grow? How do we develop better business and brand focus? How can we reflect our unique branding via in-store shopping experiences? How might we extend this experience outwardly through our online and social presence?'"

"Good decision making requires leveraging data, but, many stores don't know

how many households there are within 10 miles of their operation. Neither are they aware of what those homes look like, the demographics and geographics of the families that live in them or their occupants' style preferences.

"We recently worked on a campaign targeting roughly 330,000 women with household incomes of at least \$60,000 in a retailer's trading area. These women had an interest in home furnishings, decorating and home improvement.

"Here's some context. The typical U.S. household purchases, on average, \$1,900 to \$2,300 on home furnishings a year. A quick calculation using an average yearly spend of \$2,000 multiplied by 330,000 households told us that the targeted group was likely to spend in the neighborhood of \$660 million on home furnishings during a one year period.

"The media this retailer used to reach this audience included targeted ads served via paid social advertising, online advertising, programmatic, video marketing, OTT, YouTube and print. Impressions,

clicks and how many people from the targeted group entered the store and purchased were captured. This retailer generated more than \$820,000 in sales on a \$55,000 ad spend.

"People used to say, 'Man, if I knew which half of my advertising worked, and which didn't, I'd be a genius. Today, retailers can have that information. It doesn't matter if a retailer can invest \$100,000 on an advertising campaign or just \$2,000. An insightful in-house marketing team or ad agency can create an articulated advertising program that is responsive, data-driven, filled with analytics and market intelligence. But, great advertising can only take a retailer so far. It has to be accompanied by looking closely at what's happening when shoppers targeted by ads visit a store.

"That's why it's so important for furniture retailers to have conversations with their agencies or marketing teams about how consumers interact with their websites and in-store experiences. These can be incredibly productive conversations."

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Focus on DESIGN

Furniture of America

With vintage ivory frames and contrasting rustic gray crown moldings, the Myrtlemoore bedroom has farmhouse charm. It features hand-carved floral details on sustainably sourced Pine wood, meticulously hand-painted and hand-finished. **Contact information on page 104.**



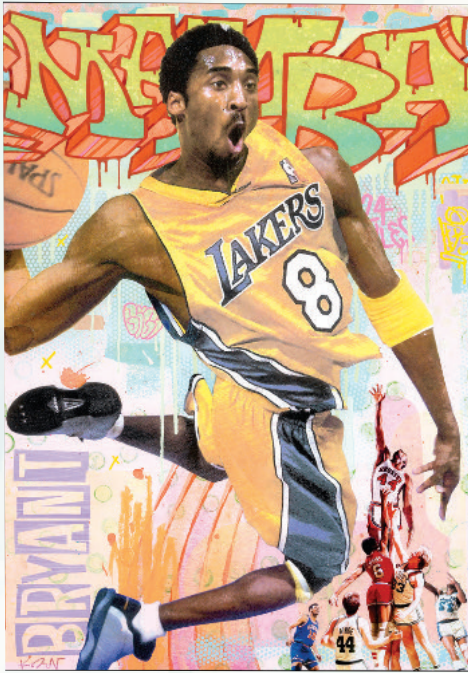
Stressless

The original Stressless model has been brought back to celebrate the company's 50th anniversary. It features iconic curves and retro details which dominate today's furniture design. **Contact information on page 104.**

Magnolia

Featured in a teal suede with tie-dyed pillows, this double chaise configuration is made from quality materials in the USA. **Contact information on page 104.**





RFA Decor

"Mamba" is a hand-embellished giclée on canvas of an original mixed media work by artist Kevin Wenner. 60 x 44 inches, framed. **Contact information on page 100.**

fiVO Design

Pictured is fiVO Design's patent pending MOD 5 sleek, modern bar cart. It can be a desk by day and bar cart by night. Upper shelves for storage and matching wine rack makes it the perfect piece for everyday entertaining. **Contact information on page 104.**



Legends

The Alexandria bedroom blends modern and rustic. Its slatted design and forged iron accents compliment the Mountain Mist finish. Includes USB ports on each side of the headboard. **Contact information on page 104.**

Country View Woodworking

This table features two leaves. Its Rustic Cherry finish with Michael's stain allows the wood grain to shine through. Shown with CVW's DCH-33 side chairs. **Contact information on page 104.**



Focus on DESIGN

Capel Rugs

Arrows has a playful pattern that works beautifully in any room. This area rug from Genevieve Gorder has a 20 mm pile height and is machine made from 100 percent Olefin with easy-care performance features. Contact information on [page 104](#).



Pelican Reef

The Pelican Reef Moldova Collection is an all-aluminum frame outdoor seating and dining group. Its textiline sling seats create a plush and comfortable surface for the outdoor cushions. Contact information on [page 104](#).

Bivona & Company

The Log Cabin Loft features rustic panels designed to look like traditional logs, creating the perfect club house to hang out with fellow adventurers and host sleepovers on standard twin size mattresses. Contact information on [page 104](#).



Moe's

The Mid-century Bellos Accent Chair shown in Open Road brown 100 percent top-grain leather upholstery with solid Rubberwood frame. Contact information on page 104.



Muniz

Newest sculpture designs showcase fluid lines and brilliant translucent colors intermixed with clear polished acrylic. Contact information on page 104.



Arason

The Brussels style Creden-ZzZ cabinet bed comes in three finishes, white, charcoal and ash. This elegant cabinet holds a queen size mattress. Contact information on page 104.



Focus on DESIGN

Kravet

The new Kravet Soleil Indoor/Outdoor Collection, created with luxury in mind, includes a variety of seating options to outfit any outdoor space, including sofas, swivel chairs, sectionals, chaise lounges and ottomans. **Contact information on page 104.**



American Woodcrafters

The Wiltshire Bedroom Collection is a fresh take on the popular Campaign style. It features sleek, transitional hardware and provides ample storage options. **Contact information on page 104.**

Norwalk Furniture

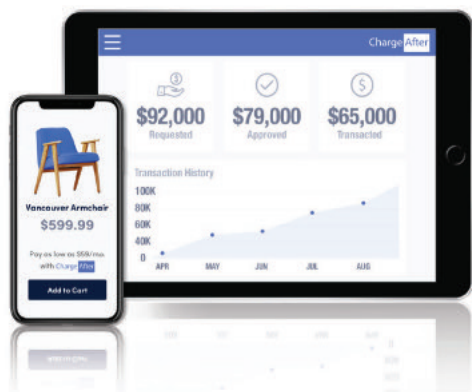
The traditionally-styled Wilmington Chair is infused with subtle updated design elements that make it easy to include it in more modern spaces. The gentle curve of the back rail and dramatic drop of the back sew line compliment its oversized contrasting welts. **Contact information on page 104.**



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Focus on DESIGN

Currey

Designed by Hiroshi Koshitaka, the Saisei Grande Chandelier is made of rattan that flows artfully around a wrought iron frame in a khaki finish.

Contact information on page 104.



Estro Milano

Palladio features refined style and recliner function in seat and headrest. This model stands out with its two woven leather side panels and metal slat design details.

Contact information on page 104.

Craftmaster

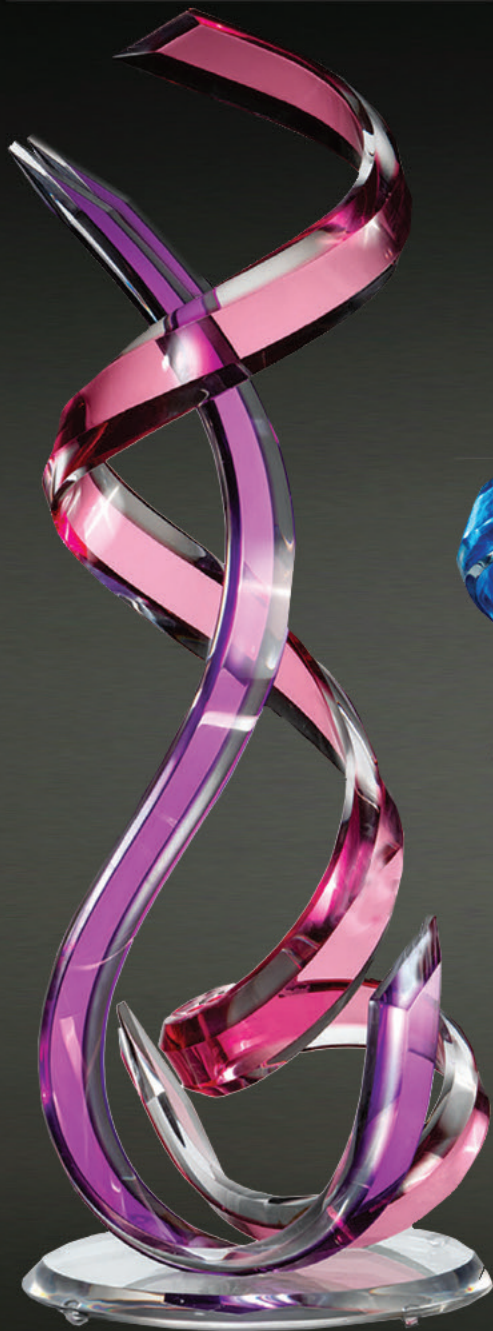
From the New Traditions collection, the Perez sofa features BlendDown cushioning, nailhead trim, and a beautifully textured performance fabric. Available in hundreds of fabrics and made in the USA.

Contact information on page 104.



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Focus on DESIGN

Nourison

Shades of golden yellow, orange, and burnt red appear to glow atop a blue ground on this modern rug from the Prismatic Collection. Carved accents add a unique layer of dimension. Handmade from a luxurious blend of New Zealand wool and silky Luxcelle™. **Contact information on page 104.**



Whittier Wood

The Addi Occasional low cocktail and end tables are cleverly designed to either nest or be used in more traditional configurations. Crafted from sustainable solid American Alder and Black Walnut hardwoods. **Contact information on page 104.**



Omnia

Unique, expertly crafted in 100 percent top-grain leather, the Durango ensemble on the Cartwright conversation sofa is just one of many ways to help your customers fulfill their vision. Proudly made in America. **Contact information on page 104.**



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PLAYING THE RETAIL BOWL GAME

by Gordon Hecht

Retail owners and managers need to have the skills of both professional and college head coaches.

You are probably reading this article in late March or early April but there's a better than even chance that between Christmas and February 13, you spent time watching some of the 238 college and professional Bowl games. Almost every bowl game starts with a sponsor's name. I don't intend to be disrespectful to die-hard football fans, but I imagine that in the future we might see names such as "The Desitin Rash Bowl" brought to you by Johnson & Johnson or "The Natural Gas Bowl" brought to you by Taco Bell.

Just as the college bowl and championship season ends, the NFL ramps up with playoff games culminating in naming the intergalactic Super Bowl champion.

This year's NCAA and NFL big championship games were real nail-biters, with losing teams coming up a bit short, probably because they only gave 109 percent. In each final, there were questionable coaching decisions, leading to theories regarding what makes a good head coach in college versus the NFL and what skill sets are needed at each level.

Recruiting in the NCAA & NFL

To be successful, college coaches must be great recruiters. Beyond that, they need a proven staff of assistant

coaches who can take very good high school kids and convert them into well-trained adults.

College coaches cannot offer to pay players for their efforts and performance. The old theory was that the "pay" was a college education. The greatest reward a coach could offer was to offer a player an opportunity to be seen on television and by professional football team scouts. Winning teams tend to get the most TV exposure, so winning coaches have a better shot at attracting really good high school players.

Of course, being seen is not enough. Colleges need to train the skills and tactics to be successful at a professional level.

NFL coaches don't need to recruit. They just have to work for owners with thick bankrolls. Instead, they strive to create cohesive teams made up of millionaire and multi-millionaire players. Those coaches need an eye for talent and commitment, along with the ability to weed out toxic or non-performing personnel.

Winning at Retail

Operating your retail empire is like playing in The Retail Bowl every day, but harder. That's because retail owners and managers need to have the skills

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of both professional and college head coaches.

Like a college coach, you need to be a great recruiter. Sure, you can offer a salary and benefits, but that pay is probably competitive with other employers in your area, meaning you have no advantage there.

Make the recruits better: Here is where you can win. Recruit raw talent and make that talent better. That means helping your players improve their skills even if you may be improving them for their next job. You will need to invest time and money in training. Real training includes reading the retail playbook, some interaction on the practice field and lots of coaching and correction. Successful college coaches use assistants to coach every day. For you that probably means engaging factory reps, in-house sales managers, the company's leaders and experienced winning players.

Bring in the fans: You need to give your players exposure too. That means bringing shoppers through the front door by using good marketing and smart lead

generation systems. You can't let any lead or customer contacts fall through the cracks. Count that traffic and keep your players accountable for their actions with each customer. You'll want to keep a scorecard with accurate statistics and share them with the players.

You'll need a bit of the NFL's Bill Belichick or Andy Reid in you. They coach big teams with big players in front of big audiences. And, they face big expectations because of that. They're able to spot talented players and build them into exceptional performers. On top of that, in a world with free agency, they keep the best players on their teams for a long time.

No dumb mistakes: If you watch Bill and Andy's teams you'll understand that they expect flawless execution—meaning no dumb mistakes. They insist on short memories when it comes to failures. There's no room on their teams for bad actors with poor attitudes. That includes their "stars" as well.

No prima-donas or bad actors: Watch for this on your own Team Retail. Make

sure that your sales team performs the skills you train. That means showing all the products, not just the ones they like. It also means selling, not giving away, accessories. Weed out toxic people who poison work environments. Your best players should create the fewest problems. Your sales team needs to work in harmony with your operations team. Both need to be flexible and respectful of their mutual contributions.

Disruptions and disagreements will occur. Winners recognize the problems, fix them, and move on. Losers let problems fester and hold grudges.

Be ready for the big game: We, the people of The Retail World, get to play our biggest game of the season today. We also get to play it tomorrow and six- or seven days next week. Recruit and practice to WIN. Your fans are counting on you!

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.*

"Bill Belichick and Andy Reid

are able to spot good talented players and make them exceptional performers. On top of that, in a world with free agency, they keep the best players on their team for a long time."



Furniture Wizard Software

Technology update

Furniture Wizard users can now harness the power of their data like never before.

Furniture Wizard, the leading provider of software for the retail furnishings industry, recently announced its "Furniture Wizard Exporter." This new tool provides users with a powerful suite of inventory and sales reporting functionality.

Straightforward Access

The main goal of the exporter is to provide retailers real-time access to information; with a focus on providing retailers with an accurate picture of in-stock inventory across all platforms.

"We want to help retailers harness the power of data to more effectively manage availability and pricing," said Evan Faller, director of operations. "When retailers are using a range of consumer-facing tools, there can be confusion about the accuracy and timeliness of data. Furniture Wizard Exporter helps solve that issue."

Export Data For Website, Kiosk & Sales Devices

The new tool allows retailers to schedule and automate the export of data to ensure that all of their platforms—including websites, kiosks and sales devices—are operating from the same data set. It comes as an add-on to the pop-

ular Furniture Wizard software already being operated by thousands of retailers around the world.

Accurate In-stock Information

"There's nothing more frustrating to a customer than finding out that an item they purchased from your website is not in stock," said Grant Honeycutt of Woodstock Furniture, who's been helping beta test the new tool. "By automating the export of inventory and pricing data, we can be sure that the information we are providing to customers is accurate, no matter if it's accessed from a store or online."

Automate Sales Follow-up

The Exporter can be set to automatically run at user-controlled intervals, which will save time and increase efficiencies. In addition to inventory exports, sales and customer information can easily be exported to help automate sales follow-up, creating a great customer experience. The sales export can drive enhanced management reporting via third party tools.

"Many consumers simply want to know what's in stock today rather than special ordering an item," said Faller. "When websites and other consum-

er-facing tools are up to date, you can be sure that you aren't disappointing your customers. With better data, you can make better decisions."

Over the past 30 years, Furniture Wizard has been an innovator in inventory and sales management software, providing thousands of retailers with simple, yet powerful, solutions that have increased profits, streamlined operations, and saved owners and managers countless hours. The new Furniture Wizard Exporter is another in a long line of innovations and is available today.

For more information on Furniture Wizard, contact sales@furniturewizard.com or call 855-387-6949.

"By automating the export of inventory and pricing data, we can be sure that the information we are providing to customers is accurate, no matter if it's accessed from a store or online."

- Grant Honeycutt, Woodstock Furniture

NEXT LEVEL TRAINING

Closing Moxie!

Part 4— by Scott Morris

Sol was the best closer in a chain of 23 furniture stores. He passed along the following three selling “moxies” that are still relevant to salespeople today.

You may know a salesperson like Sol, a real selling “pro” who took me under his wing early in my career. He was the #1 retail salesperson for many years at a leading furniture company operating 23 stores.

He was also the best sales closer I have ever seen. Sol was the person who never failed to close the sale when other salespeople turned over their customers to him.

Closing: Science & Art

It has been said that closing is both a science and an art. The science consists of applying proven and highly effective selling rules and techniques. The art is to read customers perfectly to win over their hearts so that they want to do business with you.

Before you read three stories that demonstrate the science and art of closing, it's helpful to be familiar with a few important insights that Sol passed along. In addition to knowing the store's merchandise really well, he said there are three additional selling ‘moxies’ every salesperson should strive to master. All are interrelated and work together. They are referred to as customer, closing, and floor moxies:

- *Ability to read your customers*

correctly.

- *Ability to come up with the right close for each customer.*
- *Identify immediate closing opportunities on an open floor.*

Sol in Action

Now let's quickly view three snapshots of Sol in action. They illustrate his three principles, even though what he said to customers and the products he sold are quite dated. Many retailers don't teach traditional closing techniques beyond

“Before you read three stories that demonstrate the science and art of closing, it's helpful to be familiar with a few important insights Sol passed along.”

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TOURNAMENT**Monday, June 13, 2022****Honoring**
Roy Hester

Planned Furniture Promotions

**10 A.M.**Shotgun
Start**11 A.M.**Tennis
Tournament
Begins**3:30 P.M.**Cocktail
Reception and
Silent Auction**4:30 P.M.**Buffet Dinner
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Ceremony**Coto De Caza Golf and Racquet Club**

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"The woman still liked one set and her husband liked another. I eventually realized they were going to leave because neither were willing to compromise."

just the few simple overused ones, such as the alternate of choice close, the add-on close, and the 'ask for it' close. It is true that when used in an obvious way, they can be considered manipulative.

Sol was a 'closing academy.' I asked him how many closes he knew, and the immediate reply was "86." This tells you there's a lot to learn beyond the dozen or so closes that are often offered in standard company sales training. If Sol were alive today, and looking at closes from a contemporary perspective, he would say that knowing the basics of closing can improve sales performance, while at the same time helping customers to overcome indecision, and purchase what's best for them.

Sol & Undecided Browser

The lady had been in the showroom browsing for at least two hours. Every available salesperson had worn themselves out trying to help her make a decision about which set of three occasional tables to buy. Just when they thought they had closed the sale, she'd pull her two kids down another aisle to look at more sets. Sol happened to be passing by

just as he was finishing another sale. He looked at me with a big smile.

He marched up to her and said "watch this!" Then he lit a cigarette and placed it on a coffee table that had a new kind of laminated top. The woman said, "Hey, you'd better pick that up!" He said, "I will, just as soon as you say 'I'll take it!'" She bought the table about five seconds later.

Sol & the Inebriated Up

A man in his early 20s, who obviously had several drinks before deciding to shop for furniture, was looking to buy a sofa. He wasn't disorderly, but was having trouble staying focused on my sales presentation about a sofa he seemed to like. Sol saw everything from a short distance away and came directly over once I gave him our ritual nod.

The first thing he said to the customer was, "Man, this wine-colored set looks great!" The man's eye's lit up as he stared at the set and replied, "Wow, so this is wine colored?" "Yeah," confirmed Sol. "Just put \$400 down and you can have the whole set!" The young man admitted, "I'm sorry, I don't have \$400." "Hey, no problem, I like you! Just give \$300

instead," Sol concluded. The customer was surprised, but you could see that the wheels were definitely turning. After about 10 seconds he replied, "Okay then, I guess we gotta deal!"

Sol & The Compromise

I once helped a married couple who couldn't decide on which dining set to purchase. After about an hour with them, the woman still liked one set, and her husband liked another. I eventually realized they were going to leave because neither was willing to compromise. Sol was close by, and I gave him the nod. I told my customers that Sol was very knowledgeable, and if they had any remaining questions he was the one to ask. The woman told Sol, "I really like this set, but he doesn't want to get it because he likes something I don't like that much."

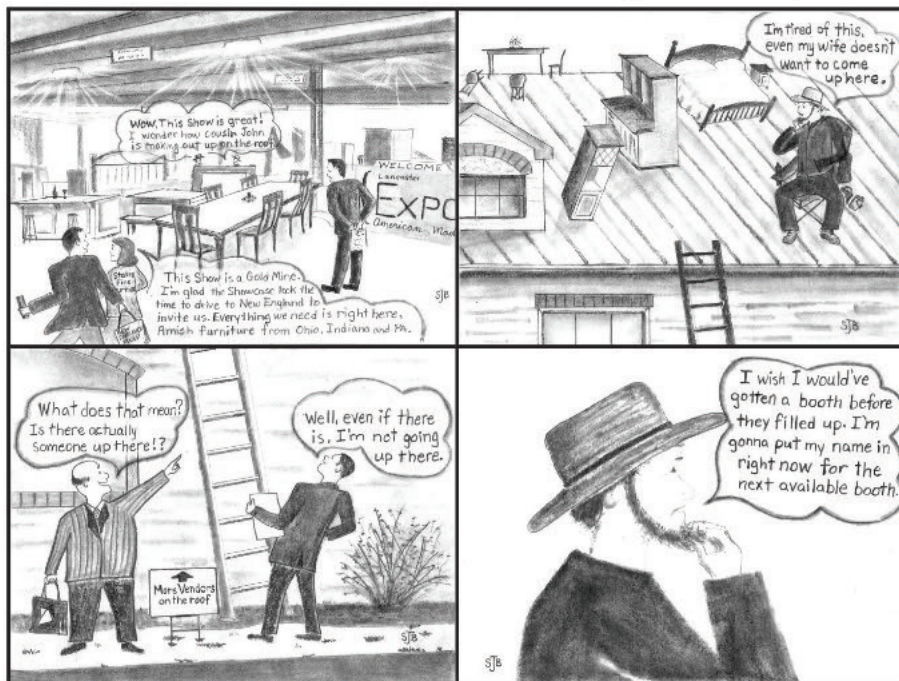
Sol immediately went into action. He said, "You both should be very proud." Then he addressed the woman saying, "You have such cute children! I know you are probably home all day long with them, being a very good mom, right?" Sol then turned to the man and said, "Hey, she is the one who has to look at the furniture all day, but you really don't

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right?" The husband reluctantly agreed. Then Sol said, "We know that for a mom to raise happy kids she has to be happy too, right?" The man turned bright red. Sol's next statement was simply, "Where will we be delivering this?"

Sol Explains How to Help Shoppers Out of Indecision Ruts

There were two other closing insights he provided that any person on your sales team can begin using immediately.

An extremely important thing he taught was to "enlarge a person's heart" toward you, just before the close. This certainly makes good sense. The most important part of the sale is the close, so that is exactly the time when you need the customer to be most

favorably inclined toward you. Taking just 30 seconds or so to acknowledge something your customer can be complimented on, which is also true, is often all that it takes. Notice how Sol did it very smoothly in the third story, with the couple's children. He actually then built upon the children for his close. He did it in the second story as well.

The next great selling insight Sol provided is best demonstrated by way of another example. One evening, I was making the best presentation on a living room set I had ever made. The couple listened to all the great features and benefits. I felt if I just kept throwing more FABs at them, they would be convinced. We had been sitting at that set for over an hour. Sol kept walking by. Once he stopped and stared at me in an obvious fashion, which he never did.

The customers just couldn't make up their minds. So finally, they politely asked for my card and promised to come back. My goodness, they surely had to. After all, they had just witnessed what might have been the best furniture presentation given today on this planet!

Watching them walk out I was still silently singing my

own praises, then I happened to look up. Sol was standing a few feet away. He looked stupefied. He eventually blurted out, "Why didn't you turn that customer over to me?" I said, "They'll be back. I just made the best presentation I ever made in my life!" Upon which he decidedly replied, "They won't be back."

"Pardon me Sol, perhaps you weren't listening. I just said I made a fantastic presentation. It was so fabulous that I almost bought that set myself." He looked me squarely in the eyes and said, "They won't be back." Well at least I had enough sense not to argue with him, and asked, "But if I turned it over to you what would you have done?" He said "I would have pulled them away from it!" You might imagine my logical response. "I didn't want to pull them away from that set because it was the set they liked most of all."

Here's the 'selling epiphany' Sol transmitted. He explained that when people get in a decision making rut, they keep practicing indecision over and over. It's like when tires are stuck in the snow, and dig in deeper. He said, "I would have pulled them around the corner to see something they didn't like as much. That would help them to make a decision. Then, once they were out of their rut, they would pull me back to the set you wanted to sell them, and ask me to write it up!"

Well my mind just couldn't quite shake hands with such a snake oil theory as that. So, I politely thanked Sol and went about my business. Soon afterwards I had to go to the local jewelry store to shop for a gift. The store was very small, with only one saleslady on duty. The

"The woman had been in the showroom browsing for at least two hours. Every available salesperson had worn themselves out trying to help her make a decision."



Retail Performance Tip #10

From David McMahon at PerformNOW

“Many retailers have run out of space in their warehouses. Much of this inventory is often reserved for customers. Communicate with customers frequently prior to and after merchandise arrives in the DC until it is scheduled for delivery or pickup. One communication is not enough to speed up warehouse inventory turns. Use email, sms, and voice automation to enable this frequency and to control your message.”

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"Here's the selling epiphany

Sol transmitted. He explained that when people get in a decision-making rut, they keep practicing indecision over and over."

shopper who was trying on rings liked one in particular. She repeatedly moved it in and out on her finger, admiring it. Eventually she quickly removed it from her finger, handed it back to the saleslady and said, "I just can't make up my mind. I'll be back!"

The saleslady replied, "Sure that's fine. I am going to put this back over here, in this section of the counter. It'll be here for you when you come back." Then, without warning, the salesperson loudly said "Oh! Oh! Do you mind, I just found one more I think you might like. Would you mind trying one last one?" The shopper put that final ring on, moved it back and forth under the light several times, took it off and said, "I don't like this nearly as much. Why don't you just go ahead and write the other one up."

The lesson of that moment did not escape me. I realized that she just used what Sol would later refer to as the 'pull away close.' Once the salesperson helped her to make a decision about what not to buy, she was free to go

ahead and make a decision to purchase what she liked better.

Conclusion

Oh yes, I almost forgot to tell you. Just how much did my customers buy when they came back after hearing the best presentation ever made, complete with every feature, advantage, and benefit? I will have to share that with you at a later time, in another article. I'm still 100 percent sure they're coming be back!

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 empowering "Sales Questions" Laminate, and publishes the advanced level, 10-Hour sales training course titled, "The Best Furniture Sales Training Ever!!!" He also produces a package

of "12 Insightful Customer Handouts" to aid in the in-store selling process, plus to give to the 75 percent of all shoppers who leave without buying.

His newly produced 2-Hour "Sales Closing Academy" is geared to closing today's unique shoppers. He may be reached at: hsm7777@att.net.

"Once the salesperson helped her to make a decision about what not to buy, she was free to go ahead and make a decision to purchase what she liked better."

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Left to Right: Daniel Marshall, Anna Whittier-Tower, Scott Whittier and Evert Slijper



Nine important considerations for designing effective retail talent acquisition strategies.

-By Tracy Jackson, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, HFA Chief HR Strategist

Ever wonder what the difference is between recruiting and talent acquisition? Recruiting is the short-term goal of filling an opening. Talent acquisition is a long-term strategy for attracting and retaining talent, creating leaders and future executives for your organization.

HFA's retail furniture store members cite lack of talent as one of the greatest concerns they face. One big reason for this is that baby boomers are quickly exiting the workforce. Born between 1946 and 1964, by the end of this decade, they will be 65 years or older. That's why creating and developing your organization's future leaders must become a priority.

A successful talent acquisition initiative cannot be just an HR initiative. It must be embraced at every level of your organization. While recruiting and respectful engagement with candidates is important, talent acquisition should incorporate

many of the following considerations.

Compensation: Ensure that your salary, benefits, retirement plans and time off offers are attractive and competitive. Be sure to include reward and recognition plans that are attainable. Give employees "total rewards" statements to point out that the actual value they receive is greater than their paycheck alone.

Culture: Develop an unbeatable culture. Start by developing a clear and concise mission, vision and values statement that everyone in your organization knows, understands and buys into. Be sure to celebrate your culture regularly by recognizing how employees contribute to the company's success. Consider identifying "brand ambassadors" within your organization that model behavior consistent with your brand.

Internships: Network with the local

community colleges and university clubs. Offer students paid summer internships to introduce them to your organization.

Leadership Trainee Program Initiatives: Accelerate advancement for newly hired employees who have degrees and/or experience so that you can attract work-

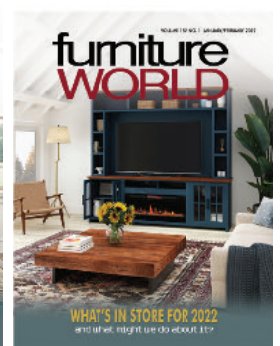
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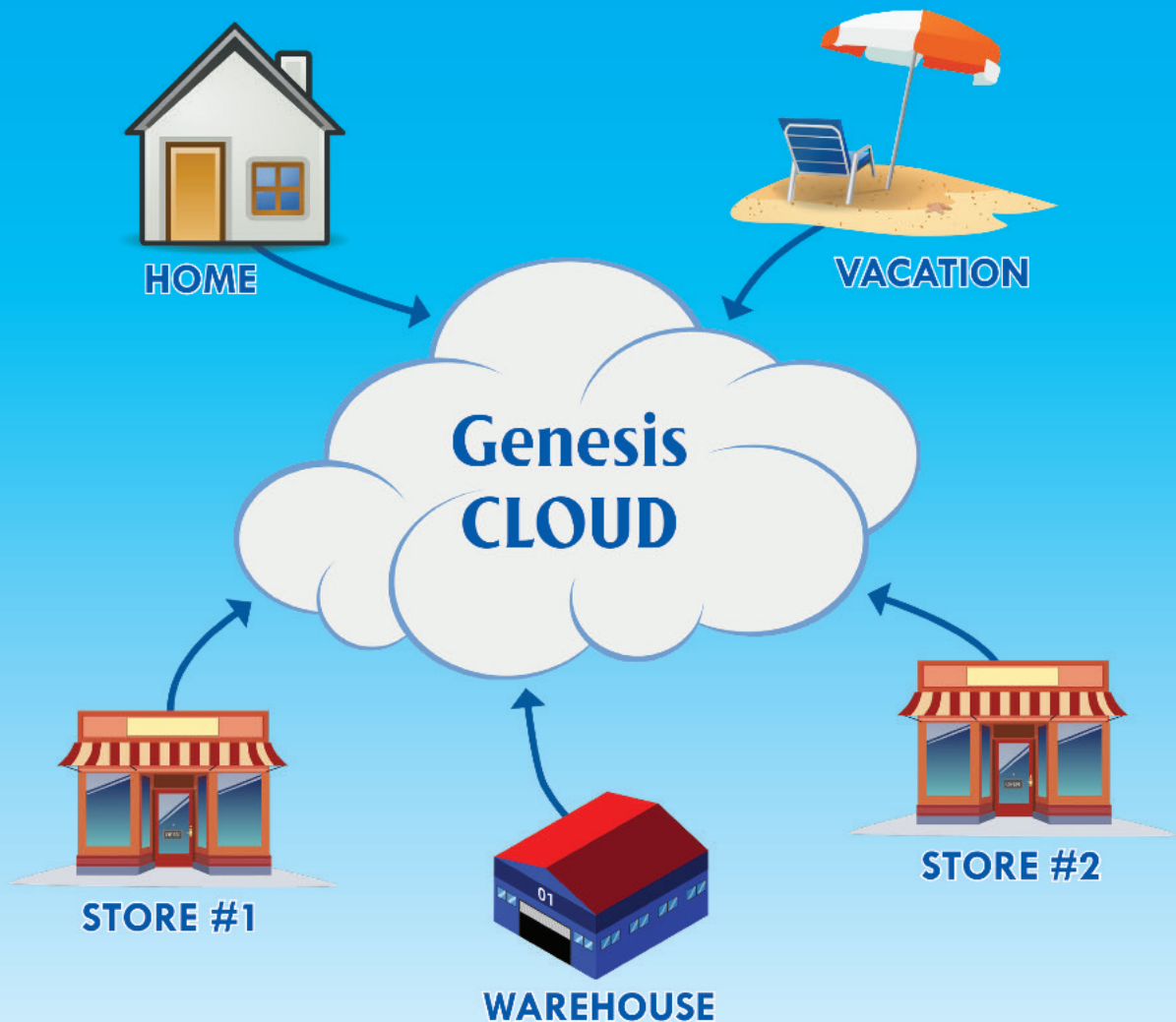
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TALENT ACQUISITION

ers at all levels.

Leadership Academy: Identify high-potential employees and create a development program designed to prepare them for their next leadership level. Develop multiple tracks designed for entry-level management, mid-level and advanced leadership. Provide a 'badge' or certificate program that tracks their readiness for the next level.

Employee Engagement: Regularly survey and review engagement feedback from your employees and create informed methods of reviewing employees.

Cross-Training: Allow employees who meet qualifications to participate in a cross-training program to get an inside look at other roles within your organization. It will help top employees who may consider leaving your organization due to conflicts or lack of advancement

opportunities, consider changing roles instead of employers.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (DEI&B): Expand outreach and ensure that the practices, processes, policies and language used across your organization are inclusive. Ensure all feel welcomed to work as their authentic selves in your organization. Look for barriers that prevent certain groups, based on religion, gender, sexuality, race, age, disability, etc., from being hired or promoted. Address issues that arise with care.

Succession Plan: Succession planning helps retail organizations move forward. It should address both sudden and planned exits as well as growth opportunities and future organizational needs. Succession plans address the people aspects of continuity. They differ from the business continuity plans, which ensure that businesses can provide continuous

critical services to clients at an acceptable level.

Of course, there are many other areas to consider. Talent acquisition strategies should be regularly reviewed and updated as needed.

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

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Different Perspectives at HFA

Mark Schumacher, CEO, Home Furnishings Association



Joining HFAs executive committee are Randilynn Talsma of Blended Furniture, Salvador Llanos of FAMSA, Jared Simon of Simon's Furniture and Eric Easter of Kittle's.

Each year it is a ritual passing of the gavel. We approve the new year's slate of officers and leaders on the HFA Board at our annual membership meeting. Our board is made up of stakeholders, retailers, and manufacturers; we represent each day in all we do.

As an example, Jesús Capó, the Chief Information Officer at El Dorado Furniture, a family-owned furniture chain in Florida, ends his stint on our HFA board of directors. The way it works in our association when you elevate to the officer level, you ascend from secretary-treasurer, vice president, president-elect, president, and then chairman. At that point, you have to rotate off for at least a year. The officer tenure should be a total of five years. Jesús, our chairman, is ending his sixth year. Why?

Back in 2019, we lost a few key board members to life changes, and in an unprecedented fashion, all officers were asked to extend their tenure for an additional year. And, 2020 proved to be like no other. As someone who took over as CEO in 2020, in the early throes of the pandemic, I am not sure we could have become the HFA we are today, a bat-

tle-tested, member-centric, industry-first association without Jesús' leadership.

David Gunn, an owner of Knight Furniture in Texas moves into the chairman role. Jesús represents a Top-100 retailer, while David has a mid-sized operation. Differing perspectives are essential to progress at HFA and I am thrilled that moving onto our executive committee in 2022 is a talented group, diverse in age, gender, store demographics, and experience. They are Randilynn Talsma of Blended Furniture in Michigan, Salvador Llanos of FAMSA in California, Jared Simon of Simon's Furniture in Massachusetts, and Eric Easter of Kittle's from Indiana.

This year is critical for HFA. As we come into the third year of the pandemic, the HFA board is working on strategic

development as they start to chart a ten-year vision for the association.

My message is this. Your association is positioning itself for whatever disruptions lie ahead. Board leadership is committed to charting the course. Their diversity will represent you well in that process.

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

Pictured from left to right are Randilynn Talsma of Blended Furniture in Michigan, Salvador Llanos of FAMSA in California, Jared Simon of Simon's Furniture in Massachusetts, and Eric Easter of Kittle's from Indiana.



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The Home Furnishings Association is proud of our 2022 award winners, all deserving of this prestigious honor, recognizing them for their achievements and contributions to the home furnishings industry. Won't you join us in congratulating them!



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